

Modern Foreign Languages

The National Curriculum for modern foreign languages has three aims: to help you to understand and respond to spoken language; to understand and respond to written language; and to communicate both in speech and writing. Languages alone will not normally qualify you for a particular job, though they are useful in a great many - and essential in several. So before you can make use of your language ability, you must combine it with other skills. Languages form the primary skill in:

- interpreting and translating
- teaching.

The main areas in which they can form the secondary, but useful skill are:

- the Civil Service and international organisations
- industry and commerce
- secretarial work
- travel, tourism, hotel and catering work
- information science and librarianship
- journalism
- broadcasting
- scientific work
- the law
- banking, insurance and other services.

You never know when your linguistic ability will come in useful. Few people are in a position to use languages all day. However, as many organisations operate in Europe, employers are aware of the value of having someone on the staff who can read and speak another language, even if they aren't employed primarily for their linguistic skills.

Interpreting and translating

Interpreters and translators are employed in all sorts of settings, where one or more languages are required to be converted into another. Interpreters work with the spoken word, and translators work with the written word. Both interpreters and translators need a high degree of fluency in the languages they are working with.

Interpreting - Interpreters change the spoken word from one language to another. They have to listen to and understand what's being said and then translate it into the target language to help people understand what's going on. Interpretation takes place in many places, including conferences and business meetings, interviews with the police and solicitors, and medical appointments. The interpreter might sit in a soundproof booth, listening to a speech and immediately interpreting it so that the audience can hear what's being said on headphones. Or, they might wait until a speaker has paused, and then translate what they've just said. To become an interpreter, you usually need to do a degree in interpreting or modern languages, then a postgraduate qualification in interpreting.

Translating - Translators convert written text from one language to another. They make sure that they keep the style and meaning of the original text. Translators usually specialise in a particular subject, such as medicine, law or engineering, and build up the vocabulary they need. Most have a degree in modern languages; there are also courses that combine translation studies with one or more languages. Postgraduate training in translation is useful.

Foreign languages are taught in schools, colleges and at universities. Pupils might be taught from scratch, or may already have some language skills. Teaching a foreign language requires fluency in the language and a professional teaching qualification. Some teachers work with foreign students, helping to improve their English skills. Overseas work is possible.

Secondary Teacher - Modern foreign languages are one of the statutory subjects in the National Curriculum, studied by all pupils up to the age of 14. They are also an option for all pupils at GCSE and AS or A level. Languages can also be studied at degree level. Most foreign language teachers are employed in secondary schools. The main languages taught in schools are Welsh (in Wales), French, German and Spanish. Others include Italian, Russian, Mandarin, Urdu and Bengali. Pupils are taught to understand and communicate in the foreign language, as well as discover more about the countries where the language is spoken. Teaching methods include group work, discussions, using audio-visual materials and computers, as well as the more traditional teaching sessions. Teaching takes place in a classroom and language lab, but can also involve taking pupils on foreign trips. Language teachers also have to plan lessons, mark work, write reports, attend meetings and give feedback. A good languages teacher also needs to generate enthusiasm. To enter, you'll need a degree that leads to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), or to follow a relevant degree with postgraduate training leading to QTS.

TEFL Teacher - Teachers of English as a foreign language (TEFL) teach English to learners both in the UK and other countries. The work ranges from teaching people on short 'conversational' classes to helping people learn the English they need to live and work in the UK. Knowledge of a foreign language can be useful but isn't essential because English is usually spoken at all times during lessons. Foreign language knowledge can help you to anticipate problems that learners from particular backgrounds tend to experience in English, for example, because a tense in English doesn't exist in their first language. Teaching methods include:

- pair and group work
- role plays
- interactive whiteboards and online language games
- audio-visual resources such as recorded conversations, songs and films.

To enter this job, you'll usually need to complete a recognised qualification that includes teaching practice and written work.

Civil service and international organisations

Linguists are employed in government departments whose work is influenced by our membership of the European Union. Opportunities can also come up for people wishing to use their languages in HM Revenue and Customs, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice. Patent examiners receive training in French and German because many of the documents they search are published in these languages.

The Diplomatic Service - Members of the Diplomatic Service represent the UK in embassies, high commissions and consulates all over the world, and also work in departments of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. Diplomatic service officers (DSOs) protect and promote British interests abroad. For example, some DSOs monitor the political situation in the country where the mission is based, advise British businesses and brief the local media. Others process visa applications from people who wish to visit the UK. DSOs need to use foreign languages although, while very useful, qualifications in these are not essential for entry. Instead, the Service tests candidates' aptitude for learning languages at their final interview stage. DSOs are likely to spend up to two-thirds of their careers in other countries. They receive relevant language tuition before each overseas posting.

Working in Europe

European Union (EU) **administrators** work in institutions of the EU, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and the Court of Justice. They are involved in drawing up, and putting into practice, policies in areas such as external relations, transport, the environment, science and technology, social affairs and agriculture. To get through an EU recruitment competition, you will need a thorough working knowledge of another EU language. The competitions will test your knowledge to A level standard (sometimes higher). The UK Civil Service European Fast Stream helps British graduates enter the EU institutions and to provide European expertise in the UK Civil Service. Entry is open to a small group of carefully selected graduates in some years. Applicants must have French or German to at least A level standard (A-C) or equivalent. Other international organisations. There might be some vacancies for UK personnel in the United Nations and its agencies.

Industry and Commerce

Fluency in a foreign language can be a big asset if you are trying to sell goods and services abroad. Anyone working in export sales and marketing is bound to talk on the telephone or send emails to overseas contacts, and might also make visits to other countries.

Linguistic skills are also useful for **freight forwarders**, who offer services for importers and exporters, arranging things such as documentation and customs clearance. Many organisations today are in partnership with foreign firms or have branches in other countries. This goes for the major banks, leading firms of lawyers and accountants, construction companies, insurance companies, landscape architects and many others. Language ability is useful for the staff of large advertising and marketing agencies, which are increasingly part of international groups. In some cases, staff are based overseas.

Secretarial work	<p>Work is available for bilingual secretaries in this country, often in the following types of organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British companies engaged in overseas trade. • Foreign companies with offices in the UK. • International and multinational organisations. • Legal and financial institutions. <p>Government departments, particularly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The languages most in demand are French, German and Spanish, but there are also opportunities for speakers of many other languages, including Italian, Arabic, Russian, Welsh, Japanese and Chinese. Opportunities arise from time to time to work in other countries. Nearly all advertised vacancies are in London.</p>
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Travel, tourism, hotel and catering work	<p>Tour operators employ representatives (reps) at resorts, and couriers who escort parties to a holiday destination, or on conducted tours, giving a commentary along the way.</p> <p>Resort reps, who organise excursions as well as sorting out any problems experienced by holidaymakers, usually need to be able to speak the local language.</p> <p>Couriers must be able to make themselves understood when visiting different countries. Languages are also useful for employees of tour operators who visit resorts and organise the various parts that make up a holiday 'package'. Fluency in one or more languages is also desirable for others, including tourist information centre assistants in the UK, flight attendants, airport information assistants and tour guides.</p> <p>Tour guides usually work as freelancers, and may be hired by a tour operator or other organisation to take groups to a particular destination. Blue Badge guides must be well educated, with a good knowledge of the history of tourist attractions, and take an exam before being awarded their badge. Different tourist boards have their own training schemes and award their own qualifications. The ability to speak more than one language could be useful for hotel receptionists and hotel managers in certain tourist areas. Opportunities can occur for staff with language ability to work for international hotel groups that operate hotels in different countries.</p>
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Librarianship and Journalism	<p>Knowledge of languages can be useful for librarians in national libraries, university and college libraries, government department libraries and specialist libraries.</p> <p>Languages will be an asset if your ultimate ambition is to become a foreign or diplomatic correspondent for a national newspaper.</p> <p>For the journalism training scheme run by Reuters, the news agency, at least one foreign language is a strong advantage. Reuters particularly welcomes candidates with fluency in Arabic, Russian, Mandarin or German.</p>
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