

The world in one city

The language skills of London's residents – and why we need to make the most of their talent.

Executive summary

April 2008



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Introducing ‘The world in one city’

The languages spoken by London’s population represent a rich, largely untapped resource. Our project looks at the range of language skills in the potential workforce, working with a number of sources on language skills in the adult population. The aim has been to give our partners in London a clearer insight than ever before into the skills that our capital city, a truly global hub, can harness in a range of contexts.

Inward investment and international trade

Competition for new investment is intense – not only globally but within the UK. Skills in the city’s population are a crucial factor in the decisions potential investors make. Language and cultural skills can make a big difference in international trade also – where speaking a customer’s language has been proven to improve sales. Think London, the Capital’s inward investment agency, and UK Trade & Investment, working in support of businesses involved in import and export, are targeting a number of non-English speaking markets where particular languages are of interest, including: Arabic (Middle East), Chinese Mandarin (China), Hindi (India), Japanese (Japan), Korean (South Korea), Portuguese (Brazil, Portugal), Russian (Russia, parts of Eastern and Central Europe) Spanish (Spain and Mexico) and other EU languages for working with new investors and customers across the continent.

In London, more adults learned languages as a child than in other parts of the UK; more adults have a language other than English as their mother tongue; and more would like to learn another language than in any other region.

Figures of Speech, NIACE (2007)

Tourism and the 2012 Games

London already attracts 13 million international visitors every year. Visit London is expecting increased visitor numbers between now and 2012 for a number of countries. After the USA, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain are expected to send the largest numbers of visitors to London in 2012 – with Eastern and Central European countries and Turkey also becoming more prominent. To meet their needs effectively, people working in front-line roles and volunteers will need to speak their language.

Languages for the public services, voluntary sector and local government

Serving the needs of the residents of the ‘world in one city’ – with at least 90 resident communities – is a challenge. According to a 2007 NIACE survey, two out of five adults in London do not speak English as their mother tongue. Employers such as London Underground and healthcare authorities need to understand how communities across London may need to be communicated with differently, and a range of initiatives have been helping them to do this.

The languages most in demand

Research by RLN London in 2007 combined with research and consultation for this report has enabled us to identify a range of languages needed in all of the above contexts, grouped into two lists. Priority languages are as follows:

Arabic	Gujarati	Russian
Bengali / Sylheti	Hindi	Somali
Chinese Cantonese	Italian	Spanish
Chinese Mandarin	Japanese	Tamil
Dutch	Korean	Turkish
French	Panjabi	Urdu
German	Polish	
Greek	Portuguese	

Our research

While the Annual Population Survey and the Annual Schools Census offer glimpses into the proportion of people that do not speak English at home, little official information is currently available nationally on the actual languages spoken in London and the rest of the UK.

Other sources of information related to language skills in the population do however exist. RLN London investigated three very different sources: on language skills in the workforce; on language study and overseas domiciled students in higher education; and on language services in London.

Language skills in a sample of the adult population

Information supplied from their candidate database of 1.7 million by the national recruitment agency, Reed, has given an insight into the language skills in the adult population in London by comparison with the rest of the UK.

- Across the UK, the most common languages reported across *all levels* (basic, intermediate and fluent) are French (12%), German (6%) and Spanish (5%).
- The language with the highest number of *fluent* candidates in the UK is French, followed closely by Hindi.
- In London, the most common languages reported across *all levels* are French (14%), German (8%), Spanish (7%) and Italian (4%) – followed by Hindi, Polish, Russian and Urdu.
- The language with the highest number of *fluent* speakers in London is French, followed by Spanish, Polish, Hindi, Italian and Urdu.
- London has the highest proportion of candidates with language skills (*across all levels*) in 14 of the top 20 most spoken languages UK-wide.
- London has 39% of all people with Italian language skills across the UK; 38% with Russian; 36% with Arabic; 34% with Polish; 33% with Mandarin; 30% with Spanish.

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Languages and the university student population

Information supplied by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has given us a view of the population of language students (studying a language within a single, joint, major or triple subject combination), postgraduate language students, students taking modular language study (either additional to or a small component of a degree programme) and overseas students in London and throughout the UK.

Language study

- London produced a high proportion of undergraduate students of Chinese (36%), Modern Middle Eastern (43%) and South Asian languages (48%) as well as Russian (30%) – by comparison with the rest of the UK in 2005/6.

- London had the largest share of all first degree language students of any UK region or nation – totalling 5,460 (14.5%) in 2005/6.
- Numbers of language undergraduates have decreased by 8% over the period 2002/3 to 2005/6 (a period of growth for HE study across all subjects). This mirrors a decline in GCSE and A Level study of languages.
- French Studies was the most popular subject for all first degree language students in 2005/6 (studied by 1,445), followed by Spanish, German and Russian and Eastern European Studies.
- London had 27% of all postgraduate language students in the UK during 2005/6.
- In London, 12,740 students took an accredited language course at university in 2005/6 (also known as modular study). Spanish was the most popular language of study (almost 5,000 students), followed by Italian, Japanese and Russian.

Destinations of language graduates (2006)

- Over two thirds of London language undergraduates (68%), who graduated in 2006 and were working 6 months later, stayed in London.
- 28% of all language students from HE institutions across the UK came to work in London subsequently.
- Language graduates are employed in a wide range of industry sectors. Over a quarter (26%) were working in broad Business based industries followed by 15% in Education. Retail, Finance and Manufacturing industries also attract high numbers of language graduates.

Overseas students

- London attracted a quarter of the UK's total overseas student population in 2006/7. Over 87,000 overseas students were registered at a London university, an increase of 9% over three years.
- The next biggest proportion was 11%, found in both the South East and Scotland.
- The most popular countries of domicile of overseas students in London were China, the United States, India, Greece and Germany.

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Specialist language services offered in London

A number of professional associations for specialist linguists such as translators, interpreters and language trainers exist in the UK. We have compared membership in London with the rest of the country, and analysed data from RLN London's Service Finder database to show the service types and languages offered in London.

- Of 118 members of the Association of Translation Companies, 50 companies, more than half their UK membership, are based in London. 27 are based overseas.
- Over a third (1,692) of UK members of the Chartered Institute of Linguists are based in London.
- Over a third of members (429) of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting are based in London.
- Conference Interpreters UK has 118 members registered in London and only 13 based outside London.

RLN London Service Finder

- RLN London's Service Finder is an on-line search facility for language services in London.
- Of 232 service providers, 152 offer translation services; 113 offer interpreting; 73 offer language training. 24 offer specialised multilingual recruitment services.

RLN London's Service Finder has 232 registered service providers – offering services including translation, interpreting and language training.

www.rln-london.com/servicefinder

Other information

There have been recent positive discussions for both the UK Population Census and the Annual Schools Census in England. In April 2008 it was confirmed that a language question will be included in the 2011 Population Census. We are hopeful that clearer indications of the linguistic diversity of the population and sub-regional analysis for London will be available in the future from these sources.

The 2007 Schools Census already shows that 40.7% of all primary school children in London have a first language other than English (compared with 13.5% for England). 35.3% of London secondary school children have a first language other than English.

Historically, the Multilingual Capital publication used 1998/9 survey responses from LEAs across London to assess the languages most popularly spoken at home: Bengali, Panjabi, Gujarati, Hindi and Turkish rising to the top of the list after English.

Country profiles

The BBC, the Guardian, Think London and Visit London have all constructed community profiles for London based largely on Census information and other population surveys. Using the research conducted for 'The world in one city', we have prepared new country profiles based on the markets and languages most in demand. Available within the full report, they are:

- China (Chinese Mandarin and Chinese Cantonese)
- France (French)
- Germany (German)
- India (Hindi)
- Italy (Italian)
- Japan (Japanese)
- Middle East (Arabic)
- Poland (Polish)
- Portugal / Brazil (Portuguese)
- Russia (Russian)
- South Korea (Korean)
- Spain / Central and South America (Spanish)

Our recommendations

- 1** We encourage partner agencies across London to support inclusion of **questions on language skills** in existing and new surveys.
- 2** We recommend that initiatives take place in advance of the **2012 Games** to help put systems in place to ensure language skills and services in London are utilised to best effect.
- 3** Funding and support is needed to ensure **better linkage between supply and demand** in London – for example through placement programmes for language students and overseas students.
- 4** We encourage our partner agencies to review and feed back on the information we have sourced, analysed and packaged – and consider **what other information could assist with future planning and activity**.
- 5** We recommend that information from our research is publicised across London; and that **our Service Finder is signposted as widely as possible** as a means of accessing language and cultural skills and services.
- 6** We recommend that awareness is raised among London's residents of **the value of Community Language skills**, especially through the development of qualifications and the accreditation of their knowledge and learning.
- 7** We recommend that steps are taken to **campaign and raise awareness of the value of language learning**, given the general decline in language learning in education in London and shortage of English native speaker professional linguists.



About this report

This executive summary report was prepared by Dominic Luddy, acting as a consultant for Regional Language Network London. The full report is available at:
www.rln-london.com/pdf/world_one_city_report.pdf

If you would like to find out more about our research or are interested in the work of Regional Language Network London, please get in touch.

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