

AS and A Level Choice

Modern Foreign Languages are not popular choices

The most popular Modern Foreign Languages were French, German and Spanish. At AS level, French was taken by less than 8% of the students surveyed, while German and Spanish were each taken by less than 4% of the sample. At A2 level, the figures were even lower, as less than 5% of those in the survey chose to take French, while 3% chose German and 2% chose Spanish. These figures are low considering the percentage of schools in the survey that provided courses at AS and A2 level.

Uptake of Modern Foreign Languages and Provision by Schools in the Survey				
Subject	% of Students taking as AS Level	% of Schools where the Subject was taught to students at AS	% of Students taking as A2 Level	% of Schools where the Subject was taught to students at A2
French	7.2	84.3	4.5	54.9
German	3.1	68.6	3.0	47.1
Spanish	3.2	51.0	2.1	37.3

However the figures are in line with the uptake of these three Modern Foreign Languages since 2001. From 2001 until 2006 inclusive, the percentage of students taking one of the Modern Foreign Languages at A2 level has not been higher than 7% for French, 4% for German, and 2% for Spanish.

As well as having had a low uptake rate, Modern Foreign Languages suffered a high drop-out rate between AS and A2 level among the students in the survey reported here. French and Spanish were among the Top 10 most dropped subjects. By A2 level, French was dropped by 39% of students who chose to take it at AS level, and Spanish was dropped by 36% of students.

The probability of a student choosing to take a Modern Foreign Language was influenced by the students' social class, gender, ethnicity, prior attainment or type of school attended. In some cases the influence of these factors was significant.

The strongest influence on the probability of having chosen a Modern Foreign Language was ability, as measured by attainment at GCSE. When divided into groups of High, Medium or Low attainment, the students of High ability had the highest probability of choosing one or more of the Modern Foreign Languages at AS and A2 level.

Uptake of Modern Foreign Languages by Attainment of Students in the Survey						
Language	High Attainment		Medium Attainment		Low Attainment	
	AS	A2	AS	A2	AS	A2
French	14.7	8.4	4.1	2.1	1.6	0.7
German	6.1	5.3	2.0	1.9	0.7	0.5
Spanish	6.2	3.7	2.1	1.4	0.8	0.3

The second strongest influence on the probability of taking a Modern Foreign Language was the type of school the student attended. All three of the Modern Foreign Languages discussed here were offered in all of the types of schools taking part in the survey. Students attending Grammar and Independent schools were generally at least twice as likely to have chosen a Modern Foreign Language as one of their AS/A2 level subjects than students attending any other type of school covered in the survey. Students attending a Comprehensive school were more likely to have chosen at least one Modern Foreign Language than students attending an FE/Tertiary college were.

Uptake of Modern Foreign Languages by Type of Schools in the Survey										
	Comprehensive		Grammar		Independent		6 th Form College		FE/Tertiary College	
Language	AS	A2	AS	A2	AS	A2	AS	A2	AS	A2
French	5.4	2.9	14.6	10.5	12.5	7.9	4.2	2.7	4.1	2.6
German	2.5	2.3	7.1	7.5	4.3	4.7	1.0	1.8	1.9	0.8
Spanish	1.9	1.4	5.5	1.4	8.9	6.6	0.8	1.8	1.7	1.6

Gender also had a strong impact on whether a Modern Foreign Language was chosen at AS and A2 level. Girls were approximately twice as likely as boys to be studying at least one Modern Foreign Language at AS and A2 level.

There were few differences between social classes in the probability of having chosen a Modern Foreign Language. The probability of a student choosing one or more Modern Foreign Languages was significantly lower for children of routine and manual workers compared to the probability of those whose parents were higher professionals.

Some ethnic minorities such as Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi were less likely to take Modern Foreign Languages. Indeed, no Modern Foreign Language was rated in the Top 10 most important subjects at A2 level by any ability, gender or ethnic group. Further details regarding the impact of social class, ability, school type and the amount and perceived importance of advice to students are given in the full report and in other Factsheets in this series.

Context of research

Cambridge Assessment undertook this large-scale questionnaire survey of the choices made by 4,125 AS level students and 2,472 A2 level students to determine what subjects they chose to take and what influenced their decision-making. There were approximately the same numbers of boys and girls sampled from 60 schools (Comprehensive, Grammar, Independent) and colleges (Sixth Form, Tertiary and Further Education) throughout England and the students came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The proportions of student gender and school type were representative of the A level populations as a whole. Students were asked to list the subjects they chose at AS and A2 level, where advice had been obtained, what advice they had been given and what had influenced the choices they had made. The differences that emerged in this research between different social class groups, gender groups, ethnic groups, ability levels and school type with regard to subject choice may have implications for the widening participation agenda.

Further information

Full details of AS and A2 level subject choice are given in the full report available at www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk

In addition to this report, comprehensive details of some aspects of examination uptake can be found in the statistical reports section of the Cambridge Assessment website.

Contact: John Bell, Research Division
Cambridge Assessment, 1 Regent Street, Cambridge, CB2 1GG
Email: bell.j@cambridgeassessment.org.uk **Tel:** 01223 558365