

FRENCH - A LANGUAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

1/ Multilingual minds make a multilingual world

Bi- or multilingualism is the ability to use and speak two or more languages.

About 40% of the world's population speaks more than one language daily. Aside from English, the UK boasts six official languages: Welsh in Wales, Gaelic and Scots in Scotland, Irish and Ulster Scots in Northern Ireland and Cornish in Cornwall, England.

In a constantly evolving world of daily cultural exchanges, learning another language shows our willingness to meet the other half-way and our involvement in societal changes.

The benefits of speaking different languages

Multilingualism has been praised for its cognitive benefits, its mind-opening virtues, and the many professional opportunities it creates.

According to the British Academy, creative skills and competences developed through language learning are strongly interlinked. **Fluency, flexibility and originality are all qualities enhanced by practising another language.**

Empathy is the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes and thus consider, share, and understand their motives and feelings. **Learning another language makes us aware of the many different ways communication can happen, thereby allowing a greater appreciation of cultural diversity.**

Furthermore, **learning a new language improves our alertness, our attention span, and our ability to multitask**, stimulating networks in our brain that are known to be negatively affected by the ageing process. What a great way to defy the years!

Not only is making a new language our daily companion good for our mind and personal growth, it is also a constructive step towards new career opportunities and professional development. Whether from a high or low socio-economic background, being bi- or multilingual is a good way to stand out, and somehow, it is especially true with French!

SOURCES

[Misconceptions about bilingualism & bilingual teaching | Le Fil Plurilingue](#)

[Cognitive Benefits of Language Learning: Broadening our Perspectives | The British Academy](#)

[The amazing benefits of being bilingual | BBC Future](#)

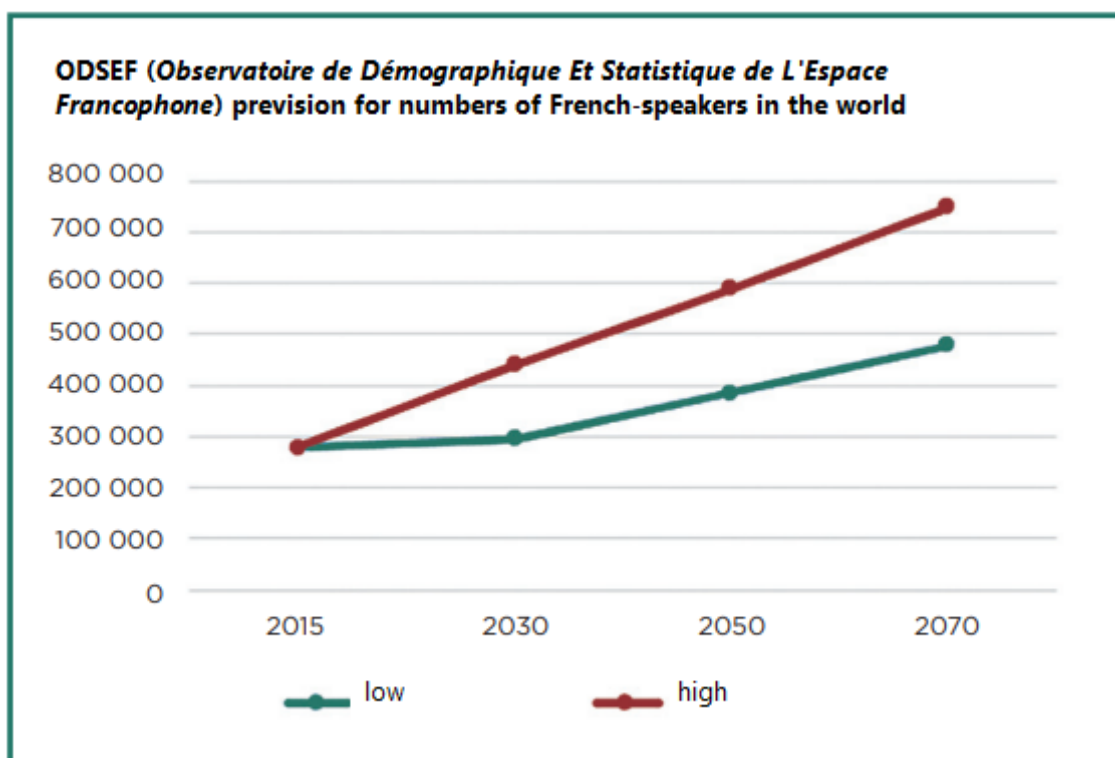
[Languages for the future | British Council](#)

2/ Learning French: towards new and unexpected career paths

The French-speaking world

French is the **5th most widely spoken language in the world**, with over 321 millions able to speak it, and 255 millions using it daily. With 50 million learners, it also boasts the 2nd most popular uptake!

It is estimated that by 2050, there will be **600 million** French speakers, by which point it will be the third most widely spoken language.



Besides being an official language in 26 countries, many of which on the African continent (e.g. Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, or the Democratic Republic of Congo), French is used in 88 countries, all part of the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*. Let's not forget also **several international organisations such as NATO, the United Nations, the European Union or the OECD**, to name but a few have French as an official language of communication.

The UK and the French-speaking world – an intricate relationship

Europe

France, Belgium and Switzerland are worth **£69 billion** when it comes to imports from the UK. By the same token, France is **the UK's second largest non-English speaking export market**. These figures show **the dominant place of French on the UK's economic spectrum**, and explains why learning French in the UK is still a rather easy task. French is the most frequently offered language in higher education across all four nations: more than 70 British universities offered courses in French in 2019.

Africa

Beyond Europe itself, there are an estimated **132 million French speakers in Africa across over 20 countries**. African economies are evolving into global economies, with the continent forecast to be the home of one in four global consumers by 2050. This **rapid growth potential presents boundless opportunities for UK businesses**.

Canada

In 2021, the UK was **Canada's third largest individual country trading partner** for combined goods and services trade. While Canada is a bilingual country, to speak French certainly opens many business opportunities across the Atlantic.

SOURCES

[Languages for the future | British Council](#)

[La Langue Française dans le Monde | Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie](#)

[Infographic – French, the 5th World Language | Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie](#)

[La Francophonie en chiffres | Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie](#)

[La Langue Française dans le Monde – Synthèse 2022 | Gallimard](#)

[Synthese-Web-corrigee.pdf \(francophonie.org\)](#)

[UK's partnership with Africa to boost trade and development | UK Government](#)

[Canada-United Kingdom relations | Government of Canada](#)

French: a language of opportunities

Stephanie Frackowiak, Regional Services Director at Sprinklr (Social Media Technology) explains the value of French in her sector:

I went to visit [our] French office last week – I had to interview candidates for open positions within the French office, meet customers [... and] prospects to convince them that my company understands them and would be a good company to do business with.

It is definitely a way to accelerate your progress and exposure to senior people.

All my meetings were in French... Even though I work for a USA company – and the “company language” is English –, being able to speak local language opens doors, since it makes locals more at ease in dealing with you, and gives them more confidence that you understand them, their culture and their business... This smooths the way for customers and also for difficult conversations internally.

SOURCES

[Bringing Languages to Life Booklet | The British Academy](#)

a. A language for business and commercial exchanges

As touched upon earlier, the UK and the French-speaking world are partners in business, relying on each other's resources and expertise, and **20% of British businesses consider French to be instrumental to the success of their firm** in the next five years (2019-2024).

At the same time, there is evidence that employers' level of satisfaction with school and college leavers' foreign language skills keeps shrinking. Acquiring proficiency in French and showing intercultural awareness can therefore be a very effective way for a candidate **to stand out**:

Language skills [...] have become vital in a connected world in which more businesses than ever operate across borders. While research suggests fewer UK students are learning foreign languages, our data reveals the importance of learning new spoken skills.

– Pawel Adrjan, UK economist at the global job site Indeed

UK Trade and Investment, through a survey commissioned in 2014, revealed that low proficiency in foreign language skills is **costing the UK up to £48bn a year, or 3.5% of the GDP**. For those interested in pursuing a career in **the United States**, the language industry itself represents \$15bn and enables the country to reach foreign markets worth \$1.5tn.

Despite what one might think, mastering another language is not only useful for big companies. Not only has the British Academy shown that **a majority of SMEs** (small and medium-sized enterprises) are convinced that speaking **additional foreign languages would help them seize new opportunities**, but Aston University's latest research has also shown that SMEs making use of languages **reaped 30% better success in exports**.

A candidate's potential to support a firm's economic ability and diversification is therefore key, and is highly valued by recruiters.

SOURCES:

[BCC and Indeed: Immigration proposals could exacerbate labour shortages \(britishchambers.org.uk\)](#)

[The costs to the UK of language deficiencies as a barrier to UK engagement in exporting](#)

[British Academy Briefing: On Languages | The British Academy](#)

[New research links languages with exporting success for UK SMEs | Aston University](#)

b. A language appealing to recruiters

Skills valued by companies are consequently sought after by recruiters. With multilingualism considered nowadays a “vital skill”, mastering **French is particularly valuable on the job market**. Proving one’s level can easily be done with a **DELFDALF** diploma (*Diplôme d’Etudes en Langue Française / Diplôme Approfondi de Langue Française*). Awarded by the French Ministry of Education, they are the only official French proficiency diplomas, and boast international recognition and lifelong validity. A DELF diploma will boost employability by making a CV stand out at home, while enabling an international career.

CBI’s 2017 Education and Skills survey confirms that French is the language most sought after by employers, and most job vacancies with a language requirement therefore call for French-speaking applicants.

Chart 10: Job vacancies with a language requirement

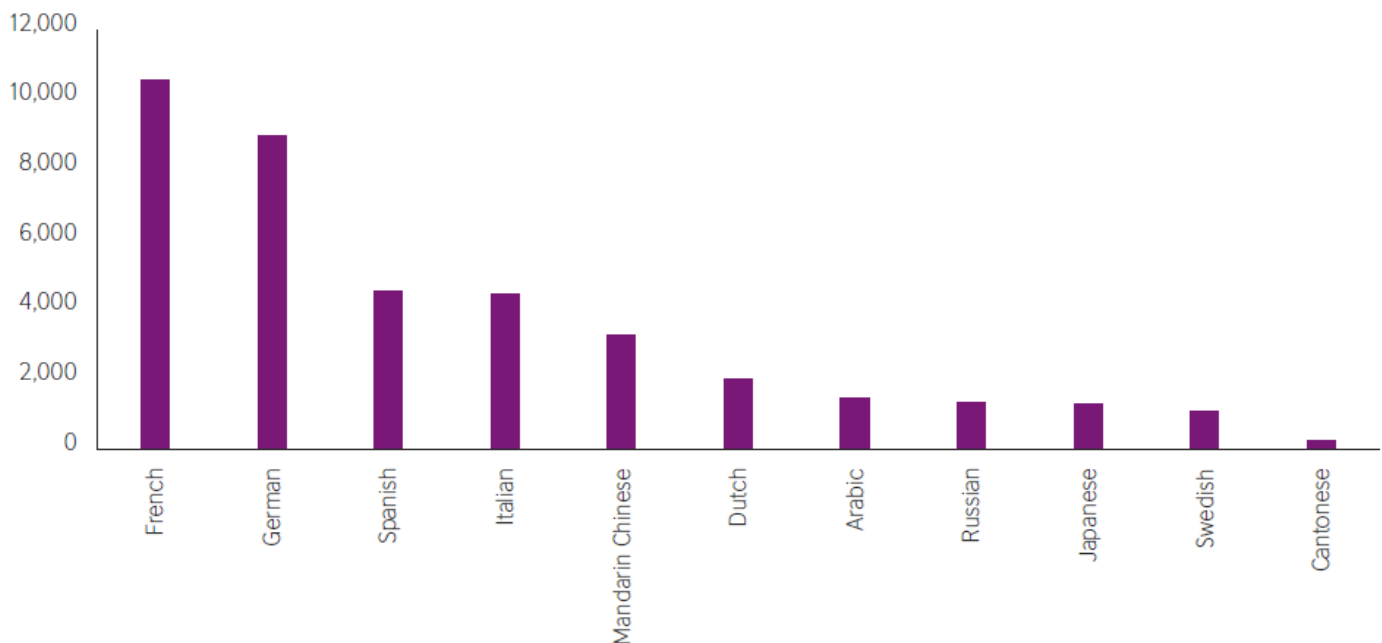
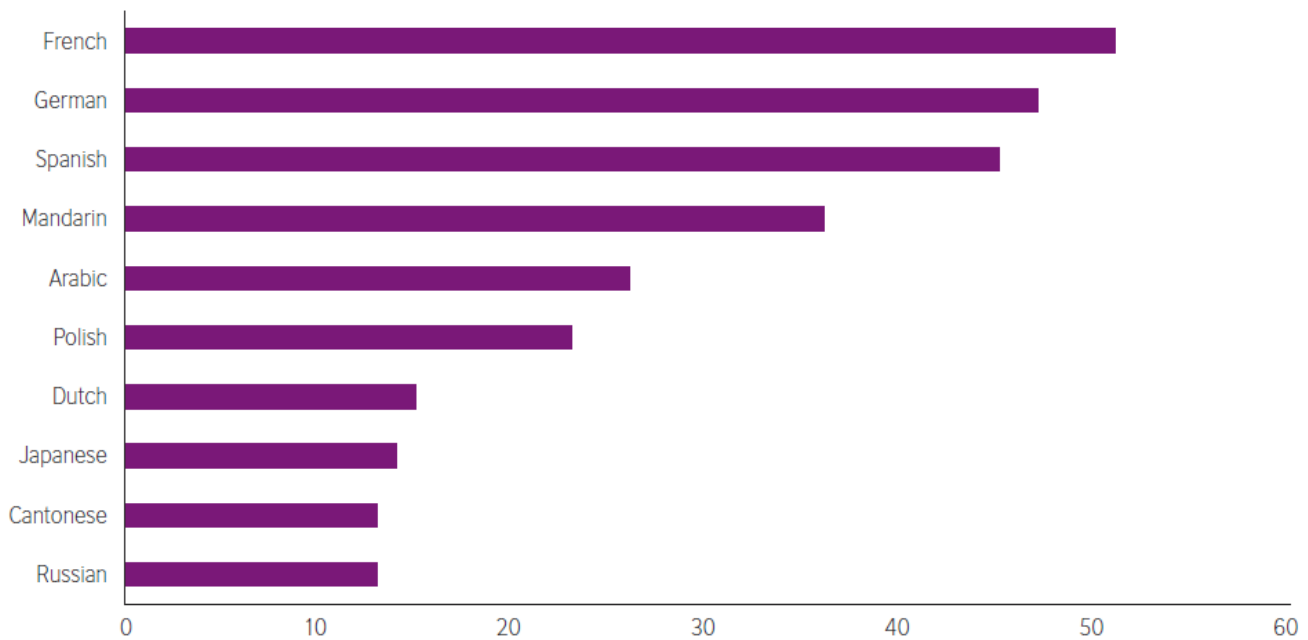


Chart 9: Percentage of companies rating this language as useful to their organisation



Source: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills survey 2017

Owing to its status as lingua franca in countries where English is not as widely taught, e.g. Morocco, Cambodia or Senegal, French appeals to recruiters looking to fill positions involving close relationships with these countries.

Businesses with international ambitions are willing to **hire staff who speak the language of the country they want to reach** in order to gain value and obtain UK-backed grants ([Understand the local business culture | Great.gov.uk](#)).

SOURCES:

[Languages for the future | British Council](#)

[Education and learning for the modern world | CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey report 2019](#)

[Understand the local business culture | Great.gov.uk](#)

[Internationalisation Fund now open for businesses in England | Great.gov.uk](#)

[Learn French – Exams | Institut français du Royaume-Uni](#)

c. A language needed for research

France and the UK have long been close academic partners. In 2017, France was among Britain's **top six research partner countries**, a position the British Council foresaw would remain stable after Brexit. French has also been identified as one of the most useful languages for studying and doing research abroad.

Table 7: International research collaboration

Countries	Languages
United States	English, Spanish also widely used
Germany	German
France	French
Italy	Italian
Australia	English
China	Mandarin
Netherlands	Dutch
Spain	Spanish

Table 10: Top ten languages for international education

French
German
Mandarin
Dutch
Spanish and Italian (ranking equal)
Danish
Hindi and other Indian languages
Arabic
Malay

Most research projects are nowadays international endeavours. **UK born and educated researchers with language skills are thereby best prepared and most sought after**, with potential world-wide recognition prospects.

According to the British Academy's 2016 *Briefing on Languages*, **90% of the world's research is led outside of the UK**. It is therefore essential for UK researchers to create a collaborative environment with overseas collaborators, and to access first-hand foreign sources, understanding original documents and cultural differences, and belonging to a worldwide community.

SOURCES:

[Languages for the future | British Council](#)

[British Academy Briefing: On Languages | The British Academy](#)

3/ French, a language of expertise – professionals explain why

Diplomacy or defence

French is a key language for diplomacy and international relations. Applicants to the British Ministry of Defence and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office stand a better chance of being hired if they speak French. Whether for collaboration with coalition partners, or the UN, NATO or the EU, or to work for international organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO, IOC, or UNDP, speaking French is an invaluable asset.

Fabian Ortner, a diplomat at the Austrian Embassy in Moscow, explains how French has played a major role in his career:

I took a two-year French course specialising in international relations and diplomacy [during my Master's degree in International Relations at the Vienna School of International Studies].

At the end of this course in 2018, I passed the entrance test to join the diplomatic staff of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for which the C1 level in French or another UN working language is required. My first steps as a young diplomat took me to Pretoria in South Africa and now to Moscow in Russia.

Studying at the Vienna School of International Studies, including French language courses, prepared me very well for my current job as a diplomat.

*I use my French language skills daily, in addition to Russian, English and, of course, German. **French is the lingua franca of diplomacy.***

SOURCES:

[Franchir de nouveaux horizons avec le français pro | Le français des affaires](#)

[Languages for the future | British Council](#)

Finance & banking

Within Europe, France has asserted a prominent position in the finance industry and Paris-La Défense is home to major banks headquarters. Paris has an established financial ecosystem, **as the seat of five of Europe's 20 largest banks. Its funds industry also manages €3.6tn**, second only to London.

These figures illustrate the need for French speakers either based in the UK or working for British banks abroad.

France's renowned Master's Degree in Finance (MiF) is a pathway of excellence towards a career in finance. Indeed, **French business schools dominated the FT's 2018 global ranking of MiF courses**, with institutions such as HEC Paris, ESCP Europe, and EDHEC Business School taking **5 of the top 10 places** for programmes requiring little or no work experience.

Wendy Scott, Director of Institutional Clients at the Royal Bank of Canada, uses French every day and explains why it has been a crucial skill:

***Could you give us up to three examples of recent occasions when you have used foreign languages at work?** Business trip to Luxembourg – meeting with colleagues and speaking French. Negotiating loan documentation in French. Client conference calls.*

Would you say that speaking foreign languages is particularly advantageous in your sector?** **Yes, clients and colleagues respond very well to speaking in their own

language. I have used my French skills in Paris, Luxembourg, Switzerland, North Africa, Vietnam and Canada. [...]

Based on your own experience of professional life, what would you say to a young person about the benefits of speaking at least one other language, when entering the workplace? More opportunities, wider portfolio of clients, opportunities to travel.

SOURCES:

[Brexit has driven 2500 finance jobs and €170bn to France, says bank governor | The Guardian](#)

[Brexit and the City: Europe plots a bank heist | Financial Times](#)

[Why the French excel in masters of finance courses | Financial Times](#)

[Bringing Languages to Life Booklet | The British Academy](#)

Healthcare

France's expertise in the healthcare industry places it at the forefront of its global market, especially **for cancer and chronic disease research**. Among key figures in the field:

- France comprises **1,700 healthtech companies** with a **€1.8 billion fund raised in 2019**.
- it is Europe's second leading market for medical devices, with 1.2 million healthcare professionals.
- it is the world's **5th largest market for medical products**.
- it is **the 4th largest exporter of vaccines**. This growing sector generated revenues of **€130 billion in 2020** and could lead to the creation of 300,000 new jobs.

French pharmaceutical and healthcare companies do carry weight on the international market. **Heather Seeley**, an associate in Chemonics' West Africa and Haiti Region, explains why mastering French has had such an impact on her career in public health policy, led outside of France:

I started learning French in college. I went to Duke University in North Carolina and specialised in public health and public policy: nothing to do with French! French was a skill that I was developing and using alongside my studies.

*However, I realised that **French was used very frequently in the medical and public health context**. For example, I did my dissertation on the social impact of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, and most of the publications on the subject were in French.*

*I am pleasantly surprised **at the direction my career has taken thanks to French**. I had these skills in French and knowledge in public health; it's surprising at first to want to link the two, but you soon realise its value.*

*Once you use French at work, **the number of professional opportunities available to you is multiplied**, you **stand out** more easily when being recruited and you increase the possibilities of mobility.*

No matter what field of study or career you choose, mastering French at work will open doors you never thought possible!

SOURCES:

[Healthcare & Healthtech in France | Business France](#)

[Franchir de nouveaux horizons avec le français pro | Le français des affaires](#)

Creative industries

According to the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre,

*“evidence shows that creative businesses turn to migrant labour **to access skills or talents not available in the UK workforce**. This is particularly to target **certain foreign languages** and specialist work experience, technical skills, qualifications and specific software.”*

The UK Creative Industries’ statistics for 2019:

- They represent £115.9bn in the UK economy in 2019 - almost 6% of its GVA.
- They grow at four times the rate of the UK’s economy as a whole, and have experienced strong growth in all parts of the UK. Between 2010 and 2019, the sector’s GVA grew by 32.6% in the North West and 45.6% in Scotland.
- They export £46bn in goods and services worldwide, and account for almost 12% UK exports.
- They create jobs at three times the UK average, employing 2 million people across the UK.

French speakers stand out in such a fiercely competitive sector, and with hiring skilled workers from the EU made harder following Brexit, multilingual UK citizens have a great opportunity to close this industry’s skill-gap.

For gaming aficionados, France is renowned the world over for its **video game**-specialised schools, especially the highly recognised CNAM-Enjmin (National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts - *École Nationale du Jeu et des Médias Interactifs Numériques*) or LISAA (*l’Institut Supérieur des Arts Appliqués*). In 2020, the video game industry represented more than **€5.3bn p.a.** in France, an ever increasing figure led by French companies such as **Ubisoft** (59 studios worldwide, 20.000+ collaborators), **Arkane Studios** or **Quantic Dream**.

We should not forget France’s **luxury sector** either, whose profits have gone up 44% since the start of the pandemic. Brands such as LVMH are on the lookout for new talents: they launched a massive hiring operation in 2021, seeking more than 7500 collaborators under the age of 30. **France’s luxury “big four”** (Chanel, Kering, L’Oréal, LVMH) have now hit a **€800 billion market cap**.

SOURCES:

[Statistics | Creative UK](#)

[Skills, talent and diversity in the creative industries | Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre](#)

[Impact Of Skills & Migrant Worker Issues In Creative Industries - Report | Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre \(pec.ac.uk\)](#)

[Métiers du futur, le marché du jeu vidéo progresse en France | Campus France](#)

[Escaping the pandemic: France's luxury sector is booming | France24](#)

Tourism & hospitality

French is a key language for both inward and outward tourism - France is the second most popular destination for UK tourists and one of the UK's biggest markets for incoming tourists, with **3.5 million visitors from the UK** in 2019. Belgium is also in the top ten with more than a million incoming visitors to the UK.

Marina Silveira De Melo teaches French to future cooks and kitchen managers in Brazil, and she explains why speaking French makes a difference to her student's careers:

***To talk about cooking is to speak French!** In the books of chefs who have written on the subject, much of the terminology is not translated [...]: vegetable and meat cuts, stocks, liaisons, sauces, flavouring agents, some preparations, the kitchen brigade, etc. [...].*

[We] also take into account the future opportunities this training will open for these apprentices in the French-speaking world, whether in Brazil, in the numerous restaurants run by francophone chefs or abroad, thus contributing to the internationalisation of [our] students.

SOURCES :

[Former en français de futurs professionnels de cuisine | Le français des affaires](#)

[France – Inbound tourism Overview | VisitBritain](#)

OTHER SOURCES

[Education and learning for the modern world: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey report 2019](#)

[Helping the UK to thrive. Education and Skills Survey: CBI/Pearson \(2017\)](#)

[The costs to the UK of language deficiencies as a barrier to UK engagement in exporting](#)

[New research links languages with exporting success for UK SMEs | Aston University](#)

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/foreign-languages-skills-in-the-workforce/>

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2019-01-23/debates/D8F140AA-54D1-4210-97ED-E3602B17C37E/BrexitForeignLanguageTeachingAndPublicServiceInterpreting#contribution-B785A97F-D2C6-4725-9AEF-F62DD329BDD2>