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Ms Kathryn Smith
Committee Assistant
Education Select Committee
House of Commons
7 Millbank
London
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Dear Ms Smith

Views of the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) on the English Baccalaureate

UCML is the overarching national organisation which represents the interests of modern languages, linguistics and area studies in higher education throughout the United Kingdom. It counts among its members virtually all University Departments and professional associations concerned with the study of Modern Languages.

1. Given the catastrophic fall in numbers of secondary school pupils studying one or more modern languages, UCML welcomes the public recognition through the English Baccalaureate of the importance of languages. The House of Lords in recent debates, the Government through Ministers' statements, and a number of bodies such as the CBI and British Academy have explicitly recognised the importance of language study both for the national economy and for the personal and intellectual development of future citizens.

2. The inclusion of a modern or classical language alongside English, Maths, two science qualifications and history or geography underlines that a language is a demanding subject of study whose acquisition deserves recognition, and this too we welcome.
3. We expect the English Baccalaureate to encourage schools to offer, and pupils to take, a language GCSE which they might not previously have considered, and perhaps to continue language study into post-compulsory education.
4. However, over recent years, a number of alternative schemes of recognition and accreditation, such as ASSET languages, have been developed and adopted, and we believe that these too play a significant role in encouraging pupils to study – and continue studying – languages. Unless such alternative accreditation schemes are given equal prominence in national rankings, the English Baccalaureate risks undermining the development and adoption of schemes which better match the aspirations and abilities of the full range of pupils.
5. There is already plentiful evidence that languages are becoming the preserve of a social and intellectual elite. Robust annual surveys, most recently *Language Trends 2010* (http://www.cilt.org.uk/research_and_statistics.aspx), confirm very clear geographical and socio-economic discrepancies in provision of language study. Data on Key Stage 3 timetabling and Key Stage 4 take-up show how pupils in the North of England, in less privileged areas, and in lower performing schools have less access to foreign languages than in wealthier areas, in selective schools and especially in independent schools. At GCE Advanced Level this difference is glaring: independent schools represent about 7% of England's secondary school pupils, but 29.7%, 27.2% and 34.2% respectively of A level entries in French, German and Spanish, and 42.9%, 42.5% and 48.5% of top A level grades. Of all mainstream university disciplines, Modern Languages has the highest proportion of students from independent schools. If the English Baccalaureate serves only to accentuate the importance of languages in schools which are already academic high achievers, then it risks widening the division between the elite and the mass of UK youngsters who can also benefit from learning languages and use them to make a fuller contribution to society and the national economy. For this reason, we emphasise the need to balance the English Baccalaureate with measures supporting less academic routes to language study, and not to undermine the many initiatives which are successfully involving the whole range of pupils in acquiring linguistic and intercultural skills which will keep them and the country's future workforce in good stead.
6. If the English Baccalaureate leads to the desired increase of take-up of languages at KS4, resources may be needed to ensure there are enough suitably trained teachers.

Two less significant issues have been raised by UCML members:

7. The English Baccalaureate emphasises academic rigour and objectivity across the curriculum. We have not conducted a full-scale survey, but members have noticed

the lobbying for Religious Education, and some at least feel that its inclusion, which would imply equal academic status with Geography and History, might dilute the profile and undermine the purpose of the English Baccalaureate.

8. It is unfortunate that the word 'Baccalaureate' has been chosen, since it is commonly used with other prefixes (e.g. Scottish, International) and typically implies a higher-level qualification. One UCML member suggested reviving instead the name 'Matriculation' with its historical resonances for English secondary education.

Yours sincerely



Professor James A. Coleman

Chair, University Council of Modern Languages