

Promoting Language Learning for Adults



“The need for language learning does not stop with full-time education. As horizons continue to widen, adults need to extend, update or maintain existing language skills, and to acquire new languages in order to take advantage of new opportunities. The UK however is failing to develop fully the huge potential of language learning in adult life.”
The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000

In 1998, the Trustees of the Nuffield Foundation established an inquiry into the UK’s capability in languages. Its brief was to estimate the UK’s needs over the next 20 years, and to assess whether the present picture represents a firm foundation for the future. In 2000, the Nuffield Inquiry reported that:

“Adults are keen to learn languages but are badly served by an impoverished system. The government’s recent recognition of the importance of lifelong learning is timely. The absence of coherence in the current language provision for adults, together with a hostile funding regime, has led to decline in what should be a key sector”.

The Inquiry recommended that the government should take strategic responsibility for lifelong language learning in order to develop the huge potential of language learning in adult life.

Modern Foreign Languages: A response by the Department for Education and Employment to the final report and recommendations of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry (DfEE, 2001) can be found at www.dfes.gov.uk/nuffield

The European Year of Languages, 2001

In order to celebrate and promote languages and language learning, 2001 has been designated the European Year of Languages. This is particularly timely for the UK following the Nuffield Inquiry.

The Year, initiated by the Council of Europe and the European Union, and supported by UNESCO, is a pan-European campaign to promote language learning and publicise the advantages of understanding and speaking other languages, with an emphasis that it is an enjoyable and pleasurable experience, bringing personal as well as economic benefits.

This is the twenty-second in a series of briefing sheets which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues

Also available:

13. Learning and Skills Councils and older people
14. Building effective partnerships
15. Briefing 2000 on learning in later life
16. Visually impaired older learners
17. Outreach
18. Joint Investment Plans
19. Mailgroups
20. Fees charged to part-time adult students 1999-2000
21. Who learns – key participation facts

Many earlier titles in the Briefing Sheet series are still available, please contact us for more information about these titles

Copies of this and other sheets are available from NIACE, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GE.

Tel. No. 0116 204 4289

E-mail: information@niace.org.uk

They are also available on the website at www.niace.org.uk

Requests for Briefing Sheets in other formats, such as large print, are welcomed, we will be pleased to consider your request

The four main aims of the Year are:

- to raise awareness of the richness of Europe's linguistic heritage;
- to make the widest possible public aware of the advantages of competence in another language;
- to encourage the lifelong learning of languages ; and
- to publicise information about teaching and learning languages.

The Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) is taking the lead in co-ordinating a wide-ranging programme of educational, cultural and popularising activities in the UK during the Year, including Adult Language Learners Week, 5-11 May 2001 and the Languages Challenge – a fun way to get going with a language while raising money for charity at the same time.

More information about the European Year of Languages can be found on the CILT website at www.cilt.org.uk/eyl2001

NIACE work on promoting language learning

As a contribution to the Year, NIACE has published the research report *Divided by language: a study of participation in Great Britain*. The research, undertaken in May 1999 by NIACE, attempts to determine to what extent language learning, often seen as the backbone of traditional evening class provision, is taken up by the population as a whole.

The survey challenges the view that little language learning exists in England and Wales, and uncovers many vibrant multilingual communities:

- 42% of adults can speak one or more foreign languages
- 15% of adults are bilingual
- Britain's black and ethnic minority communities are a rich linguistic resource - 45% speak more than two other languages
- 5% of adults are currently learning a language
- 44% said that they would like to learn a language if they had the time and opportunity
- The most common languages being learned are French, German, Spanish and Italian.

The survey draws a picture of a population who are interested in languages but facing the same difficulties that confront other forms of adult learning. Older people, those who are poor and of a

lower social class, are less likely to be engaged. For more information on this research contact Fiona Aldridge at fiona@niace.org.uk

Mind your Language is a NIACE project collecting testimonies of older learners in a variety of minority ethnic languages, the outcome of which will be an audio-tape for the media and education providers. For more information contact Raxa Chauhan at raxa@niace.org.uk

The Adult Learners Week and Sign Up Now Campaigns are taking the opportunity presented by the Year to celebrate the uses and benefits to communities of bi- and pluri-lingualism through an informal survey of the different ways people learn a language, the languages being learned by different communities, and how communities benefit through learning or teaching languages. In addition, Channel 4 are showing five 'bitesize' programmes about language learners during Adult Learners Week. For more information contact Kate Malone at kate@niace.org.uk

I love languages because....

NIACE has produced postcards in a range of community languages to encourage adults to tell us why they like learning languages.

"It opens my eyes and ears to a whole new culture which was previously a closed book to me"
(Spanish language learner)

"Because I travel to Russia and for me the pleasure is to be able to talk to the people" (Russian language learner)

"It broadens the mind and shrinks the world"
(Italian language learner)

"Life is full of voices that need to be heard and understood" (French language learner)

"Say 'hello' in another language and you greet a whole new world" (English as a second language learner)

"It lets me travel the world and its cultures without leaving my home" (Spanish language learner)

Useful contacts

Association for Language Learning (ALL)

150 Railway Terrace

Rugby, CV21 3HN

Tel: 01788 546443

Fax: 01788 544149

Email: info@ALL-languages.org.uk

Web Site: www.languagelearn.co.uk

The Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT)

20 Bedfordbury

London WC2N 4LB

Tel: 020 7379 5110

Fax: 020 7379 5082

Email: eyl@cilt.org.uk

Web Site: www.cilt.org.uk

The Languages National Training Organisation

20 Bedfordbury

London, WC2N 4LB

Tel: 020 7379 5134

Fax: 020 7379 5082

Email: Info@languagesnto.org.uk

Web Site: www.languagesnto.org.uk

The London Language & Literacy Unit

103 Borough Road

London, SE1 0AA

Tel: 020 7815 6290

Email: LLLU@sbu.ac.uk

Web Site: www.sbu.ac.uk/caxton/LLLU

National consultancy and professional development centre for staff working in the areas of literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages.

Nuffield Foundation

28 Bedford Square

London, WC1B 3JS

Tel: 020 7631 0566

Fax: 020 7323 4877

Email: nuflang@nuffieldfoundation.org

Web Site: www.nuffieldfoundation.org

References

Divided by language: a study of participation and competence in languages in Great Britain undertaken by NIACE. F. Aldridge. NIACE, 2001 ISBN 1 86201 114 1. £5.95

Languages for life: European Year of Languages 2001 UK programme. Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT), CILT, 2000.

Languages: the next generation. A. Lamping. **Adults Learning**, p.13. Volume 12, Number 1. NIACE, September 2000. ISSN 0955 2308

Languages: the next generation (the final report and recommendations of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry). The Nuffield Languages Inquiry. The Nuffield Foundation, 2000. ISBN 1 902985 02 8

Modern foreign languages: a response by the Department for Education and Employment to the final report and recommendations of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry. DfEE, Stationery Office, 2001.

Tongue-tied but trying : a NIACE survey on the languages adults speak in Great Britain. A. Tuckett and S. Cara. NIACE, 1999. ISBN 1 86201 074 9. £5.00

Where are we going with languages?: The Consultative Report of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry. A. Moys (ed.). Nuffield Foundation, 1998

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.

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