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Research in Languages, Cultures and Societies: Voices of Researchers in the UK

ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

In 2022 a survey of the languages research community in the UK was undertaken, with 536 responses (150 PhD students, 386 post-PhD researchers), complemented by 29 interviews across all career stages, as part of a Future of Languages Research Fellowship funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This article reports findings from that survey, presenting data on research expertise, funding applications and successes, engagement with government and other stakeholders, and future directions and areas for development. Presenting the perspective of researchers themselves, our study adds to our understanding of the current state of languages research in UK Higher Education, complementing other sources including the 2021 Research Excellence Framework and the British Academy & University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) 2022 report on trends in language learning in Higher Education, and providing useful data for international comparisons. The article concludes with recommendations for action.

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I. INTRODUCTION: A SNAPSHOT OF LANGUAGES RESEARCH IN THE UK

This article, reporting on a project commissioned by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to scope future directions for languages research and its funding, presents findings from a 2022 survey of the languages research community in the UK, with 536 responses (150 PhD students, 386 post-PhD researchers), complemented by 29 interviews across all career stages.[1] The research was commissioned after a period of unprecedented investment of £16 million in four major languages-based research projects through the Open World Research Initiative (OWRI, 2016–20). While our focus in this article is on the UK *research* landscape, the AHRC's interest in supporting languages-based research must be understood in the wider context of languages study in the UK, with concerns repeatedly raised over the past twenty years about continually falling numbers taking a language (and even fewer taking two or more) in schools and on university degree programmes; about structural barriers to language study for many school pupils (see the annual *Language Trends* reports since 2003, most recently Collen 2022); and about contraction of languages provision in Higher Education (HE). A proposal for a National Languages Strategy (British Academy 2020) contained a series of concrete recommendations, many of which are gradually being implemented, overseen in part by a new Strategic Committee for Languages in Higher Education, established in 2021. At school level, the Department for Education recently announced funding of £14.9 million for a National Consortium for Languages Education in England over the next three years to support language teaching "as a key part of broad and balanced curriculum" (Department for Education 2022). That is the context in which this project was undertaken, as well as the context of the immediate aftermath of the COVID pandemic, to which we return in section VI.3 below.

The UK is not alone in its concerns over the health of languages study and research; it has certainly also been raised in other English-speaking countries (see, for example, on Australia and New Zealand, Lo Bianco 2009; Asia Education Foundation 2014; State of Victoria Department of Education and Training 2021; Royal Society of New Zealand 2013), as well as in countries within Europe and beyond, where English increasingly dominates language learning study and research. In the USA, the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) reported on a survey of the needs of language and literature researchers in the "regional comprehensive institutions" (i.e. non-research-intensive institutions that educate "most of America's postsecondary students"), noting, among other points, researchers' feelings of isolation due to a lack of a peer group in their institutions; "systemic underfunding"; and, more positively, widespread desire for support to undertake more "public-facing work" (MLA 2020: 23). As for student numbers in the USA, a 2019 MLA report found both a decline of 5.3% in programmes available, and a drop of 9.2% in enrolments, between 2013 and 2016; the report underlined the need for investment in language education (highlighting in particular the vulnerability to budget cuts of less commonly taught languages), and noted a context of "financial constraints, challenges to the profession, and general disregard for language study" (Looney & Lusin 2019: 1, 3).

Soliciting the experience and perspectives of UK languages researchers themselves, our survey thus offers data as a point of comparison internationally. It complements other sources such as the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021, the UK's assessment of research over 2014–21), the 2022 British Academy and University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) report on trends in language learning in UK Higher Education, and other recent reports on the wider standing of languages in the UK such as the 2006 Research Review carried out by the Centre of Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies and UCML, and the 2020 *Towards a National Languages Strategy* (British Academy 2020). Adding to our understanding of the current state of languages research in UK Higher Education, our research offers another snapshot in the longer history of languages research in UK universities.

We present an analysis of what responses reveal about languages research capacity in the UK, including the distribution of languages and regional expertise; disciplinary areas of specialism; and the kinds of institutions and units in which languages researchers are based (III). We also consider language researchers' experience of working with external partners, including business and government (IV), before reflecting on researchers' experience of the research funding landscape, with

1 Future of Languages Research Fellowship (AH/W009986/1). Separately, a confidential report was submitted to the AHRC in September 2022. Two other Fellows focused on the UK's indigenous languages, including signed languages; and on mapping existing languages expertise, including community languages, against languages needs in business and public services. See Macleod & Leslie (forthcoming, 2023), Labeau (forthcoming, 2023).

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some important ramifications for funders, subject associations and other stakeholders (V). Finally, we offer some reflections on the future directions for languages research, and the PhD pipeline into research (VI). We trust that we offer a realistic picture of UK languages research, with some areas of real concern, but others that are distinctly encouraging. We conclude with recommendations for action in the UK, but which may also offer food for thought for readers elsewhere.

A word on our remit: we have used the deliberately inclusive term "Languages, Cultures and Societies" in the title of this article. In doing so, we align with the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements (QAA 2023, until 2015 headed "Languages and related studies") and the recent rebranding of the former Institute for Modern Languages Research, now the Institute for Languages, Cultures and Societies ("promoting the integrated study of languages, cultures and societies", according to its website).[2] The brief for the research underpinning this article, set by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, referred both to "language research" and "language(s) research"; *languages research* is the term we use for simplicity here. Readers should note that our remit was wider than that of Modern Languages as understood by the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021), whose "Modern Languages and Linguistics" panel explicitly restricted "Modern Languages" to "Celtic, Germanic, Romance or Slavonic languages or other languages of Europe", while other languages research was submitted to other panels. Rather, we took "languages research" to encompass the study of non-English languages, cultures and societies, including indigenous, community, minoritized and signed languages, as well as research on the teaching of languages other than English; and some areas of linguistics of English falling within the AHRC remit.

II. METHODOLOGY

Ethical approval was obtained through the University of Nottingham before the research began. In order to canvass the views of UK researchers in the field:

1. We invited all languages researchers in the UK to complete a survey, open over about two months (3 February 2022 to 11 April 2022) and promoted through subject associations lists, heads of relevant academic units, social media and other channels. The survey collected primarily quantitative data regarding views on the current and future shape and structure of research and impact funding, views about current and future thematic calls, and solicited views on current and possible AHRC subject classification keywords. Our survey elicited 536 responses: 150 from current PhD students, 386 from post-PhD researchers. Our sincere thanks to all who took time to respond.[3]
2. We conducted interviews with 29 individuals – recruited from among survey respondents – at various career stages and from a range of HEIs across the UK; 18 interviewees were from Russell Group (so-called research-intensive) institutions; 11 were not. Interviews were conducted online, via Microsoft Teams (a format that participants were familiar with in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic).[4] Warm thanks to all who participated.

The 386 survey responses from languages researchers, across all career stages, would equate to approximately 23% of the 1,688 staff submitted in the UK's so-called Research Excellence Framework 2021 (REF 2021) to the "Modern Languages and Linguistics" Unit of Assessment 26 (UoA 26); or 10% of the combined total for UoA 26 and UoA 25 ("Area Studies", including Asian languages and sign languages, which saw work from 616 staff across 23 submissions). Note, however, that some respondents will have been submitted to another relevant REF panel (e.g. Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management; English; Education), or, depending on career stage or nature of contract, will not have been submitted

2 See https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/ (accessed May 2023).

3 Among post-PhD researchers, 93% (359 of 386) of respondents considered themselves languages and/or linguistics researchers. Of the 27 who did not, only three indicated that they were based outside a languages, linguistics or area studies unit, and all but one of those 27 specified one or more cultures and societies other than English as their area of focus. Among PhD respondents, 85% (127) of all 150 identified with the label; among those who did not, some were based, for example, in Film Studies, Music, Museum Studies and Hispanic Studies. We accordingly included all these respondents, since they had chosen to complete a survey explicitly directed at those active in languages research.

4 Interviews conducted jointly by the AHRC fellows with various stakeholders are not included in the list of interviews.

at all. As for PhD students, our 150 respondents probably equate to about 6.5% of the doctoral student body across the two panels UoA 25 and 26.[5]

The proportion of women among PhD respondents (66%, n = 99) is 11% higher than among post-PhD researchers (55%, n = 214) (see Table 1)[6] but is consistent with the languages pipeline from school, where 64% of A-level modern languages candidates were female in 2017 (Tinsley & Board 2017: 21), into undergraduate study, where women still considerably outnumber men on languages and linguistics courses. The fact that this larger proportion of women has not yet resulted in a women-dominated profile in the profession reflects the historical losses of women from the academic career pipeline.[7] It is important to continue to monitor these trends, at national and individual institutional levels. As to disability, overall 7% of respondents (6% of post-PhD respondents and 10% of PhD students) reported that they have a disability (Table 2), far less than the c. 20% of working-age adults in the UK with a disability (UK Department for Work and Pensions 2022).[8] We return to gender and disability in Section V below.

Table 1 What is your gender?

	PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)		POST-PHD R ESEARCHERS (n = 386)		TOTAL (n = 536)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female	99	66	214	55	313	58
Male	44	29	159	41	203	38
Non-binary	2	1	3	1	5	1
Transgender	0	0	1	0.3	1	0.2
Prefer not to say	4	3	9	2	13	2
Other	1	1	0	0	1	0.2
TOTAL	150	100	386	100	536	100

Table 2 Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

	PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)		TOTAL (n = 536)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	15	10	25	6	40	7
No	131	87	346	90	477	89
Prefer not to say	4	3	15	4	19	4
TOTAL	150	100	386	100	536	100

III. RESEARCH CAPACITY ACROSS LANGUAGES, CULTURES AND SOCIETIES

III.1 LANGUAGES AND REGIONAL EXPERTISE

We were keen to understand what languages and subject areas researchers are working in. Since REF structures and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data do not treat languages individually, such information is not readily obtainable from other sources. We first asked

5 UoA 25 and UoA 26 recorded 957.6 and 3019.62 PhD completions respectively over the seven-year REF period 2014–21 (REF 2022a: 60, 83), equating to about 570 students completing in any one year. Assuming four years to complete a doctorate, that equates to about 2,270 students in any one calendar year.

6 Our survey asked respondents to identify as male, female, non-binary, transgender or intersex; we also gave an option "prefer not to say". It would have been preferable to ask respondents to identify as men, women, non-binary, transgender or intersex. Nevertheless, we report our data as collected, i.e. using the descriptors male and female. Regrettably we did not gather data about ethnicity. However, for reference, in a 2022 Association for German Studies survey of members designed and analysed by Professor Iman Nick, 89% described themselves as "White"; among the remainder, 90% indicated a "mixed" or "multi-ethnoracial" background, while the remaining 10% self-described as "Asian or Asian British".

7 For example, the University of Nottingham 2018 Athena Swan Bronze submission noted a 69:31% split between women and men undergraduates in Modern Languages and Cultures in 2017–18, but 53:47% among academic staff. See also the observations on the historical under-representation of women in French Studies in Holmes (2011: 22–23), who notes that in 2002–03, only 25% of UK professors of French were female.

8 For reference, in the 2022 survey of members of the Association for German Studies (see note 7), almost 13% reported that they had some form of cognitive, developmental, emotional, physical, sensory and/or psychological impairment.

respondents to indicate which broad regions or language groups they worked on (Table 3). Three-quarters of respondents (75%) – among both PhD students and post-PhD respondents – selected "European" as one of their responses. Multiple responses were possible, and among the 289 post-PhD researchers who selected "European", 25% (71) also specified one or more parts of the Americas, while 10% (29) specified Africa. The fact that at least a quarter of post-PhD respondents working on European cultures and societies also mentioned another continent provides some quantitative evidence for the growing transnationalizing and globalizing of languages research beyond the historical focus on the nations of Europe, to post-colonial and other contexts.[9]

Table 3 How would you describe the languages, cultures, and/or societies that you conduct research on? For example, if you work on Latin American culture and society in Spanish, please tick "North America" and/or "Central America" and/or "South America", as applicable. (Please select all that apply).

	PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)		TOTAL (n = 536)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
European (including Slavonic languages, cultures and societies)	112	75	289	75	401	75
Indigenous to UK and/or Ireland	21	14	65	17	86	16
South or Central American	14	9	54	14	68	13
East Asian	17	11	38	10	55	10
Indigenous minority language in another majority culture (e.g. Breton in France)	13	9	36	9	49	9
Classical languages (e.g. Latin)	14	9	32	8	46	9
North American	14	9	28	7	42	8
Community/heritage language in the UK and/or Ireland	12	8	27	7	39	7
African	9	6	29	8	38	7
Other	8	5	19	5	27	5
Middle Eastern	10	7	16	4	26	5
Australasian/Pacific	2	1	7	2	9	2
South Asian	1	1	8	2	9	2
Other Asian	1	1	6	2	7	1
Signed languages	0	0	3	2	3	1
Other	8	5	19	5	27	5

After European languages, those working on indigenous languages of the UK/Ireland make up the next largest group (16%), which may reflect the effective promotion of the survey among these researchers through a parallel AHRC-funded project on indigenous languages research (Macleod & Leslie, forthcoming 2023).[10] Next most numerous were those working on South or Central American languages, cultures and societies (13%), East Asian (10%) and non-UK/Ireland indigenous or minority languages (9%); Middle Eastern was nominated by 5%. "Other" was chosen by 5%, many of whom noted that their research was not language-specific, or who named a particular approach rather than a language (e.g. minorities; comparative literature). The Caribbean, the Caucasus, Atlantic and Mediterranean were each mentioned once; the remaining respondents gave a more specific answer that would fall under one of the categories we offered (e.g. North African, Chinese).

We also asked respondents to specify what languages they worked on using their own preferred terms (Table 4). Some respondents – particularly those in linguistics – work across a number of languages, so the number of languages listed by individuals in response to this question varied

9 See, for example, Burdett et al. (2020); Forsdick & Launchbury (2023) and others in the same *Transnational Modern Languages* book series; Burns & Duncan (2022).

10 The apparently roughly equal spread of expertise across indigenous Celtic languages in the UK is surprising – we would certainly expect more capacity in Welsh than in Scottish Gaelic – and may reflect particularly enthusiastic take-up of the survey among Macleod's networks in Scotland. It is worth noting that 11 respondents mentioned Welsh without mentioning another Celtic language; only three mentioned Scottish Gaelic on its own.

considerably. While a fifth of respondents (20%, n = 108) listed English as one of the languages they work on, all except four listed it alongside at least one other language or variety that they work on.

	PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)	POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)	TOTAL (n = 536)	%		n	%
French	38	115	153	29	*Also mentioned:*		
					Other French varieties (regional and or historical)	27	5
					Francophone Africa, + 1 creoles	8	1
English	24	84	108	20			
German	19	88	107	20	*Also mentioned:*		
					Specific regional, national, historical varieties of German	22	4
					Dutch	6	1
Spanish and/ or Portuguese			109*	20*	* 11 respondents mentioned Portuguese alongside Spanish, and are counted only once in this headline total		
Of which:							
Spanish	16	74	90	17	*Also mentioned:*		
					Spanish in Central/Latin America	34	6
					Other regional languages and varieties of Spain (e.g. Catalan, Galician; also 1 Basque)	4	1
Portuguese	6	24	30	6	*Also mentioned:*		
					Lusophone Africa, South America, Goa	25	5
					Latin America, South or Central America	9	2
Italian	20	43	63	12			
Japanese	10	20	30	6			
Russian	11	18	29	5			
Polish	3	11	14	3			
					Other Slavonic languages and varieties of Slavonic languages	44	8
Celtic languages					Of these, 11 mentions of Welsh were not alongside another Celtic language; 8 mentions of Irish were not alongside another Celtic language; 3 mentions of Scottish Gaelic were not alongside another Celtic language		
(Scottish) Gaelic			27	5			
Irish	8	18	26	5			
Welsh	3	22	25	5			
					Other Celtic languages of the UK and Ireland	14	3
Chinese			25	5			
Latin			22	4			
Arabic			18	3			
Korean			6	1			
Yiddish			5	1			
Hebrew			5	1			
Greek	0		3	1			
Turkish	0		3	1			
Signed languages	0	2	2	[0.5]	British Sign Language mentioned twice, Irish SL once		

Table 4 Summary of languages listed by respondents (multiple answers possible).

Among major UK community languages not already listed above, Hindi Urdu, and Punjabi were each mentioned once. A number of other languages were mentioned once each.

The distribution of expertise among European languages is roughly as one might expect from the traditional modern languages landscape in the UK. French and German were, historically, the main "modern languages" throughout the twentieth century, in both schools and HEIs, but Spanish has grown rapidly since the 1960s; it overtook German in English schools in 2001 (McLelland 2017: 16), and entrants to named Spanish degrees are now level with those for French (British Academy & UCML 2022: 8).[11] In our survey, French is still best represented

11 We follow the language of the report, which refers to "courses with Spanish in the title" (rather than, say, Hispanic Studies).

(mentioned by 29% of respondents), followed by Spanish and/or Portuguese (together 20%, of whom 17% [n = 90] mentioned Spanish, 6% [n = 30] mentioned Portuguese, about a third of those in combination with Spanish).[12] However, French dominance appears less than in the past. LLAS and UCML (2006: 48), using FTE data from RAE 2001, reported that French research capacity in 2001 was more than twice that of "Iberian and Latin American Languages", just under twice that of German(ic) studies, more than four times that of Italian, and almost six times that of Russian and Slavonic Studies.[13] In our survey, German stands at 20%, Italian 12% and Russian 5%;[14] Japanese (6%) and Chinese (5%) appear to be roughly on a par with Russian.[15] Arabic was mentioned by 3% of respondents (n = 18) as a research focus; of those, only four mentioned Arabic as a main focus, rather than in combination with at least one – and usually several – other languages.[16]

Despite the shift in emphasis in recent decades, there is a relatively poor fit between the preponderance of research in the languages of our large and close European neighbours, which have been historically culturally most important to the UK, and the current strategic and policy focus of national and devolved governments and other stakeholders on, variously, indigenous languages, community languages in the UK and languages with global reach, including Arabic, Chinese and others. However, as some of the REF 2021 impact case studies demonstrate, researchers based in European languages have certainly made connections to the UK's societal multilingualism through imaginative collaborative and interdisciplinary work.[17]

III.2 LANGUAGES RESEARCH CAPACITY BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION AND UNIT

In the light of concerns about possible languages "cold spots" in some areas (British Academy 2020; British Academy & UCML 2021), we were keen to understand the distribution of languages research capacity across the UK and across institution types. In REF 2021, researchers based in one of 22 of the total 24 Russell Group institutions made up just under three-quarters (72%) of the 1,614.5 FTE staff submitted to the Modern Languages and Linguistics UoA (UoA 26); in the Area Studies UoA (UoA 25), RG staff (from 10 institutions) were only just in the majority, at 52% of 579.82 FTE. Our survey falls somewhere in the middle, with 65% of all respondents in employment based in a RG institution. Of the 24 RG institutions, only one, the sciences-focused Imperial College, did not submit to UoA 25 and/or 26. By contrast, only 29 out of 105 non-RG institutions (28%) made submissions to UoA 25 and/or UoA 26, compared to 91% of RG universities. Of course, there is an existential link between the presence of undergraduate courses in languages and the funding of research-active staff in languages, so it is not surprising that the British Academy and UCML report (2022: 15) on language learning in HE notes a particularly large decline in such courses in post-92 institutions, especially so in the West and East Midlands, in the East of England, and in London. This contraction of provision is the second such wave – after one in the 1980s and 1990s – undoing much of the growth that followed the 1963 Robbins Report on Higher Education, which had prompted an unprecedented expansion of universities. Many such new universities (formerly colleges of advanced education) established departments of languages, often more vocational in focus, and widening the class base from which undergraduates were drawn. However, after that initial expansion, many departments declined again in the 1980s, which saw the University of Salford lose eight out of 40 jobs in its

12 Spanish and Portuguese are reported together here because Portuguese tends to be integrated with Spanish in UK course and institutional structures.

13 Figures for non-European languages were not given.

14 However, the Society for French Studies still has a membership of about twice that of the equivalent German HE subject association, the Association for German Studies (approx. 400 vs 200); the Association of Hispanists in Great Britain and Ireland has a membership of around 500.

15 For a recent assessment of the history and current status of Chinese in UK Higher Education, see Natzler (2022: esp. 21–30).

16 On the past and present of Arabic in UK universities, see Dickins & Watson (2006); British Council (2015: esp. 21–22); British Academy (2018: esp. 19–20). Some of the history of teaching other Middle Eastern, African and Caucasian languages in the UK can be gleaned from Brown's (2016) history of the School of Oriental and African Studies.

17 Among REF impact case studies in UoA 26, see, for example, Cambridge, "Changing the value of languages in the UK"; Nottingham, "Reshaping how language learning and multilingualism are valued and understood"; Oxford, "Valuing Creativity in Multilingualism, Translation and Language Learning"; King's College London, "Language Acts and Worldmaking". All of these are associated with one of the four very large Open World Research Initiative (OWRI) projects funded by the AHRC (2016–20). For all impact case studies, see the REF 2021 impact case study database (REF 2022b).

Modern Languages department, for example; since then, languages study has disappeared entirely from Salford, as from many other similar institutions (Holmes 2011: 15–16), and losses are continuing (see now also Muradás-Taylor 2023; Muradás-Taylor & Taylor, under review).

Interviewees from outside the Russell Group emphasized the importance of sustaining languages research in all kinds of institutions, not least for ensuring diverse participation in, and therefore shaping of, languages research where the school pipeline currently results in over-representation of higher socio-economic cohorts among students and researchers:

> If language departments are closing in, say, the bottom half of universities in terms of entry tariffs, that's a massive proportion of the population that now has no way of studying languages at university. So, it's bad for education because people can't study languages and it's bad for research as well because it means the people doing research are coming from a certain place in terms of type of university or type of privileged background or whatever. And so there are groups that are either ignored in terms of research [...] or it's the privileged researchers doing the research on the marginalized groups [...] If you've got active research, active, thriving departments in universities of all types, then there's more scope for people to be working within their own communities and doing research on a more equal basis, which is important.
>
> [interviewee, 6–15 years since PhD, non-Russell Group]

III.3 THE KINDS OF UNIT IN WHICH LANGUAGES RESEARCHERS ARE BASED

Within universities, we were keen to understand the kinds of units in which respondents are based. Only 62% of languages researchers in non-RG institutions are based in a languages unit of some kind, compared to 87% of RG respondents (see Table 5).

> I would urge you to recognize the work of languages research outside Languages Departments or Schools. Non-Anglophone research happens outside of Area Studies or Languages and it feels dangerously invisible when discussions of languages research take place.
>
> [survey respondent, over 15 years since PhD or equivalent]

Table 5 In what kind of department or unit do you work/ are you based?

*Post-PhD researchers were able to "tick all that apply". This was not an option in the PhD student survey.

	SURVEY (n = 536)				RESEARCHERS BY HEI TYPE (n = 386)			
	PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (RUSSELL GROUP) (n = 229)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (NOT RUSSELL GROUP) (N = 112) OR "NOT SURE"/"PREFER NOT TO SAY" (n = 13); TOTAL n = 125	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
A languages unit or a larger unit including languages (e.g., "Languages and Cultures", "Modern Languages")	115	77	278	79	200	87	112	62
A linguistics unit or larger unit including linguistics	9	6	45	13	21	9	24	19
An area studies unit	16	11	17	5	8	4	9	7
Other	10	7	32	9	12	5	20	16
	150	100	372*	106*	241*	105%*	165*	104%*

Non-RG languages researchers who responded are twice as likely to be based in a linguistics unit of some kind, but both linguistics and modern languages units are less common outside the Russell Group:[18] crucially, non-RG respondents are more than three times as likely to be based outside any of languages, linguistics or area studies, and to be housed in some other kind of unit (e.g. Literature, Drama and Creative Writing; Social Science; History, Heritage and Global Cultures; Creative Industries; Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences). This perhaps gives certain advantages in terms of exposure to a range of disciplines, but suggests a lack of critical mass in core languages research, and can lead to pressure to venture beyond one's own core discipline in order to survive.

18 They are also under pressure – see the recent staffing cuts in the Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages at the University of Huddersfield.

> There are not many other post-92s that have modern languages provision. Some colleagues will then obviously foreground their methodology or present themselves as being in a different discipline rather than modern languages. That makes a lot of sense. But it also erodes modern languages.
>
> [interviewee, over 15 years since PhD, non-Russell Group]

> I feel like I'm a traitor to languages because I cannot pursue this in the institution that I'm in.
>
> [interviewee, 6–15 years since PhD, non-Russell Group]

III.4 THE RESEARCH AREAS OF LANGUAGES RESEARCHERS

At the request of the AHRC, we asked respondents to indicate which subject classifications used by the AHRC they found useful to describe their research. Of the 29 classifications we offered respondents (an informed guess selected from a far longer list, too long to present in a survey), the top ten in Table 6 each attracted at least 20% of all respondents. There was pleasing evidence of response to emerging areas of research. Digital Humanities (encompassing both the role that digital culture and technology can play in transforming our research, and the role that languages researchers can play in illuminating digital culture(s); see Spence & Brandão 2022) were mentioned by almost one in six (17%) of respondents. This figure must surely grow as forms of digital mediation and thus our relationship to our research objects, methods and infrastructures continue to be transformed – most recently in the public eye thanks to the emergence of large-language-model-driven chatbots such as ChatGPT.

Table 6 Please select any categories that you feel describe your research interests, regardless of which languages, cultures, and/or societies you work on (multiple responses possible).

	TOTAL		RANK ORDER (ALL)	RANK ORDER: PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)	RANK ORDER: POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)
	n	%			
Literature	278	52	1	1	1
Literary and cultural theory	232	43	2	2	3
Comparative Literature/World Literature	221	41	3	4	2
History	186	35	4	5=	4
Cultural Studies and/or Pop Culture	184	34	5	5=	5
Translation and/or interpreting	147	27	6	7	6
Gender and sexuality studies	143	27	7	3	7
Linguistics: Sociolinguistics	119	22	8	10=	8
Postcolonial studies	117	22	9	10=	9
Philosophy, religion and/or history of ideas	115	21	10	8	11
Visual arts	106	20	11	10=	14=
Film/Screen industries	104	19	12	14	10
Language teaching/pedagogy	97	18	13	16=	12
Creative and/or cultural industries	95	18	14	15	13
Media	94	18	15	13	19
Digital humanities	93	17	16	16=	14=
Linguistics: *any other area*	91	17	17	18	14=
Education	89	17	18	15	14=
Politics and/or international relations	88	16	19	9	20
Applied linguistics	85	16	20	20	18
Environmental humanities	59	11	21	22	21
Lifewriting	47	9	22	23	22
Theatre studies	45	8	23	21	23=
Music	39	7	24	24	25
Geography	38	7	25	29	23=
Creative Practice (other)	37	7	26	25=	26
Health humanities/medical humanities	34	6	27	27=	27
Creative Writing	32	6	28	27=	26
Law	25	5	29	25=	29

A similar proportion of respondents (16%) mentioned environmental humanities and/or health/medical humanities. Notably, literature remains the largest area of focus of the languages researchers who responded to our survey, with 51% of respondents (including 50% of current PhD students) identifying it as an area of research interest, although frequently alongside at least one other classification. Literature was also the most common area of focus in applications for AHRC research leave in 2000 and 2005 (LLAS & UCML 2006: 22). This dominance of literature in languages research has deep historical roots, and is, for example, encoded in the structure of the British Academy's sections, with "Early Modern Languages and Literatures to 1830" and the now slightly more expansive "Modern Languages, Literatures *and other Media* from 1830" nevertheless still defined as "modern languages and literatures in a global context, *though at its core are the literatures of the major European languages, and the extension of their potential* through the increasing diversity of modern media" (our emphasis).[19] Against this background, the fact that literature was mentioned by only about half of our 2022 respondents is notable.

There are some differences between PhD students and more established researchers in their preferred subject classifications. Among our PhD student respondents, the following rank comparatively highly: gender and sexuality studies (ranked 3rd, vs 7th among other researchers); visual arts (ranked 10th equal, vs 14th equal among another researchers); and media (13th vs 19th), as well as philosophy, religion or history of ideas (ranked 8th vs 11th). The growth in visual studies was noted already in 2006 (LLAS & UCML 2006). On the other hand, film and screen industries, and language teaching and pedagogy all rank relatively lower among current PhD students. However, overall PhD researchers and post-PhD researchers ranked the same nine categories among the top ten, with visual arts and/or film/screen industries close behind in both cases.

Within linguistics, sociolinguistics is an area of strength, somewhat ahead of "linguistics: any other area", and ahead of applied linguistics. Just under a quarter (28) of the 119 respondents who listed sociolinguistics as an area of expertise stated that they are in a linguistics department or similar unit. Importantly, however, the remaining three-quarters (91 respondents) are presumably in languages or area studies units and likely to be working with languages other than English. This is rather anomalous, given that the current AHRC remit *excludes* sociolinguistics, even for languages other than English (AHRC 2021: 95–96); by comparison, both AHRC and ESRC councils fund applied linguistics "relating to the areas for which they are responsible". It would be logical, given the prominence of sociolinguistics in research of languages, cultures and societies, to extend this flexible approach to the sociolinguistics of languages other than English.

At the request of the AHRC, we invited respondents to suggest other keywords that would usefully describe their research. There was a very wide range of responses, and many suggestions occurred only once or twice. However, Table 7 shows a list of terms mentioned relatively frequently, which do not obviously fall under any of the existing headings. Alongside the existing label "postcolonial studies", a few respondents suggested decolonial, anticolonial or neocolonial studies. The nature of our AHRC brief meant that we did not ask about researchers' chronological focus, so it is noteworthy that medieval studies was mentioned by 11 respondents; a "commitment to chronological depth" despite "a particular concentrate of work on the 20th and 21st centuries" was similarly noted in REF 2021 UoA 26 (REF 2022: 75). LLAS and UCML (2006: 5) noted an "acceleration" in "the shift towards research into twentieth century and contemporary topics", with medieval studies relatively buoyant, but with less work in the "Cinderella" centuries in between.[20]

III.5 INTERDISCIPLINARITY AMONG LANGUAGES RESEARCHERS

The REF 2021 overview report for UoA 26 observed that the areas within its remit are "in many ways, intrinsically, interdisciplines: thematically, methodologically, conceptually and collaboratively", and that the research submitted "transcends disciplinary boundaries [...] across a range of domains" (REF 2022: 71, 72).[21] Of course, to recognize the "complex

19 Other BA sections which may accommodate languages researchers include (at least) "Africa, Asia and the Middle East", "Linguistics and Philology" and "Medieval Studies", as well as in the two more recent additions, "Culture, Media and Performance" and "Education".

20 Pieri (2015: 7) made a similar observation about the coverage of Italian teaching.

21 This self-concept of the home discipline as extremely broad and inclusive may help explain the rather uneven use of the "interdisciplinary" flag in REF (see REF 2022: 25, 52, 71); differing interpretations of the term, as discussed below, will also have played a role.

KEYWORD (GROUPED)	NUMBER OF TIMES MENTIONED
Memory studies	18
Critical theory, critical studies	15
Anthropology	14
Translation studies[22]	14
Multilingualism, bilingualism	12
Medieval studies	11
Comparative studies (comparative cultural studies, comparative literature, comparative history)	11
Sociology	11
(Critical) Discourse Studies/analysis/critical discourse analysis/studies	9
Transnational studies	9
(first or second) language acquisition research	9
Book history	7
Disability Studies	7
Migration Studies	6
Ethnography	5
Poetics	5
Area Studies	4
Forensic linguistics	4
Language policy and planning	3

Table 7 Suggested additional keywords, in order of frequency mentioned.

multidisciplinary structure" of the field of languages research (Carruthers & Fisher 2020: 3) is not to say that all individual researchers themselves work in a multi- or interdisciplinary way. Nevertheless, only 8% of PhD students and 5% of researchers post-PhD reported that their work was not interdisciplinary and/or multidisciplinary in some sense (Table 8). About two-thirds of respondents reported that at least some of their work was "lone researcher but involving more than one discipline in its focus or methods", although the proportion identifying with this form of inter-/multidisciplinarity declined with career stage, from 77% among PhD students, down to 60% among those with most experience since their PhD.

Table 8 Do you consider any of your research interdisciplinary and/or multidisciplinary? (Please select all that apply).

	PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)						ALL RESPONDENTS (n = 536)	
			UP TO 5 YEARS (n = 82)		6–15 YEARS (n = 135)		15+ YEARS (n = 169)			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes, inherently – my work is "lone researcher" work, but involves more than one discipline in its focus and/or methods	116	77	61	74	88	65	102	60	251	65
Yes, I sometimes collaborate with others working on the same language as me, but with a different focus/methodological approach.	16	11	19	23	55	41	73	43	147	38
Yes, I sometimes collaborate with others in another language specialism within languages research.	17	11	17	21	43	32	63	37	123	32
Yes, I sometimes collaborate with others in another subject area beyond languages research.	28	19	22	27	60	44	83	49	165	43
No, it's not.	12	8	3	4	3	2	9	5	15	4

Our deliberately inclusive phrasing surfaced differing and to some extent competing understandings of interdisciplinarity. Asked to explain how their work is multi- or interdisciplinary, one respondent simply noted "Text/image". Another explained:

22 Presumably these respondents wanted to distinguish translation studies from a possible narrower and more practically focused reading of "Translation and/or interpreting", the label offered to respondents (as in Table 6 above).

> I am a medievalist working comparatively across Old French and Middle English, using a range of methodologies including manuscript study and sometimes combining visual and textual work – so even when I work alone, I work across disciplines.
>
> [survey respondent, over 15 years since PhD or equivalent]

Another respondent set a very different threshold:

> I work regularly alongside people working with all sorts of languages [...] I know colleagues writing on e.g. Golden Age Spain who remain resolutely siloed, yet label their research as cross-disciplinary because they do a bit on Latin. Hardly the same definition.
>
> [survey respondent, within 5 years of PhD or equivalent]

Closer to this respondent's understanding of multi- and interdisciplinarity and to definitions in the literature,[23] about a third of our respondents (38%) reported collaborating with someone in the same language area as them; 32% sometimes collaborated with someone in another language area; and 42% collaborated at times with an area outside languages research, thus backing the observation of "increasing evidence of collaborative research" and of "comparative work" in UoA 26 (REF 2022: 69, 72):

> I work with historians, psychologists, scientists.
>
> [survey respondent, 6–15 years since PhD or equivalent]

> I work with Geography and Sociology on matters relating to the representation of space and peoples in visual and literary cultures.
>
> [survey respondent, within 5 years of PhD or equivalent]

One interviewee, from a non-Russell Group institution, commented on the existential need to work in a more interdisciplinary way to survive within changing university structures:

> I've sort of moved away from a specifically modern language focused area into something that's far broader. My understanding, and having seen the changes in the profession and in the discipline, is that that's not uncommon, that increasingly we're finding that modern languages isn't a subject within the university in and of its own right, but rather it's part of that broader humanities or arts or literatures or cultures package that is now being packaged together. And that has serious consequences, as I'm sure other colleagues have said, for how we teach and what we teach.
>
> I feel like I have to diversify in order to survive in the profession.
>
> [interviewee, 6–15 years since PhD, non-Russell Group]

It is salutary to observe that at undergraduate level, degrees combining language study with social sciences subjects have *increased* their student numbers, compared to declines for languages alone, or languages with arts/humanities (British Academy & UCML 2022: 13). Nevertheless, "working across disciplines is not the only or even always the best way to do scholarly work" (Austin et al. 1996: 282), nor does it obviate the need for robust assertion of our core disciplinary expertise. However, it does make it possible to tackle big – and by definition usually complex – questions. Challenge-led research, of the kind often articulated in thematic funding calls, is, then, arguably "best nurtured in interdisciplinary settings" (Ayres-Bennett 2023: 15), and languages researchers need to be confident as leaders of, or participants in, such work. This is not always the case. One interviewee cautioned,

23 We deliberately avoided imposing definitions of these terms in our survey. However, it is common to distinguish between *multidisciplinarity*, where a team of researchers approach a problem but each from their own discipline, and *interdisciplinarity*, where all involved "approach the problem in a new way. The members of interdisciplinary teams learn from each other to produce new approaches to a problem that would not be possible through any of the single discipline [...] team members [learn] the language of each other's disciplines, as well as the assumptions, limits, and valid uses of those disciplines' theoretical and experimental approaches" (Graff 2016: 779–80). A third term gaining currency – but not used in our survey – is *transdisciplinarity*, understood as "the integration also of insights generated outside the academy, a team approach to research, the active involvement of non-academic participants in research design, and a 'case study' approach" (Repko & Szostak 2017: 25, cited by Carruthers & Fisher 2020: 3). See Carruthers & Fisher (2020) for a worked example of languages-led interdisciplinarity in practice.

> we tend to see ourselves as gatekeepers, rather than as facilitators [of research with a languages dimension], and I think you have to change that mindset.
>
> [interviewee, more than 15 years since PhD]

Our infrastructure – including, for example, subject associations – perhaps does not always support interdisciplinarity. One early career academic commented,

> I think interdisciplinary is kind of a foreign concept for [NAME OF A LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION].
>
> [interviewee, 0–5 years since PhD]

One researcher talked about the "very artificial divide" between languages researchers and education or other social sciences, while a PhD student commented,

> I do think the future of languages research specifically is going to have to encompass multidisciplinary strands. So I think we're going to have to think broader than our own subject, and we're going to have to learn from other specialisms.
>
> [interviewee, PhD student]

Some researchers feel held back in their desire to work across disciplines by a lack of training and expertise. One PhD researcher commented,

> I'm cross-disciplinary [...] and I need more data and analysis training. I need more training and things like SPSS [Statistics Package for Social Sciences, i.e. statistical software] and I don't really know how to access that. The IMLR [Institute for Modern Languages Research, now rebadged as the Institute of Languages, Cultures & Societies (ILCS), part of the School of Advanced Study at the University of London] offer some great data visualization courses and things like that, and I have joined them online. But I would really love to see more cross-disciplinary training offered so that you could branch out of your specialism.
>
> [interviewee, 6–15 years since PhD]

In our interviews, there was a strong appetite from researchers at all career stages for support and further training to scaffold them towards becoming more confident in working in an interdisciplinary way, whether though methods training or support with networking outside their own area. Training offered by the ILCS – mainly aimed at PhD students, though open to all – was praised, as above, several times, and the shift to online delivery (a consequence of the COVID pandemic) was welcomed, making training far more accessible.

IV. LANGUAGE RESEARCHERS' EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS

The REF 2021 gives a snapshot of the impact of languages research, in the technical REF sense of impact as "an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia" (see REF 2021). However, the REF impact case studies database (REF 2022b) gives a very incomplete picture of the extent of experience in and capacity for working beyond the university environment. Our survey therefore asked about researchers' experience of working with external partners, in any capacity (whether research, teaching or other activity, such as outreach), and about their current links with such partners, in the UK or elsewhere (Table 9). The vast majority (86%, n = 332) of post-PhD respondents have worked with at least one kind of external partner in some capacity (a school, cultural organization, charity, museum, gallery, special interest group, etc.), whether in the UK or beyond. Among PhD students, 53% (n = 80) have already worked with at least one kind of external partner.

Given the tendency of REF impact case study narratives to focus on success, it is useful that some respondents were very open about the difficulties encountered in working with partners:

> I have worked with small local museums, who need support, but are often themselves underfunded. They are great with the public engagement, often less good at providing the evidence for impact.
>
> [survey respondent, over 15 years since PhD]

> Working with a museum was a total nightmare. The sector is horribly underfunded, and the mentality (e.g. around deadlines and respecting them) is very different from academia.
>
> [survey respondent, over 15 years since PhD]

Table 9 Survey respondents' links with partners of various kinds (in the UK or elsewhere).

"THROUGH YOUR RESEARCH, TEACHING, OR OTHER ACTIVITY AS PART OF YOUR PHD STUDIES, HAVE YOU WORKED WITH …"	PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)		TOTAL (n = 536)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
an educational institution outside of HE?	35	23	203	53	238	44
a cultural organization?	36	24	190	49	226	42
a charity?	21	14	113	29	134	25
a museum?	20	23	108	28	128	24
a special interest group?	22	15	106	27	128	24
a public body?	13	9	112	29	125	23
a heritage organization?	16	11	74	19	90	17
a gallery?	7	5	70	18	77	14
a business?	10	7	66	17	76	14
the health sector?	1	1	29	8	30	6
Respondents who have *not* worked with any kind of stakeholder	70	47	54	14	124	24

The additional difficulties caused by the COVID pandemic were also noted, particularly when working with smaller charities:

> It's had a severe impact on the charity sector, as we all know, in terms of their resources, in terms of their bandwidth.
>
> [PhD student interviewee, Russell Group]

> Covid basically entirely decimated the whole previous world and charities have got so much on their plates that yes, it's definitely a struggle to get in.
>
> [PhD student interviewee, Russell Group]

The AHRC requirement for partner organizations to commit resources to a project, often already a challenge, was considered by some respondents to be a particular problem since the COVID pandemic not just when working with charities but also with local council services. However, other respondents described fruitful and sometimes long-standing relationships with a wide range of organizations, in the UK and globally.

Some kinds of partnerships are more familiar territory than others. Fully 44% of respondents have worked with an educational institution outside HE, most commonly in outreach work with mainstream schools, but also with complementary schools teaching community or heritage languages (mentioned three times) and in teacher training or professional development (e.g. with the Prince's Trust, mentioned three times), as well as with the educational arms of museums, galleries and other organizations. Many respondents – 42% – had worked with one or more cultural organizations, often specific to a language (e.g. the Institut français, Cervantes Institute, Goethe Institute, Japan Foundation, Pushkin House, Italian Cultural Institutes), but also others such as the National Centre for Writing, Chartered Institute of Linguists, opera and theatre groups, book festivals, the British Library, and the National Library of Wales. The level of engagement with charity partners (25%) is somewhat over-stated, as some respondents very reasonably included their interactions with scholarly associations and funders that have charitable status. However, charities mentioned included those in the area of women's rights, or working with migrant, refugee and asylum seeker charities in the UK and internationally (e.g. in Ireland and the Netherlands).

Overall, 24% of respondents had experience working with a museum, 17% with a heritage organization and 14% with a gallery in some capacity, whether curating an exhibition, working on the language of explanatory materials, assessing the visitor experience, or other activities. Besides several international collaborations (e.g. Czech Republic, Spain, Colombia), examples

given ranged from large national institutions (e.g. the British Museum, Tate, Courtauld Institute, National Galleries of Scotland, National Trust, Heritage UK, Archaeology Scotland), to regional, local and community or more specialist museums, galleries, national parks and heritage organizations, such as the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum. Similarly, 24% reported having worked with a special interest group. Most commonly cited were groups within HE (e.g. the Early Career Special Interest Group of UCML), but many other kinds of groups were also cited: refugee organizations, expatriate and employer organizations, groups such as Disability Wales, local dialect interest groups in Scotland, as well as particular heritage and faith communities, conservation and environmental groups. Examples of work with the health sector (6% of respondents), including NHS trusts, were often related to assessing language requirements, including translation and interpreting; one respondent described a project to create bilingual poetry for staff and patients in palliative care.

This bottom-up self-reported picture correlates well with the kinds of impact in the 154 impact case studies submitted to UoA 26 in REF 2021, among which there was "a preponderance" in the areas of "culture and society, creativity, education, policy, and public understanding", with some "outstanding impact" in the heritage sector, and a "cluster" of case studies in the area of health and well-being (REF 2022: 78–79). The sub-panel report for UoA 25 (Area Studies) noted that much research submitted explored "globally important themes", including "global problems of poverty, health, sustainability, quality of life, migration, insecurity, human rights and social injustice", ethical issues, for example in regard to women and violence, slavery and aid, as well as "little-known histories of people, post-conflict and post-disaster settings, gender relations, colonialism and post-colonialism, religion and heritage" (REF 2022: 50).[24]

Around half of our respondents (over half of post-PhD researchers and a third of PhD students) have some link outside the UK with an organization or potential stakeholder of some kind, excluding links with HE institutions (Table 10). A fifth of all respondents have worked with a non-HE education institution outside the UK; a quarter have worked with a cultural organization outside the UK, 14% with a special interest group, 13% with a museum, and 8% with a charity. Among the partners mentioned, locations in Africa, Asia, Australasia and the Pacific, North and South America, as well as Europe all featured. A very diverse range of non-UK partners was mentioned, many broadly falling into the categories of arts and heritage sector organizations and institutions, and charities or non-government organizations that support particular groups (such as refugees, vulnerable women and disabled people). This relative strength in international connections is also reflected in REF 2021, where in UoA 26, local-level impact case studies were "often" based in countries outside the UK (REF 2022: 79). A third of UoA 26's 154 impact case studies had impact *exclusively* outside the UK, and many more had impact both in and beyond the UK. Some 55 different countries featured, on all continents except Antarctica. In UoA 25, fully two-thirds of impact case studies were international (REF 2022: 53). This experience of impact work outside the UK accords with an important competitive advantage of languages researchers: their capacity to bring both insider and outsider perspectives to research questions and real-world problems.

Table 10 Survey respondents' links with organizations outside the UK.

"OUTSIDE OF THE UK, DO YOU HAVE LINKS WITH …"	PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)		TOTAL (n = 536)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
any of the following?	47	31	212	55	259	48
an educational institution outside of HE?	19	13	86	23	105	20
a cultural organization?	21	14	114	30	135	25
a charity?	4	3	40	10	44	8
a museum?	10	7	60	16	70	13
a special interest group?	13	9	61	16	74	14
a heritage organization?	4	3	34	9	38	7
a gallery?	6	4	26	7	32	6
a business?	5	3	33	9	38	7

24 See also the REF 2021 impact case study database (REF 2022b). Note also the updated Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies (QAA 2023), now aligned to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On SDGs and languages research, see also below.

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IV.1 LANGUAGES RESEARCHERS AND BUSINESS

Comparatively few of our survey respondents (14%, n = 76) have had a link to business, several of which were in fact related to a previous career outside academia. Otherwise, the most common links cited related to providing teaching or training to a business, or matching students to placements that could use their language expertise (in the UK or abroad); other links were of very disparate kinds. The only kind of business mentioned more than once was publishing. A theatre company, a business involved in digital storytelling and virtual reality, and wine businesses were each mentioned once. There was no mention of very large or multinational businesses among survey respondents. That is not to rule out the possibility of arts and humanities partnerships with very large businesses – the AHRC-funded project based on the archives of Boots, *Histories of the High-Street Shopper: Boots and the Experience of Chain-store Retail, 1880–1980*, is an example. However, it is not a current area of strength for languages researchers.

The case for the economic value of languages has been repeatedly made, at least since the 1918 Leathes Report, and was most recently quantified by Ayres-Bennett et al. (2022), whose study modelled the effect of the UK increasing knowledge of four languages (Arabic, Chinese, French and Spanish) by just 10% in the Key Stage 3/4 population (i.e. among pupils aged 11–18) "to a level that could be applied in a business setting later on" (in practice, B1 in CEFR). It suggested that this could yield a return by 2050 of between about £9bn and £12.6bn for each language, while a 25% increase would yield a return of between £24bn and £31.6bn. A "full eradication" of language barriers with trading partners in Arabic-, Chinese-, French- and Spanish-speaking countries could increase UK exports by about £19bn annually (Ayres-Bennett et al. 2022: 32, 44–47). Nevertheless, alongside the quantitative case repeatedly made for the economic value of languages to business, there is scope for narratives of success to nudge more businesses, especially smaller and medium-sized businesses, to take the leap to address their own language and cultural knowledge deficits. A University of Nottingham survey of local and regional SMEs in 2017 confirmed both the lack of language knowledge (only one of 24 businesses that responded used a language other than English) and the desire among some to improve their capabilities. In a 2016–20 programme offering placements in local small and medium enterprises for students of languages at the University of Nottingham,[25] the vast majority of businesses were interested in language skills and/or basic cultural knowledge. The programme yielded many success stories where placements of students with these skills did indeed open doors to new markets for their host SMEs in Europe, Asia and the Americas. However, for our purposes, it is important to note that the facilitating factors were typical language graduate attributes, rather than the results of new research.

IV.2 LANGUAGES RESEARCHERS AND GOVERNMENT

The importance of languages capabilities to the UK's strategic interests is recognized in broad terms in government (cf. HM Government 2021; note also the Welsh government's ambition of a million Welsh speakers by 2050, *Cymraeg 2050*). Within the Civil Service, too, language capabilities are being treated as a test case for a wider ambition to work on skills mapping and development, with the first ever survey of language skills in the Civil Service.[26] A Cross-Whitehall Languages Group, originally created for departments which employ and train linguists to share notes, now includes more government departments and organizations, though it is still growing and does not yet have representation from all departments.

It is encouraging that almost a quarter of post-PhD researchers (23%) had worked with one or more levels of government in some form, whether local (11%), devolved (9%) or national (6%) (Table 11), while almost a quarter (23%) of all respondents already had some experience of working with a public body.[27] At a national governmental level, the Department for Education

25 The programme was part of a wider project supporting business in the D2N2 (Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire) region with support from the European Structural Investment Fund (Gregory & Hughes 2018).

26 The findings helped support a successful bid for a National Security Secretariat-funded programme to offer Mandarin language training at various proficiencies to 100 civil servants, and likewise the Home Office piloted funded classes for staff to develop and maintain their language skills.

27 We did not define "public body", and in practice there is some overlap between the examples cited under this heading and under "government". Nevertheless, we present the data here as reported.

and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office were each mentioned by more than one respondent; ten other national government departments or government agencies were each mentioned once (Table 12). Other forms of engagement with government ranged from giving evidence at a Select Committee to giving a presentation to members of the national Civil Service languages network.[28] Of the devolved governments, the Welsh and Scottish governments were both mentioned several times, but the Northern Irish government only twice (recall that there were only two Northern Irish submissions to UoA 26 in REF 2021 and none to UoA 25; note also the Northern Ireland government's own internal challenges). The largest proportion of respondents with any experience of engagement with government had it at a local level. Examples of public bodies include the BBC, the British Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Social Mobility Commission, and, outside the UK, Ireland's Conradh na Gaeilge, Spain's La Fundación SGAE (founded by the Sociedad General de Autores y Editores**),** and Tahiti's Académie tahitienne.

Table 11 Survey respondents' experience of working with government or public bodies.

"THROUGH YOUR RESEARCH, TEACHING, OR OTHER ACTIVITY AS PART OF YOUR PHD STUDIES, HAVE YOU WORKED WITH …"	PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)		TOTAL (n = 536)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
any government (one or more of local, devolved, UK)?	6	4	90	23	96	18
a local government?	4	3	54	14	58	11
a devolved government?	2	1	48	12	50	9
national UK government?	1	1	30	8	31	6
a public body?	13	9	112	29	125	23

Table 12 The nature of work or partnerships with government.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT	DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT	NATIONAL GOVERNMENT
Numerous local councils and authorities were mentioned by name, as well as local government in France, China, Japan and Peru (each 1x). Kinds of involvement mentioned included: • Arts and heritage service • Assessment of skills and training needs in local economy • Bilingual signage in public spaces • Education and outreach activities, including promoting language learning • Policy on child protection • Training sessions for public officials • Supporting refugee organizations	• Welsh government (6x) • Scottish government/ Education Scotland (5x) • Northern Irish government (2x) ——————— • Catalan government (1x)	*Mentioned 3–5 times* • Department for Education • Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office *Mentioned once* • Cabinet Office • Department for Culture, Media and Sport • Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs • Ministry of Defence • Defence Science and Technology Laboratory • Ministry of Justice • HM Courts & Tribunal Service (HMCTS) • National Crime Agency • Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre – GOV.UK • Ofqual *Other forms of engagement* • Giving evidence to a Select Committee • Language policy across government • All-Party Parliamentary Group on Languages • Talking to the UK Civil Service Languages network (German, specifically)

Given the relative breadth of experience of engagement with government and public bodies, we spoke to a number of government representatives and researchers at the interface between academics and government to explore where and how languages researchers might engage more with decision-makers and policy developers, including in designated "Areas of Research Interest" (ARIs) of government departments.[29] Some topics are obviously more narrowly linguistic, for example forensic linguistics (chiefly but not exclusively concerning English); determining intent of adversaries by analysing language and gesture; effective communication, including planning communications for emergency situations of all kinds (health, natural disasters, large-scale industrial incidents); using emergent information technologies (such as text analytics, natural language processing, sentiment analysis and semantic markup) to improve knowledge and information-sharing in the public sector as a whole.

28 The Civil Service Languages Network, a volunteer-run nationwide staff network of 6,500 members, meets periodically and warmly welcomes contributions from academics that give members a chance to practise their language and/or learn more about it.

29 See https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest (accessed May 2023).

In many other areas of government focus, however, languages researchers with many specialisms are well equipped to provide comparative and historical perspectives that are valuable for informing policy, providing qualitative research to improve the understanding of what people do in particular contexts and why, by comparing the past with the present, comparing the UK with other parts of the world, and/or offering critical, ethical and philosophical analysis.[30] What is more, interviewees at the interface between academia and government emphasized the importance – alongside quantitative and big-data approaches – of narrative and qualitative research to help address inherently complex interdisciplinary problems. Narratives are important in at least two ways. First, they help identify, challenge, and correct the in-built biases of algorithms, in which minority categories are by definition likely to be under-represented or to be over-identified as problems. Second, narratives are highly effective in helping communicate opportunities or outcomes memorably (Sundin et al. 2018; McCall et al. 2019).

Some examples from current government ARIs include:

- understanding cultural and social factors which influence the spread of, and receptiveness to, political, religious, medical and other kinds of ideologies;
- understanding political ideologies, including different forms and degrees of extremism, and links between extremism and terrorism; variation within and beyond individual states;
- understanding the role of social media in promoting, recruiting to or countering extremism or other ideologies such as denial of climate change, racism, vaccine hesitancy, etc.;
- understanding geographical, cultural and language barriers to trade;
- human rights, understanding modern slavery, working with survivors to co-design mechanisms of support for survivors.

Besides government ARIs, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) also publishes Select Committee ARIs, for example changes to the UK aid budget; UK trade policy; cultures underpinning male violence against women and girls (such as gender stereotypes; the impact of music, social media, and sport; and cultures and attitudes that develop in schools).

Published ARIs vary in how up to date, how detailed, and how complete they are, especially where they may be sensitive, and they can change rapidly. However, many can be summarized under four broad headings:

1. **understanding causes** of undesirable behaviours, such as unhealthy lifestyle choices, crime, disengagement, conflict escalation, extremism;
2. **increasing and improving quality of life**, including well-being, community engagement and social cohesion;
3. **evaluating and/or improving services and systems**, including reducing inequalities, improving accessibility and inclusivity, in the public sector and elsewhere;
4. **identifying and/or mitigating problems** of all kinds, including the impacts of an ageing population; managing conflicts of all kinds and at any scale; tackling climate change; food insecurity; energy insecurity; cybersecurity.

Languages researchers' cultural expertise and experience in the creation, analysis, and critiquing of many kinds of cultural assets – texts, images, multi-modal, on- and offline – makes them particularly well placed to help address many of these high-level challenges.

Finally, it is worth noting that policy development processes also include a requirement to consider the "Public Sector Equality Duty", that is, to consider whether any groups with protected characteristics are likely to be impacted disproportionately by any new policy. These protected characteristics do not encompass language, but do include ethnicity and disability, both of which may have a languages dimension. For example, the role and quality of translation and interpreting in healthcare services, policing and the courts (see e.g. Gaiser & Matras 2016; Tipton

30 On the value of historical perspectives, note the 2015 joint AHRC and Institute for Government Report, *What is the Value of History in Policymaking?* (Haddon et al. 2015).

2021; Matras et al. 2023) must be considered when auditing racial disparities in public services (a priority of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) and of inequality in access to justice or to medical treatment.[31]

We explored the routes for academics to interact with government and parliament. The repository of language policy documents recently published by Ayres-Bennett and Humphries (2022) was considered a good example of a well-curated overview of material that could usefully inform policy development, a curation of material that leaves it to the reader to use it as they like. In other contexts, a policy briefing with key findings may be wanted; sometimes a statement of what research needs to be undertaken can be useful; at other times civil servants or government representatives may want to contact researchers for a conversation on a specific topic. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office uses a "network of networks" model to access very specific knowledge as and when it is needed.

There is, in other words, no single route to engagement with government, even when both sides are willing and eager. The Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement project[32] funded by Research England is exploring how to support effective and sustained engagement between academics and policy professionals across the higher education sector, but a 2017 survey of academics found that "the biggest barrier to engagement with Parliament was lack of knowledge or guidance on how to engage".[33]

Through the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, already mentioned, it is possible to register an interest and expertise in a Select Committee ARI, but we suspect that relatively few languages researchers are aware of this or of other ways to help develop researchers' capacity to undertake policy work and engagement with government, including the Open Innovation Team (established in 2016 as a "cross-government unit that works with academics to generate analysis and ideas for policy"),[34] and the Institute for Government, which describes itself as "the leading think tank working to make government more effective", and runs training (for example, *How to engage with policy makers*; *Understanding UK government and politics*; *How to develop and implement policy effectively*; *How to navigate policy making in Whitehall and Westminster*).[35] The Institute for Government was mentioned in passing by one of our researcher interviewees, evidently as "assumed knowledge", and was an external partner for some of the work funded under the AHRC's "Translating Cultures" theme, but it is, we suspect, not widely known among the languages research community. Raising awareness of these sources of support for engagement with government (see, e.g., Institute for Government 2020) is surely something for subject associations to consider.

V. THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE AND LANGUAGES RESEARCHERS' EXPERIENCE OF IT

We also used our survey to ask post-PhD researchers about their views on the funding landscape and their experience of it (Table 13; note that the success rates reported are not per application, but per respondent; many respondents may have applied more than once to any one funder). Of the 386 respondents, 51% (n = 197) had applied for AHRC funding at least once since completing their PhD (42% have not applied, a further 5% are not yet eligible, and 2% preferred not to say). Of those who had applied, almost two-thirds (64%, n = 126) had been successful at least once during their career. Of all post-PhD respondents, 33% have received AHRC funding at least once, but as we would expect, the level of success varies with career stage. Among those 6 to 15 years into their career (n = 136), only 37% have applied

31 Not all decision-makers welcome a multilingual approach. A now infamous 2013 written statement to Parliament by the then Communities Secretary Eric Pickles steered against devoting resources to translate information into community languages, which Pickles suggested could undermine social cohesion and reduce the incentive for migrants to learn English (Pickles 2013). Pickles argued that local authorities' use of translation and interpretation should be reserved for "rare" and "emergency" situations – of which the COVID pandemic proved to be an example, falling under the remit of the new Health Security Agency. Note that to approve indefinite leave to remain for immigrants, the UK sets an expectation of B1 (CEFR) in English.

32 See https://www.cape.ac.uk/ (accessed May 2023).

33 See UK Parliament Knowledge Exchange Unit website, https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/research-impact-at-the-uk-parliament/knowledge-exchange-at-uk-parliament/ (accessed May 2023).

34 See https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/open-innovation-team (accessed May 2023).

35 See https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/about-us (accessed May 2023).

to the AHRC, and of those, 36% have been successful. In other words, only 13% of all mid-career researchers have gained AHRC funding. This is important for the sector to bear in mind, for example when assessing colleagues' readiness for promotion, where differences between research councils and disciplines may not always be well understood. Of course, our survey is only a snapshot, but if anything, our sample of respondents is likely to over-represent those who are more invested in AHRC or other UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding, and to under-represent those who have had no success with UKRI.

Table 13 Applications for funding.

*Respondents included a wide variety of sources under this heading, some of which in fact overlap with the categories above.

	"HAVE YOU EVER APPLIED TO …" (n = 386)		"HAVE YOU BEEN SUCCESSFUL FROM ANY OF THESE APPLICATIONS?"		
	n	%	n	% OF THOSE WHO APPLIED	% OF ALL
AHRC	197	51	126	64	33
Other UKRI funding (of which. ESRC 40, EPSRC 4, Innovate UK 3, MRC 1)	60	16	39	65	10
Any non-UKRI funding (any) …	296	77	238	80	62
… of which:					
European Commission (EU) funding	72	19	28	39	7
British Academy	148	38	74	50	19
Leverhulme Trust	159	41	56	35	15
British Academy/Leverhulme small research grant	94	24	47	50	12
UK-based subject association	88	23	70	80	18
Other UK government funding	35	9	26	74	7
Other UK-based charity or third sector organization	51	13	41	80	11
Funding council in another country	64	17	47	73	12
Government funding in another country	52	13	26	50	7
Other funding than the above*	40	10	40	100	10

Encouragingly, the gender distribution among survey respondents who have applied to the AHRC for funding is very close to the overall gender distribution in the survey (Table 14; cf. Table 1 above): 56% of AHRC applicants are women and 42% male (vs 51% of all our post-PhD respondents).[36] Both women's success (35%) and men's success in obtaining AHRC funding (31%) are close to the overall 33% rate of all respondents who have had funding from the AHRC.

Table 14 Application rates to the AHRC among languages researchers by gender.

GENDER	"DURING YOUR CAREER IN THE UK SINCE YOU COMPLETED YOUR PHD, HAVE YOU APPLIED FOR AHRC RESEARCH FUNDING, EITHER AS A CO-INVESTIGATOR OR PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR?" (n = 386)							
	YES		NO		NOT APPLICABLE		PREFER NOT TO SAY	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female	111	56	87	54	15	71	1	17
Male	82	41	68	42	6	89	3	50
Non-binary	1	0.5	2	1	0	0	0	0
Transgender	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Prefer not to say	3	1.5	4	2	0	0	2	3

The picture regarding disability is more concerning (Table 15). We noted in Section II above that people with a disability are under-represented among post-PhD researchers responding to our

36 Among all those who have applied to the AHRC, women (59%) outnumber men (39%) significantly, however.

survey, at 6% compared to 16% in the working-age population as a whole. Even more alarming, the low figure of 6% is still triple the proportion of applicants for AHRC funding under the heading of languages and linguistics who reported a disability (approx. 2% of applicants; success rates were not available [source: internal AHRC data]). So not only are people with a disability under-represented among languages researchers, but those researchers with a disability are in turn also badly under-represented among AHRC applicants in languages and linguistics. The COVID pandemic will surely only have exacerbated this – one survey respondent listed their disability and the need for prolonged shielding as their reason for having not yet applied for AHRC Follow-on-Funding for which they were eligible. Only 11 (44%) of the 25 post-PhD researchers in our survey who declared a disability had applied for AHRC funding. Of those, 5 (20% of those with a disability, and 45% of those with a disability who had applied) had been successful, all once only. These figures compare unfavourably both with the 51% of respondents who had applied to the AHRC, and with the 33% of all post-PhD respondents who had received AHRC funding at least once.[37] Clearly, addressing the under-representation of disabled people in languages research, and even more so among funding applicants, must be a priority for funders, subject associations, and institutions. The British Academy appointed an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) officer in 2021; many subject associations now have EDI officers and/or groups, and have undertaken EDI audits and/or surveys of their membership as a first step to inform action plans.[38]

Table 15 Application rates to the AHRC among languages researchers with a disability.

"DO YOU HAVE A DISABILITY?"	"DURING YOUR CAREER IN THE UK SINCE YOU COMPLETED YOUR PHD, HAVE YOU APPLIED FOR AHRC RESEARCH FUNDING, EITHER AS A CO-INVESTIGATOR OR PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR?" (n = 386)							
	YES		NO		NOT APPLICABLE		PREFER NOT TO SAY	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	11	6	12	7	2	10	0	0
No	178	90	145	90	19	91	4	67
Prefer not to say	8	4	5	3	0	0	2	33

Besides AHRC funding, we also asked about applications to and successes with other funders, including other UKRI funders, the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust (Table 16). About a third (33%) of applicants to the AHRC have been successful at least once. Of these, a quarter (25%) reported success twice (8% of all post-PhD respondents), and a further 14% (4% of all post-PhD respondents) three or more times. The most common non-AHRC UKRI funder applied to was the Economics and Social Sciences Research Council (ESRC), accounting for two-thirds of non-AHRC applicants; among those applicants to the ESRC, about 40% listed applied linguistics and/or sociolinguistics as their research area. As for non-UKRI funding, 62% of respondents who had applied had received funding from one of these sources. However, levels of success vary considerably depending on the funder, as Table 16 shows. For example, 41% of all respondents have applied to the Leverhulme Trust at least once, 35% of whom (corresponding to 15% of all survey respondents) have been successful at least once.[39] Among respondents who have applied to the British Academy (38%), half have been successful at least once, corresponding to 19% of all respondents. The small grants jointly administered by the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust have been a source of funding for 12% of survey respondents. As one might expect, the proportion of applicants who have gained funding is lower among "mid-career" respondents than among "senior" respondents, who are likely to have made more applications, so that the chance of at least one of their applications having succeeded is greater. Proportionally, mid-career applicants are half as likely as senior respondents to have benefited from British Academy or Leverhulme funding, and only a third as likely to have benefited from their small-grant funding.

37 Equivalent data on gender and disability among researchers entered to REF 2021 are not available, and it seems likely that disability was under-reported (EDAP 2022: 19).

38 For example, Women in German Studies and the Association for German Studies jointly undertook an EDI survey of members in 2022 designed and analysed by Iman Nick. Numerous actions by – among others – the Society for Latin American Studies, the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies and the Society for Italian Studies were reported at the British Academy's March 2021 network meeting of learned societies and subject associations.

39 In 2021 18% of applications to the Leverhulme Trust (all schemes) were successful (Leverhulme Trust 2021: 14). Note, however, that many of our survey respondents will have applied more than once. The British Academy lists numbers of awards made, but does not publish success rates (British Academy 2021: 16).

	UP TO 5 YEARS SINCE PHD (n = 82)					6–15 YEARS SINCE PHD (n = 135)					15+ YEARS SINCE PHD (n = 169)				
	"HAVE YOU EVER APPLIED TO …"		"HAVE YOU BEEN SUCCESSFUL FROM ANY OF THESE APPLICATIONS?"			"HAVE YOU EVER APPLIED TO …"		"HAVE YOU BEEN SUCCESSFUL FROM ANY OF THESE APPLICATIONS?"			"HAVE YOU EVER APPLIED TO …"		"HAVE YOU BEEN SUCCESSFUL FROM ANY OF THESE APPLICATIONS?"		
	n	%	n	% OF THOSE WHO APPLIED	% OF ALL AT CAREER STAGE	n	%	n	% OF THOSE WHO APPLIED	% OF ALL AT CAREER STAGE	n	%	n	% OF THOSE WHO APPLIED	% OF ALL AT CAREER STAGE
AHRC	11	13	6	55	7	50	37	18	36	13	136	80	102	75	60
Other UKRI funding (of which. ESRC 40, EPSRC 4, Innovate UK 3, MRC 1)	5	6	4	80	5	26	19	14	54	10	29	17	21	73	12
Any non-UKRI funding (any) …	47	57	27	57	33	111	82	93	84	69	138	82	118	86	70
… of which:															
European Commission (EU) funding	6	1	2	33	2	22	16	8	36	6	94	56	18	19	11
British Academy	16	20	3	19	4	48	36	20	42	15	84	50	51	61	30
Leverhulme Trust	19	23	3	16	4	50	37	15	30	11	90	53	38	42	22
British Academy/ Leverhulme small research grant	5	6	1	20	1	32	24	10	31	7	57	34	36	63	21
UK-based subject association	11	13	7	64	9	38	28	31	82	22	39	23	32	82	19
Other UK government funding	3	4	1	33	1	13	10	9	69	7	19	11	16	84	9
Other UK-based charity or third sector organisation	4	5	2	50	2	23	17	18	78	13	24	14	21	88	12
Funding council in another country	8	10	8	100	10	24	18	17	71	13	32	19	22	69	13
Government funding in another country	10	12	1	10	1	18	13	9	50	12	24	14	21	67	12
Other funding than the above	5	6	5	100	6	17	11	15	88	11	19	12	20	105	12

Table 16 Post-PhD researcher respondents' success rates for various funding schemes, by career stage (% "successful" means "successful at least once").

Only 19% of respondents have applied for European funding; of those, 39% have been successful, but this corresponds to just 7% of all respondents. UK-based subject associations are a source of funding for 23% of respondents, and with a high success rate (80%) among those who have applied, usually for quite small amounts (often around £1,000–2,000, though funding varies widely among subject associations). The proportions of colleagues who applied to UK charities or third-sector organizations, and who have applied for funding in another country, are relatively low – between 13% and 17% of all respondents – but those who apply have high success rates, with between 80% and 85% succeeding at least once from such applications. Among the wide range of organizations mentioned, the Wellcome Trust had funded two respondents, and the Carnegie Trust three.[40]

We asked researchers for their views on the kinds of funding schemes offered by the AHRC. Across all career stages, those involved in the four very large OWRI-funded projects were largely positive about the experience (though not universally, and with some caveats), but it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the four successful OWRI projects were led by four of the largest RG institutions, all with robust research support. Both the concentration of funds in relatively few institutions (largely in England, and led by the "usual suspects") and the rather uneven distribution of funds even with the successful consortia were noted.

40 A very wide range of "other" sources were mentioned by 40 (10%) of respondents, all of whom reported success at least once, but given the wide disparity of funders mentioned in this category (including several which in fact fall under one of our named categories), this group is not further analysed here.

More generally, it was noted that funders could also do more to understand the inequalities in research time and internal research support (e.g. for pump-priming and proof-of-concept) available to applicants from different kinds of institutions.

> We just don't have that kind of access to little bits of money that I know exist in the Russell Group [...] I would imagine a lot of universities have kind of small pots that you can apply to for proof of concept type stuff.
>
> [interviewee, 6–15 years since PhD, non-Russell Group]

The same interviewee continued:

> [...] we're on research and teaching contracts. But research is only 10% of our time. And in in Russell Group universities, I think research is generally 30% or 40% of people's time.
>
> [interviewee, 6–15 years since PhD, non-Russell Group]

All existing AHRC funding schemes met with a majority support (75%–88%) among survey respondents (Table 17), though the Follow-on-Funding scheme for impact was less popular, supported by only just over half of respondents. It was noted by some respondents that this scheme gives "a double bite at the cherry" to those lucky enough to be eligible (i.e. those with prior AHRC funding), as the scheme has very high success rates: among the 16% (n = 20) of our survey respondents who have applied to the scheme, 70% (n = 14) had been successful at least once. While funding for impact clearly addresses the AHRC's strategic aims, the restriction of this relatively attainable funding to an already privileged pool somewhat distorts the funding ecology. One respondent commented,

> I don't think the AHRC should be in the business of running purely impact and engagement grants when there is so much money being disbursed in institutions for exactly that purpose.
>
> [survey respondent, over 15 years since PhD]

Another observed,

> These pots of funding focused on engagement etc. inevitably favour a less diverse cohort of those with more senior positions; those who (are able to) avoid taking on time-consuming collegial roles in their departments; and those with levels of social privilege which make it possible to progress with their research regardless of time pressures from teaching, departmental roles, family responsibilities, etc.
>
> [survey respondent, 6–15 years since PhD]

Table 17 Support among respondents for AHRC funding schemes to continue.

FUNDING SCHEME AVAILABLE	SUPPORT (n = 386)	SUPPORT %
Standard research grant (open to academics in a post), range of £50k–£1million.	340	88
Research, Development and Engagement Fellowships: individual fellowships for academics in a post, £50–£300k, up to 18 months (or pro-rata if part-time).	311	81
Early Career Researcher Research, Development and Engagement Fellowships: individual fellowships for early career academics already in a post, £50–£250k, up to 24 months (or pro rata if part-time).	306	79
Early Career Researcher standard research grant for early career academics already in a post, £50k–£250k, up to 60 months.	291	75
Research networking grant, up to £30k for up to two years (or £45k for international activities/involvement over two years, but only with "significance relevance to beneficiaries in the UK").	290	75
Follow-on-Funding for Impact and Engagement, £100k for up to 12 months.	216	56
Follow-on-Funding for Impact and Engagement, up to £30k for "shorter, higher risk" activities, with faster decision times than the larger scheme.	214	55

Asked about different kinds of funding that might be offered, about half of respondents supported the idea of impact and engagement funding that is *not* tied to previous AHRC funding (52%). Some respondents commented that support for more general public engagement projects, not just those tied to specific pieces of research, would be welcome:

> This [wider engagement work] is critical for languages/linguistics research, because there is significant value in communicating basic knowledge in the field, given the state of language education and knowledge about language among the general public.
>
> [survey respondent, 6–15 years since PhD or equivalent]

Among some survey respondents and among several interviewees at varied career stages, there was enthusiasm for the "flexible funding pots" that each of the four OWRI projects had been required by the AHRC to administer, enabling small-scale projects, often in engagement:

> It was very, very supportive of work taking place with languages across the board in society, and I think the model that they developed is really valuable.
>
> [interviewee, 6–15 years since PhD, involved in an OWRI project]

We also invited respondents to express a view on other possible funding schemes which the AHRC does not currently offer (Table 18). There was majority support (53%) for small-scale funding for methodological skills development, though support for this was still lower than for any of the existing schemes. We had hypothesized that opening up impact-related funding to develop impact from projects not funded by the AHRC might be popular; in fact, as noted above, only a slim majority of respondents (52%) supported the idea, lower than the 56% who support the existing Follow-on-Funding scheme for impact.

Network grants are appreciated; comments indicate they are especially valued as an entry-level grant, a first step towards a potential larger research project. Support was strongest for postdoctoral fellowships of two to three years, supported by two-thirds of all respondents (67%), and by 80% of those within the first five years since their PhD (n = 81), but even among those longest in post (15+ years, n = 169), 59% agreed. However, some of our interviewees noted the danger of further increasing the number of highly qualified postdoctoral researchers remaining in HE on short-term contracts but for whom, ultimately, there remains a very limited number of permanent posts in languages. One respondent noted that the UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship scheme makes such fellowships difficult even to apply for, because of the expectation that the host institution will guarantee an open-ended post for the fellowship holder after the end of the fellowship.

Table 18 Support for other possible kinds of funding opportunities, in order of popularity among survey respondents.

"WHAT OTHER KINDS OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES WOULD YOU LIKE THE AHRC AND/OR UKRI TO INTRODUCE? BELOW ARE SOME IDEAS. PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY, AND/OR PLEASE SELECT 'OTHER' TO MAKE YOUR OWN SUGGESTIONS." (N = 386)	n	%
Full-time (or part-time pro-rata) 2–3 year postdoctoral fellowships for early career academics	258	67
Small scale (under £50k) funding for proof-of-concept/pump priming/seed corn funding.	237	61
Small scale (under £50k) funding for further methodological skills development/(re-)training (open to all career stages).	203	53
Impact and engagement funding as above (up to £30k or up to £100k), but not dependent on previous AHRC funding for underlying research.	201	52
Full-time (or part-time pro-rata) one year postdoctoral fellowships for early career academics.	194	50
None of these	11	3
Other	33	9

Many respondents at all career stages raised the difficulties faced by early-career academics, so often part of the precariat. The networking and mentoring facilitated by the UCML Special Interest Group for Early Career Academics was praised; the British Academy's Early Career Researcher Network is also a positive development. However, severe practical obstacles remain. Part-time employment stands at 26% (n = 19) of all 73 respondents within five years of their

PhD and currently employed by a UK HEI at that stage, and 23% of all 82 respondents at that career stage (compared to 14% of all 354 respondents in HE employment). This pattern of part-time work among early-career researchers is presumably largely not through choice. Similarly, 43% (n = 35) of all respondents in the earliest career stage are on fixed-term contracts, whether part-time (n = 13) or full-time (n = 22), which means they are not eligible for most kinds of AHRC funding. Furthermore, posts are often teaching-focused, with teaching loads heavier than those of many research-active academics, meaning that finding time to apply is not feasible, and/or that gaining the necessary institutional support is difficult or impossible; some researchers on teaching-focused contracts even have limited or no access to research-related training in their institutions. By the time individuals reach the longed-for permanent post, they have already outlived their early career status, or only have a very short window in which to apply for funding.

Equally, a few survey respondents were frustrated by the extension of the early-career definition to eight years after completion of the PhD, which meant that those with less experience were outgunned by those with considerably more experience, sometimes already in a substantive post. One interviewee commented,

> A more equitable way of doing it would be say, well, if you're in 100% teaching post then actually that doesn't count towards your years as an early career researcher, you know it's almost like a career break from research because all you're doing is teaching.
>
> [interviewee, 6–15 years since PhD]

Another compared this situation to how parental, maternity or carers' leave are accounted for:

> There is flexibility there in terms of parental leave, maternity leave or any carers leave [...] But do they take into account the fact that increasingly you don't just go from job to job, there are periods when you have to work outside of the traditional academic job market in order to just pay your bloody rent, you know?
>
> [interviewee, 6–15 years since PhD]

A group of respondents felt that the system meant that mid-career researchers who had not met with success in obtaining funding early on – sometimes for compelling EDI reasons, or because they had not been eligible to apply for ECR schemes – were doomed to be uncompetitive for funding for the rest of their careers, because they could not demonstrate research project management experience commensurate with their career stage. Funders may wish to consider how to address this missed opportunity to fund experienced researchers with differing career histories.[41]

VI. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: DIRECTIONS, METHODS AND TRAINING NEEDS IN LANGUAGES RESEARCH

Looking ahead to future funding directions, a small but vocal number of survey respondents were emphatically in favour of very large grants of a scale beyond the usual £1m AHRC cap, noting that it can be hard to keep large, ambitious, complex and/or international projects under the current ceiling of £1m, a point made in our report to the AHRC. (The cap has recently been increased to £1.5m.) Many more respondents emphasized the value of responsive-mode funding at all levels to fund excellent research in any area. Modern Languages researchers seem particularly reliant on the responsive mode – Carruthers (2017a, reporting on the previous five years) found that 75% of Modern Languages applications, and of awards, were under the responsive mode; 86% of the spend on Modern Languages in the AHRC is for projects in responsive mode, vs 69% overall. This suggests either that relatively few thematic calls match language researchers' expertise, or that languages researchers are not confident in responding creatively to wider thematic calls. Nevertheless, we asked survey respondents about potential themes for research funding calls, and about emerging themes in their own research area. Responses to both questions were very varied, but a strikingly large number of suggestions were values-driven. Recurrent themes were power, human rights, social (in)justice and (in)equalities (including race, disability, gender and intersectionality); under-represented voices in research

41 Since this research was carried out, the AHRC has announced changes to its funding schemes that address some of the concerns raised.

and among researchers; and decolonizing/anti-colonizing agendas. Climate change and cultural and environmental sustainability were also prominent. A smaller cluster of responses concerned language pedagogies and concerns about the languages pipeline. Another smaller cluster was concerned with language and digital technologies, including human–machine interactions. Transnational approaches to languages research were a theme in some responses (cf. the comments above on the mainstreaming of this notion in Modern Languages).

Almost half of our survey respondents (49%) considered a possible theme of "Global engagement and sustainable development goals" (SDGs) as "not for me". Yet, as the digest just given shows, respondents' own priorities and emerging themes often did fall under one of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (https://sdgs.un.org/goals#goals), in particular the following seven goals:

- **Climate action [SDG 13]** (e.g. humanities-led climate change research; planetary health and well-being);
- **Good health and well-being [SDG 3]** (e.g. human health and well-being);
- **Quality education [SDG 4]** (e.g. student engagement, pedagogy; language, teaching, and technologies);
- **Sustainable cities and communities [SDG 11]** (e.g. sustainability: cultural, environmental and other);
- **Reduced inequalities [SDG 10]** (e.g. addressing inequalities transnationally, decolonizing research, decentralizing of power and cultures; diversity; human rights; disability studies, including disability beyond the global north; unheard, hidden or forgotten voices; intersectionality);
- **Gender equality [SDG 5]** (intersectionality; and many of the points under *Reduced inequalities* above);
- **Peace, justice and strong institutions [SDG 16]** (e.g. human rights; values; European values; uses of the past).

Evidently, we could be cannier in articulating the connections between our research and SDGs or other priority areas; the fact that they are now also referenced in the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies (QAA 2023) may help languages researchers conceptualize their work in these terms.

VI.1 RESEARCH METHODS AND TRAINING NEEDS

Finally, we asked respondents about the research methods they currently use, and about methods and skills that they would like to develop. As Table 19 shows, there was strong appetite among researchers – not just PhD students – to learn a wide range of new approaches and skills. In some cases, a low reported appetite for training simply reflects widespread existing high confidence in using that approach. For example, *Close reading/close analysis* ranks lowest among approaches about which respondents are keen to learn more, because 86% already have experience in the approach. Many respondents also reported experience in critical theory, linguistic analysis, corpus work, working with archives (though this was also an area of interest for PhD students to develop) and interviewing.

There was a particularly strong appetite for development in digital skills of various kinds, including the digital analysis, representation and visualization of data. However, stronger still was the desire to learn more about co-designing research with stakeholders,[42] in which over half (52%) of PhD respondents and well over a third (39%) of post-PhD researchers expressed interest (overall 43%). Similarly strong was the interest in creative approaches to communicating research results (46% and 41% respectively, overall 43%). It is somewhat surprising that some 54% of respondents considered research ethics "not for me". This is perhaps best interpreted as meaning "research ethics approval is not necessary for the research I do, so I do not need training", but the languages research community may wish to reflect on this finding, especially as the appetite to work with a wider group of stakeholders grows.

42 Note, for example, the 2022 AHRC call for research partnerships with indigenous researchers, inviting proposals which are "collaborative and co-designed with indigenous researchers and practitioners, with a view to the co-production of the research".

RANKING BY OVERALL INTEREST IN LEARNING TO USE		WOULD LIKE TO LEARN FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND/OR IMPACT						HAVE USED OR CURRENTLY USED (ALL RESPOND-ENTS, n = 536)	THIS IS NOT FOR ME (ALL RESPOND-ENTS, n = 536)
		PHD STUDENTS (n = 150)		POST-PHD RESEARCHERS (n = 386)		TOTAL (n = 536)			
		n	%	n	%	n	%	%	%
1=	Co-creation of research with stakeholders	78	52	151	39	229	43	26	14
1=	Working with a creative practitioner (e.g. artists, writer, comedian, musician, actor) to communicate research results	69	46	159	41	228	43	20	30
3=	Digital representation of texts, artefacts and other cultural assets	53	35	142	37	195	36	26	5
3=	Digitization of texts, artefacts and other cultural assets	56	37	137	35	193	36	25	23
3=	Policy brief writing	56	37	137	35	193	36	10	42
6	Social network analysis	51	34	134	35	185	35	14	39
7=	Data visualization	59	39	123	32	182	34	18	33
7=	Documentary approaches	61	41	119	31	180	34	18	49
9	Creative and arts-based methods of research, e.g. drawing, collaging, comics	47	31	128	33	175	33	12	53
10=	Participatory action research	55	37	118	31	173	32	15	28
10=	Practice as research	58	39	111	29	169	32	17	28
12=	Ethnographic methods	57	38	111	29	168	31	24	45
12=	Oral history	53	35	115	30	168	31	22	29
14=	Embodied research	55	37	105	27	160	30	8	17
14=	Using software for qualitative and/or quantitative data analysis	57	38	102	26	159	30	31	36
16	Computer-aided discourse analysis	49	33	104	27	153	29	6	28
17	Computer programming for data collection and/or analysis	51	34	92	24	143	27	13	36
18=	Delivering training to stakeholders	44	29	98	25	142	26	17	45
18=	Qualitative data collection: focus groups, interviews	46	31	96	25	142	26	33	47
18=	Interviewing	49	33	89	23	138	26	46	28
21	Fiction and life writing as social enquiry	40	27	92	24	132	25	16	34
22=	Research ethics	51	34	78	20	129	24	36	54
22=	Questionnaire design and analysis	40	27	89	23	129	24	30	47
24=	Narrative enquiry (biographic)	44	29	81	21	125	23	26	22
24=	Working with archives	59	39	65	17	124	23	63	28
26=	Qualitative data analysis	41	27	77	20	118	22	42	36
26=	Discourse analysis	46	31	71	18	117	22	40	34
26=	Performance analysis	37	25	79	20	116	22	13	41
29=	Quantitative methods – statistics	35	23	80	21	115	21	25	51
29=	Experimental design and running	34	23	80	21	114	21	11	40
31	Corpus work	[not asked]		69	18	69	18	43	33
32	Linguistic analysis (any linguistic level)	41	27	50	13	91	17	48	30
33	Critical theory	37	25	46	12	83	15	60	45
34	Close reading/close analysis (textual, visual, multimodal etc.)	12	8	28	7	40	7	86	38

Table 19 Research methods ("For each method, please state whether you have used or currently used this method, whether you would like to learn to use it, or whether this method is not applicable to your work").

Already in 2006, the LLAS and UCML research review noted "There has been some embedding of social science paradigms, particularly among early career researchers", but that the scale remained small, and in certain pockets of expertise, with "little evidence of a broader shift away from the traditional qualitative focus of modern languages research towards more quantitative social science models" (LLAS & UCML 2006: 33). There is some evidence of a continuing gradual openness to methods found in the social sciences, both qualitative and quantitative. Admittedly, almost half of respondents consider that methods that we might usually associate with social sciences are "not for me" (action research, qualitative and quantitative data collection through interviews, focus groups, survey, ethnography). Yet in all these cases, about a third of respondents *are* interested in learning more (and note already e.g. Wells et al. 2019).

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In addition to the methods listed in Table 19, respondents were also asked to list any other methods they used. Responses fell broadly under the following headings:

- translation and translation analysis;
- textual editing, reception studies, palaeography and study of manuscripts;
- studying and curating material culture, exhibition curation;
- mapping and map analysis, descriptive and analytical bibliography;
- forms of political, legal and economic analysis.

We also asked what other areas respondents would like to learn more about besides those suggested in Table 19. Among the thirty responses, some were very specific and/or already fall under the methods listed above. The remainder can be grouped under the following broad headings:

- mapping and spatial visualization: Geographic Information Systems (GIS), digimap and other cartographic tools;
- linguistic landscape analysis;
- specific software packages, including Excel, SPSS, R (mentioned three times), Goldvarb or Rbrul;
- using virtual reality, developing apps with software developers;
- collaboration generally, including working in interdisciplinary ways, and working equitably with partners, including partners outside the UK.

Interviewees also often mentioned a desire to learn more about different formats for communication, in order to engage with partners, beneficiaries, and co-creators, and to disseminate results to non-specialist audiences, including a desire to develop their expertise in social media, such as podcasts and YouTube, MOOCs, advocacy outside the academic sphere, and writing for different audiences, including civil servants.

The interest in a wider range of methodologies, many of which fall outside the traditional "comfort zone" of languages researchers, suggests a readiness and appetite for even greater interdisciplinary working. Put another way, a lack of familiarity with a wider range of research methods and approaches may be limiting efforts at interdisciplinary working. Lack of confidence in some kinds of engagement and communication with government, stakeholders, and wider publics may also be holding back researchers, as well as the perennial lack of time to devote to new knowledge and skills.

Subject associations and the British Academy may wish to explore what structures can be put in place to provide tailored opportunities for skills development in languages research (including co-design with stakeholders) among researchers at all career stages, to maximize capacity for strong and innovative interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary working.

VI.2 THE PIPELINE INTO LANGUAGES RESEARCH: DOCTORAL STUDENTS

In 2017 the AHRC Modern Languages Leadership Fellow Janice Carruthers expressed concern that the number of AHRC doctoral studentships awarded in Modern Languages (including Celtic Studies) had declined far more steeply over the five years leading up to 2016–17 than in other subjects, to only just over a third (37%) of the number five years earlier, whereas awards in other subjects stood at over half (56%) of their previous level (Carruthers 2017a). Figure 1 shows how our 150 PhD student respondents are funding their postgraduate study. A third of our respondents (33%, n = 50) are funded (at least partly) by a UK research council (AHRC or ESRC). This proportion appears far higher than in the year 2000, when only one in six research students in modern languages and linguistics had research council funding, and when 78% were self-funded (LLAS & UCML 2006: 18, 50). It is possible, however, that because our work was commissioned by the AHRC, AHRC-funded students are over-represented among respondents.

We were interested to understand more about the background and training of the PhD students in languages research (Figure 2). Among our respondents, 75% of current post-PhD researchers had completed their PhD in the UK: of those, 75% had done so in a languages unit of some kind, 10% in a linguistics unit, 8% in a an area studies unit. Other answers (totalling 7%) specified Welsh, Celtic Studies units, and other subject areas spanning English, History,

Media/Film/Theatre, various social sciences (including Law, Geography, Education, Politics), as well as Psychology and a medical school. Among PhD students, there is a broadly similar split, with 70% currently in a languages unit or similar, 13% in a linguistics unit, 10% in an area studies unit, and the remaining 7% in another kind of unit.

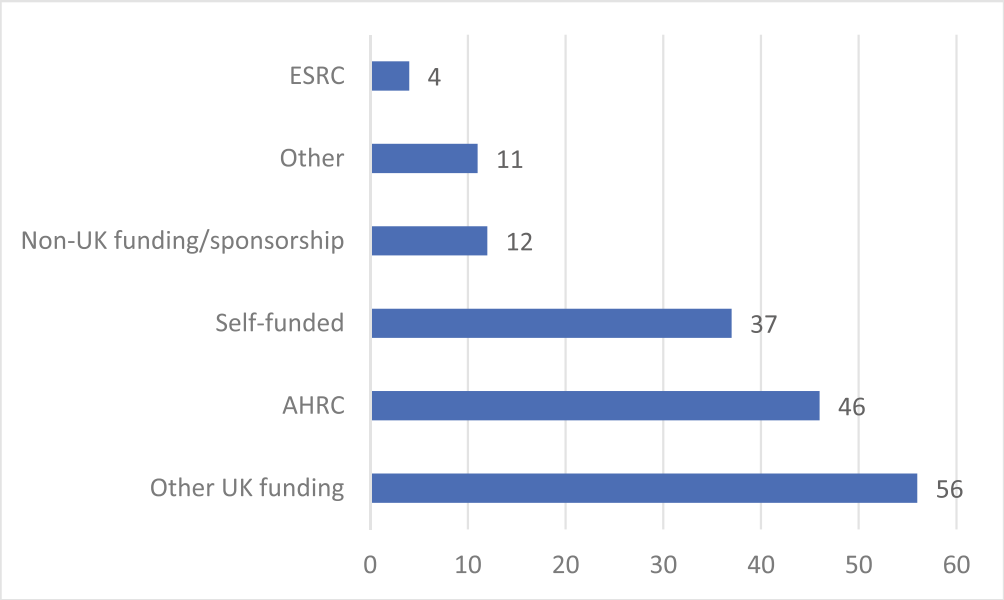

Figure 1 How PhD student respondents are funded (n = 150, multiple answers possible).

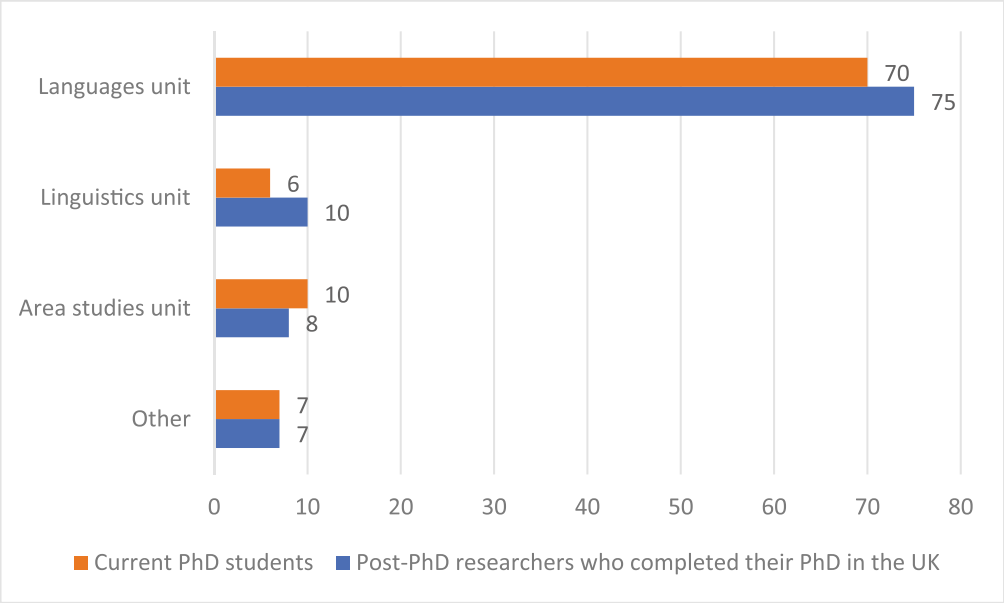

Figure 2 In what kind of unit did survey respondents complete, or are currently completing, their PhD?

An unexpected finding was the relatively low proportion of our PhD student respondents who had completed their undergraduate studies in the UK (see Figure 3). In our survey, 71% of all PhD respondents, and 74% of those who were AHRC-funded, had completed an MA in the UK. However, only 53% of PhD student respondents had completed their undergraduate study in the UK, rising to 65% of the 46 AHRC-funded students. In other words, nearly half of all PhD students who responded (and still 35% of AHRC-funded PhD students) in languages research are not fully "home-grown". International cross-fertilization of a field is of course desirable; among post-PhD researchers in our survey, 25% reported having completed their PhD outside the UK. Nevertheless, the fact that nearly half of current PhD students in languages are not fully UK-trained raises a concern about the pipeline of local undergraduate students through to PhD. Various explanations are possible, but all would give cause for concern. We know already from concerns over grading at GCSE and A-level that languages study in the UK is losing many of the best students to other subject areas, resulting in a smaller pool of candidates who are competitive for PhD study.[43] The lack of follow-through may also be affected by the relatively limited opportunities to undertake an MA in languages at many institutions, as small taught courses are increasingly not considered viable, as well as the lack of MA funding.

43 On the problem of severe grading, see British Academy (2020: 10) and references there.

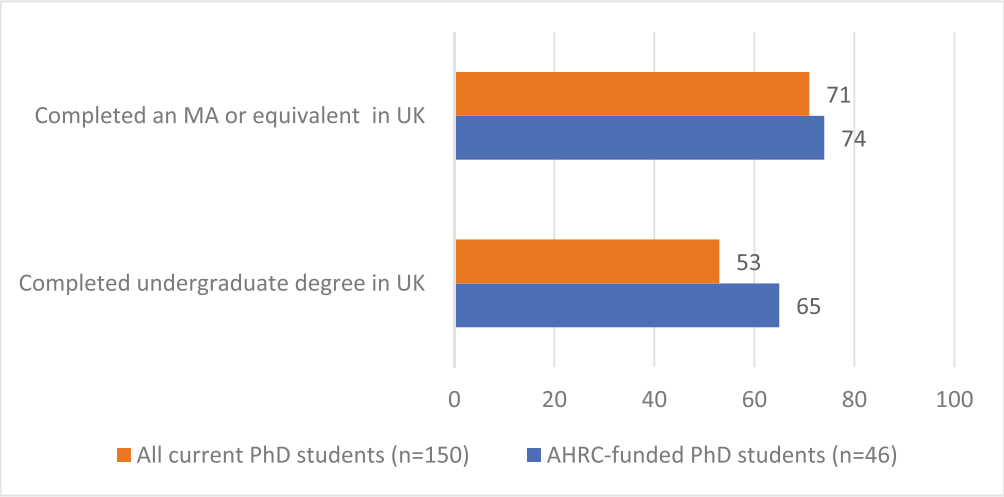

Figure 3 PhD student respondents' previous study: in the UK or outside the UK?

Indeed, only 53% of PhD student respondents who had completed an MA in the UK did that MA in a languages unit of some kind, even though 77% of all PhD respondents are currently studying in a languages department in the UK (Table 20). The disparity is even higher among the 24 AHRC-funded PhD students who had done an MA in the UK, of whom only 38% (13 respondents) had done an MA in a UK languages department or similar. Almost as many (32%, 11 respondents) listed "other" – neither a languages, linguistics nor area studies unit.[44] To put this positively, languages units are attracting students from other areas into doctoral study. Viewed more negatively, if our survey is representative, then the majority of the students in languages units who are gaining very competitive funding from the AHRC are doing so on the basis of their earlier training outside a traditional languages-research unit. This raises questions either about the preparedness of candidates from within languages and linguistics, or, perhaps, about how their preparedness is evaluated at interdisciplinary DTP panels, a concern also raised by Carruthers (2017b).

Table 20 PhD student respondents who completed an MA in the UK: in what kind of unit?

*'Other' chosen as the *sole* response by 23 of these 24 respondents.

	"IF YOU COMPLETED YOUR MA OR MPHIL OR SIMILAR IN THE UK, IN WHAT KIND OF DEPARTMENT OR UNIT DID YOU DO THIS? (PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)" (n = 106)		"IN WHAT KIND OF DEPARTMENT OR UNIT ARE YOU A PHD STUDENT? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)" (n = 150)	
	n	%	n	%
A languages unit or a larger unit including languages (e.g. Languages and Cultures, Modern Languages)	56	53	115	77
A linguistics unit or larger unit including sociolinguistics	16	15	9	6
An area studies unit	14	13	16	11
Other	24*	23	10	7

VI.3 THE COVID PANDEMIC AND ITS LONG SHADOW

Although our survey, carried out in spring 2022, did not explicitly ask about the impact of the COVID pandemic, some respondents and interviewees highlighted it. At a structural level, the pandemic has been used to justify and/or accelerate cuts to arts and humanities in some HEIs, and to promote an agenda with a strong focus on STEM that has reinforced the existing disparities in access to language(s) education. In some regards, however, it enabled and accelerated positive change. Among our informants, it sometimes led to new opportunities and swift adaptations with long-term benefits; some talked positively about the unanticipated benefits of the forced "pivot" to new ways of working – for example, gaining experience as a PhD student in digital ethnography because in-person research methods were not possible, or involving a more international group of stakeholders in an online event than would have been affordable for the orginally planned in-person event. For many researchers, however the COVID

44 The "others" listed included history, computer science, various social sciences, and theatre/performance/acting.

pandemic lockdowns made the already difficult task of juggling caregiving responsibilities and research more or less completely impossible. The freezing of all sabbaticals in some HEIs was also a major structural disruption to career plans. More than one interviewee emphasized that the pandemic was "not a one-year problem", but would have ongoing – and very uneven – implications for career development, which research funders must allow applicants to articulate.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Our data reflect only a sample of languages researchers in the UK, but they are likely to give a good approximation of the languages research landscape in the UK, in terms of disciplinary spread across languages; participation from institution types (Russell Group and others); mix of career stages; gender balance; and with participation from disabled researchers lower than in the working age population but nevertheless higher than the (too low) proportion who participate in AHRC funding applications. As noted earlier, it is unfortunate that we did not collect data on ethnicity. Here we draw out key themes, and present recommendations for action in the UK context (Table 21). We suspect that many of our findings might be recognized by languages researchers outside the UK too, especially in other English-speaking countries, which have, as noted in the introduction, seen similar concerns over languages study and research.

Our study provides further evidence of the contraction of languages in newer universities, but also provides insights into the lived experience of researchers in those universities, some of whom report feeling that their specialism is being "eroded", or feeling like a "traitor", as they experience pressure in how they badge their research and, often, in how they practise it. They express concerns about whether unequal access to research time and resources are taken into account adequately by funders. They also express fears about the consequences for society more widely if this research – and teaching – capacity is lost, such that many of the 73% of students who attend a non-Russell Group university (Advancing Access, https://www.advancingaccess.ac.uk/leading) have scant access to languages study.

Structural barriers facing early career academics were another key theme, particularly the fact that many spend most of their "early-career" years in posts in which it is technically and/or practically impossible to apply for funding or even to advance their research.

There was good support for existing funding schemes, and, amid firm support for continued responsive-mode funding, mixed views on the ideal size and scope of new schemes, though with strong interest in lower-stakes, lower-ceiling funding. It was particularly useful to gather data – for the first time, as far as we are aware – of patterns of funding application and funding successes across the languages research community. It is highly unlikely that the sample of researchers choosing to respond to our survey under-reported funding successes compared to the full population of languages researchers.

The distribution of languages expertise among respondents reflects the history of languages study at universities, in which French has dominated, followed by German in the twentieth century, but the latter now overtaken by Spanish; with Russian and Italian also long-established but less widely so; and with East Asian languages (10% of respondents) now certainly more strongly represented than we would have seen in most of the twentieth century.[45] Three-quarters of our respondents selected Europe as one of their areas of focus; the fact that a quarter of those also specified one or more parts of the Americas, and 10% Africa, is quantitative evidence of a degree of openness to globalized – and often also comparative and/or multilingual – approaches in languages research. Among the impressively wide range of subject classifications listed by respondents as reflecting their areas of interest, and notwithstanding the openness to interdisciplinarity (only 4% reject the label of interdisciplinary working), a memorable finding is that 51% of all respondents (and 50% of PhD students) identified literature as an area of research focus – definitely a decrease compared to most of the twentieth century, but nevertheless still (just) predominant. This is worth noting because literature is not, in general, what stakeholders have in mind when they talk about the strategic and/or commercial importance of languages. There is, as there has been at least since the Leathes Report on Modern Studies of 1918, a case to make about bridging the gap between the inherent cultural and intellectual value of research, and pleas from government, employers and

45 On the history of languages in UK higher education, see Gallardo & McLelland (2023).

others for relevance. The growing prominence of gender and sexuality studies – ranked third among PhD student respondents, and seventh among post-PhD researchers – is striking. The survey also revealed that, as we suspected, AHRC classifications and keywords have not kept pace with developments. Memory studies, critical theory/critical studies, translation studies, anthropology, multilingualism and medieval studies were among the areas most frequently mentioned by our respondents but not currently listed in the AHRC's classifications.

Languages academics have engaged with the "real world" – from supporting teachers in schools to taking a stand on political issues – for as the long as the discipline has existed in universities (as noted in Gallardo & McLelland 2023). In the light of the increasing pressure from REF and from UKRI funding councils to demonstrate real-world relevance, it is heartening that the vast majority of our post-PhD respondents have worked with at least one kind of external partner, and that over half of researchers (86%, n = 332) have such a link outside the UK. This suggests that REF impact case studies and the high proportion of international impact evidenced in REF 2021 (two-thirds in UoA 25, a third in UoA 26) are not rare pearls, but are anchored in a broad capacity among the wider researcher community. However, we found only weak evidence of partnerships with businesses, in particular specialist areas such as publishing, and relatively few obvious routes for research (as opposed to general language skills) to increase such collaborations. There is as yet relatively little engagement with the health sector; the growth of health humanities may see that change. We were given numerous examples of collaborations with government and public bodies, most commonly at a local level, but were encouraged by evidence of an appetite in parts of government to increase understanding of where languages research can inform decision-making.

As for future directions, without undermining the fundamental commitment to excellent research yielding new knowledge in any area, many respondents' research interests and priorities cluster around values-driven research, much of which could be seen as falling under some of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, in particular climate action, health and well-being, education, reducing inequalities, gender equality, and peace, justice and strong institutions. It was heartening, too, to see the appetite for continued research training, and notably across all career stages, something for subject associations, funders and institutions to consider.

Based on the research presented above, some recommendations for action are presented in Table 21. (A confidential report submitted to the AHRC in 2022 included numerous recommendations for action by the AHRC/UKRI, about the size, shape, scope and administration of funding, including eligibility for and accessibility of funding; these are not repeated here.) While subject associations have limited energies for a long list of actions, compared to (say) the British Academy and Institute of Languages, Cultures & Societies, we suggest that they may nevertheless wish to take on some actions, for example by building them into themed sessions of regular annual conferences and other events. We hope that our recommendations may also, *mutatis mutandis*, be a useful basis for discussion for those in other parts of the world working to support languages study and research.

Table 21 Recommendations for action.

RECOMMENDED ACTION	SUGGESTED OWNER(S)
A. Continue to support career progression and funding capture of researchers with protected characteristics, especially consulting people with disabilities, to monitor progress, and to continue to develop actions to address under-representation accordingly (see Introduction and section IV)	All HEIs, subject associations and funders
B. Ensure funding and promotion applications continue to allow the long-term impacts of COVID on applicants to be taken into account (see section VI.3)	All HEIs, subject associations and funders
C. While continuing to advocate for the importance of curiosity-led research, lead explicit and focused discussions with languages researchers to demystify opportunities and challenges for leading or participating in multi- and interdisciplinary and challenge-led research, including, e.g. Sustainable Development Goals, digital humanities, and responding to big-question thematic calls. These calls and discussions must be articulated in ways that explicitly appeal to the 51% of researchers who include literature among their research interests (see sections III.4, III.5)	ILCS; subject associations also have a key role to play (e.g. as part of annual conferences), including also UCML and British Academy
D. Provide training and/or expertise-sharing for researchers in how to plan and apply for grants, and facilitate mentoring of researchers seeking funding (recognizing that some would-be applicants will have no successful mentor in their own institution, and that the institutional infrastructure for mentoring and peer reviewing varies considerably) (see sections III.2, III.3, IV)	Subject associations, ILCS, British Academy

(Contd.)

RECOMMENDED ACTION	SUGGESTED OWNER(S)
E. Develop a rolling programme of awareness-raising of opportunities for UKRI funding apart from the AHRC, including institution-owned allocations for UKRI's Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) and UKRI Impact Accelerator Account funding) (see section V)	Subject unit leads in HEIs; ILCS with input from UCML, British Academy and AHRC
F. Develop – as part of business as usual – a rolling programme of awareness-raising for opportunities for engagement with government, including the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, the Institute for Government, the Open Innovation Team and the Cross-Whitehall Languages Group (and its academic advisory group, when constituted) (see section IV.2)	ILCS, British Academy, subject associations
G. Map structural funding inequalities (e.g. differences in the levels of accessible funding available through language-specific subject associations) and allocate funds to redress any imbalance (see section V)	British Academy, in consultation with UCML
H. Review funding opportunities offered by the AHRC (noting recent changes made), and ensure British Academy and other funds complement those, especially considering a first-timers' route, irrespective of career stage, open only to PIs who have not previously received funding from a major funder (see section V)	British Academy and other major funders
I. Identify priorities for, and develop programme of, accessible skills development in research, impact, and engagement, for languages researchers at all career stages, including, e.g. ethics-for-all; co-designing research with stakeholders; digital skills; action research; working with virtual/augmented reality; ethnography; quantitative data (see section VI.1)	ILCS in consultation with UCML and others; British Academy; subject associations may wish to build focused sessions into their regular conferences
J. Disseminate disciplinary funding success norms, to support languages researchers' career progression. Among mid-career researchers (5–15 years since PhD) who responded to our survey, 13% have gained AHRC funding (whether as Co-Investigator or Principal Investigator, and excluding their own doctoral funding); 15% have had success with the British Academy, and 11% with Leverhulme (see section V)	Languages leads in institutions and their managers
K. In the light of seeming low representation in doctoral research, **i.** commission qualitative and quantitative research on the pipeline from students with UK undergraduate degrees to doctoral work in languages research, identifying barriers from both students' and institutional perspectives, and developing an action plan (see section VI.2) **ii.** commission work to ensure there is no structural disadvantage to applicants for PhD scholarships through DTPs, to address the under-representation of languages students among the awards made (see section VI.2)	Strategic Committee for Languages in Higher Education
L. Respond to emerging findings on "cold spots" in languages degree provision, including in lower-tariff institutions, lobby for strategic maintenance of languages programmes (see sections III.1, III.2)	Strategic Committee for Languages in Higher Education

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The joint authors of this article are listed in alphabetical order. McLelland was responsible for overall project conception and design, and the writing of the article; Harrison co-designed and piloted the survey and interview guides, carried out the qualitative interviews, undertook preliminary analysis of all survey and qualitative interview data and some further analysis, and assisted in the presentation of data. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Nicola McLelland, upon reasonable request.

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