



# Opportunities for language learning – a guide for students and parents

West Midlands Routes into Languages Consortium



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## Opportunities at University

Whichever subject you are planning to study at university it is very often possible to combine it with a language or to study a language in some way alongside your main degree subject. Whether you want to continue with a language you have already studied or start learning a new one by committing a lot, or a little bit, of time, there is sure to be an opportunity available for you.

Language skills are so important in the world we live in today and you don't have to be fluent to experience the benefits – even knowing a little can go a long way and provide many opportunities for any future study and your career.

This booklet tells you all about the wide range of language opportunities available to you at university. To enable you to access the information easily, these are split into options for beginners (ab initio), full and combined degrees, short courses or modules and studying abroad options. Please bear in mind, however, that these opportunities are often linked or overlap. You can also read about the experiences of students who have studied languages in different ways.

Also included are a number of specific examples of study options at universities in the West Midlands, which, if you are planning to study outside of the region, will still give you a good idea of what might be available at universities you are interested in. The universities featured in this guide offer a wide range of language provision in addition to the examples outlined, so check out their prospectuses or websites to find out more. At the back you will find a list of useful organisations and sources of information.

So why should you read this guide?

Please read this booklet carefully – you may be surprised at the number of ways in which you can study a language at university! Please have a look at the different ways you can gain, or increase, your language skills and think about how this could benefit you in the future. If you haven't considered it before now is the time to do so!

# Why Languages? Some Fact and Figures

There is no doubt that even a little bit of language can make a huge difference – you don't have to be fluent to see the benefits of language skills.

Within our global economy and multilingual society, whichever career you choose, language skills will be advantageous and open up opportunities that might otherwise not have been there.

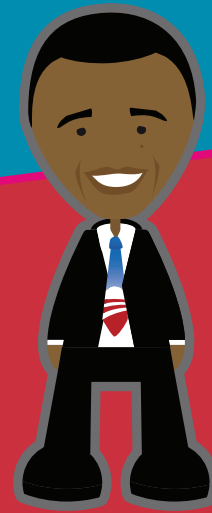
Your career won't be the only thing that benefits. Languages will help you with travel, communication, appreciation of other cultures and much more throughout your life. In a world where technology has made communicating across the globe simple, language skills open up endless possibilities.

Read on for some facts and figures...

- BMW believe that employees with language skills are worth more in the labour market.
- Being bilingual helps you to multi-task more easily.
- Learning languages gives you a greater understanding of different cultures. If you dream of travelling the world, just think how much difference it could make.

- The Government's Security and Intelligence Agency needs people who can speak languages from all over the world.

Could you be the next James Bond?



## Celebrity Linguists - you're in good company!

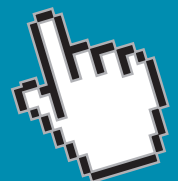
Barack Obama speaks Bahasa, the language of Indonesia and Malaysia... a great asset for improving international relations. Emma Watson, of Harry Potter fame, can speak French, German and Italian. Gwyneth Paltrow can speak fluent Spanish and Kate Beckinsale is tri-lingual, speaking German, Russian and French fluently. Arsène Wenger speaks six languages and earns, on average, £5 million a year!

At least half of the UK's 'richest' under 30's (53%) count languages among their skills.



74% of UK businesses need foreign language conversational skills to help build business relationships (CBI Education & Skills Survey 2009).

By 2020 Mandarin Chinese is expected to be the most-used language on the internet – ahead of English.



70% of UK companies have customers abroad.

# Beginners/ab initio

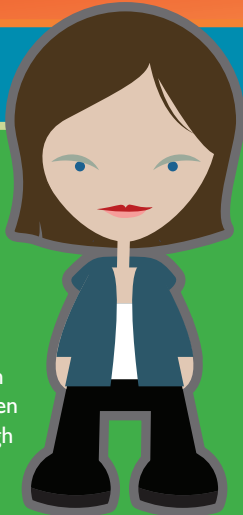
If you haven't studied a language in the last few years or want to start a new one, there are many opportunities for beginners, also known as ab initio learners, at universities across the West Midlands and the rest of the UK. Whichever subject area you choose, it is often possible to study a language as part of your degree or on an extra-curricular basis. Opportunities for beginners are usually offered as part of a university wide language programme in the form of modules or short courses – more information on these can be seen below.

## Katarzyna Krakowiak

Kat, an EU student originally from Poland, studied a joint BA (Hons) degree in Spanish and German at the University of Wolverhampton. During her primary and secondary education in Poland, Kat learnt English. Having a keen interest in languages, when she was fifteen Kat decided to also learn Spanish through private tuition after watching Mexican soap operas and loving the language! She continued with her private Spanish tuition while at college, where she also continued with English and started to learn German. After finishing college at eighteen Kat decided to move to England to join her family who had moved to Bournemouth a few years before. She really wanted to continue with her language learning and applied to a number of universities to study Spanish and German with her final choice being the University of Wolverhampton.

During Freshers' Week Kat found out about the Wolverhampton Languages Programme (WLP) at the University of Wolverhampton and decided to start learning Italian due to its similarity to Spanish. The timetabling of WLP lectures meant she was able to fit them around her degree studies and although Kat found it challenging she thoroughly enjoyed her Italian study.

Kat is going on to study a Masters degree in International Business at Aston University which will enable her to continue with language learning. She is keen to work in the UK in a career which requires her to utilise her many language skills.



## Short courses and modules

Short courses and modules enable the vast majority of students, regardless of their subject, to study a language as part of their course or on an extra-curricular basis. Whether you are an ab initio learner or a skilled linguist, there will be an opportunity for you.

A number of universities in the West Midlands (University of Warwick, University of Birmingham, Aston University, University of Worcester, Coventry University, Keele University, University College Birmingham and University of Wolverhampton) run university wide programmes which between them offer a wide range of short courses and modules in the following languages:

- French
- Italian
- Spanish
- Russian
- Portuguese
- Greek
- Polish
- Turkish
- Swedish
- German
- Japanese
- Mandarin Chinese
- Arabic
- British Sign Language
- Latin
- Panjabi
- Urdu
- Catalan

Lectures are often delivered in the target language and will consist of a range of learning areas including grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, reading and writing, and culture. Assessment techniques vary depending on the university.

## Which level is right for you?

Language modules and short courses are available at different levels usually ranging from beginner (ab initio) to intermediate and advanced, allowing you to take advantage of opportunities regardless of your ability level. The equivalencies for these levels and the length of time required to complete different courses vary from university to university, so it is worth checking them out.

***“There are great career and travel opportunities for those with language skills and they set you apart from others”***

**The University of Worcester's** Language Centre enables students to select a language module as one of their 'free' modules in the first and second years of study. Each module contributes credits towards final degree classifications. The languages available are: Mandarin Chinese; French; German; Italian; Japanese and Spanish and can be studied at Stage 1 for beginners or Stage 2 for those with some language knowledge. All students are also able to use the Centre's self-access facilities to independently improve their language skills and seek assistance from the language adviser.

**“Don’t underestimate how useful languages can be and how many careers they are relevant to”**



**Lisa Rose**

Lisa is studying a joint English Language and Linguistics degree at the University of Wolverhampton. Lisa studied French at school from Year 7 to Year 11 and really enjoyed the experience. However, when it came to choosing her AS and A level options, her choice of other subjects prevented her from continuing with French. During Freshers’ Week she discovered that it was possible to study French as part of the Wolverhampton Languages Programme. Opting for French as one of her elective modules in the first and final years of her degree will enable Lisa to gain the equivalent of an A Level and also attracts credits which contribute towards her final degree.

The timetabling of the French modules also allows her to fit them in around her main degree programme easily.

Lisa decided to take advantage of the opportunity to pick up learning French again for a number of reasons. She feels that being able to speak a language is very useful and she felt the opportunity open to her to progress with French was too good to turn down. Lisa has also discovered that it links closely to her main degree subjects and has used the French language as a topic for a number of her linguistics assignments. She has also been able to choose modules that would not otherwise have been available to her as they required language skills. French skills will be of great use in her chosen career as an English secondary teacher by allowing her to also teach French as a subject.



**Iman Dawoud**

Iman is studying a joint Economics and Arabic degree at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) in London. At her school, French, German and Latin were compulsory in years 7, 8 and 9 and Iman then studied French up to GCSE level. She really wanted to continue with French to AS and A Level but was discouraged by her teachers and instead studied History, Economics and Politics in the sixth form and applied to SOAS to study a History degree. During enrolment Iman made a mistake on a form which altered her programme to a joint History and Arabic degree, and, as she had not had the chance to continue with a language at A Level, decided not to rectify her mistake. She found her studies very challenging and unfortunately failed her first year. However, Iman was determined not to give up and continued with her studies, changing her degree to Economics and Arabic.

As half Palestinian, Iman has enjoyed immensely learning her native language in more depth and has had the opportunity during her degree to study Economics through the Arabic medium, in Alexandria and Damascus. She has found the study very challenging but has persevered and believes that her horizons have been broadened as a result. She has had to lose many inhibitions and has gained so much confidence that she now plans to spend a year in France in order to improve her French. Iman definitely wants to use her language skills in her future career and has plans to study a 2 year International Relations Masters Degree.

**Harper Adams University College** in Shropshire, which specialises in rural, animal and land-based courses, offers students the opportunity to study a language module (French, German or Spanish) as part of a wide range of degrees.

**Entry requirements vary, however, they are often as follows:**

- Beginner/ab initio** No previous knowledge
- Intermediate** GCSE or equivalent or completion of beginners level in target language
- Advanced** AS/A level or equivalent or completion of intermediate level in target language

Universities can also help you determine the correct starting level for you by carrying out a short diagnostic test or assessment.

**Fitting it in**

Many universities give you the option to study language modules as part of your course – this means that you gain credits which count towards your final grade or degree classification and that the timing of the module fits around the others you are studying.

Time commitments usually vary from 2 to 3 hours per week although this does depend on the university and level being studied. Some short courses can also be taken during vacation periods.

If you find, for whatever reason, that you cannot study a language module as part of your course, or you want to study more than one, you should still be able to access them in your own time in addition to your main studies (there may be a charge for these). University wide language programmes try to ensure wherever possible that modules are easily accessible for all students and can be slotted into existing commitments. This means they are often at a time when other lectures do not take place or in the evenings.

To find out more about the specific opportunities that are available at the universities you are interested in, visit their websites, attend an Open Day or contact them directly – they will be very happy to talk you through your options. You may also find that you can talk to specialist staff during Freshers’ Week.

**Keele University** offers language modules accessible to all students either as part of their main degree or on an extra-curricular basis. There are also a number of opportunities to study modules abroad. The languages available are French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Japanese at a range of different levels through to Advanced. French, Spanish and German are also available at higher levels. Students taking language modules at Keele for two or three years receive a Certificate of Language Competence as evidence of their language learning.

# Specialist Language Degrees

You may decide to specialise and study a single language at university. Within the West Midlands a number of universities (University of Birmingham, University of Warwick, Aston University and Coventry University) offer specialist degrees in a range of languages including French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian. The majority of these are 4 year courses which involve a compulsory year abroad. Where the year abroad is optional it is, however, usually highly recommended.

Although the specific characteristics of each degree will differ from university to university, the information below gives you an idea of what may be involved.

## Entry Requirements

- The points required vary between universities.
- In most cases an A level in the target language is required.
- GCSE English Language is often a requirement.
- Equivalent qualifications are usually accepted.

## Content

- Most degrees will also include elements of culture, literature and history.
- In degrees where 'Studies' is included in the title there will be a greater emphasis on culture, literature and history alongside language learning.
- Typically courses will be modular in structure.
- There is usually some flexibility of module choice so you can tailor your studies to aspects you are interested in.
- Modules may include topics such as: film and cinema; translation; interpreting; politics; the media and press; contemporary history and culture and linguistics.

## Assessment

- Written and oral exams
- Essays
- Listening tasks
- Group work
- Coursework
- Reports
- Presentations
- Dissertation

## Teaching style

- It is likely that a wide range of teaching styles and methods will be utilised.
- In many cases a high proportion of teaching will take place in the target language.

If you are interested in interpreting or translation as a career, some universities also offer specialist degree courses in these areas.

**Aston University** offer a wide range of options for those wanting to study a language in conjunction with another subject, 2 languages or even 3. Their 4 year BSc Modern Languages French, German and Spanish degree combines the study of each language with a year spent abroad studying, working, undertaking a teaching assistantship or combining these options. The course includes a range of module choices in areas such as film and cinema, translation, interpreting, the media and press, contemporary history and culture and linguistics. Entry requirements are currently 300 - 320 UCAS points from 3 A-levels (or 2 A-levels and 2 AS levels) including A-level French, German and Spanish at grade B.

## Combined and Joint Degrees

If you want to continue with learning a language or perhaps start a new one at university, but don't want to specialise too much, a combined or joint degree may be right for you. This is also an excellent way to combine a language with another subject area to give you a complementary set of skills for your future career and open up opportunities that might not otherwise have been open to you. More unusual combinations can help to make you stand out in the graduate employment market.

Many universities in the West Midlands (Aston University, University of Warwick, University College Birmingham, Coventry University, University of Birmingham and University of Wolverhampton) and across the UK offer a wide range of combined and joint degree options.

The combinations available differ from university to university and will be dependent on timetabling restrictions. However, examples of some of the subject areas that can be studied with a language include:

- Sciences
- Tourism
- Psychology
- Multi-media
- Sport
- Education
- Marketing
- Public Relations
- Art and Design
- Politics
- Economics
- Archaeology
- Human Resource Management
- Business
- Computing
- Media
- Performing Arts
- Deaf Studies
- Accounting
- Health Studies
- Religious Education
- English
- Law
- Music
- History
- Geography

This list is not exhaustive so please check out individual universities to see what they offer.

Remember you can also combine different languages too!

The amount of time you will spend studying each subject in a combined or joint degree will differ, but typically such degrees are either an equal split or a major/minor where greater emphasis is placed on one subject area. Some universities, such as The University of Birmingham and Aston University also offer triple subject degrees.

Entry requirements differ depending on the university and combination chosen. Knowledge and qualifications in the target language are often required; however, some universities do have opportunities to start a new language as part of a combined or joint degree.

Elements of content, assessment and how you will be taught will broadly reflect those for specialised degrees.

Remember – whichever subject area you choose to study you may have to do a work placement year or be able to opt for one. Many universities will allow you to do this abroad and support you in the application process. This is a fantastic opportunity to utilise a language you have previously studied but not continued with at university or learn a new one. Subject areas that such opportunities are often available with include Business and Tourism. For example, Coventry University offer study abroad options with a range of degrees including Tourism Management, Sports Tourism, Tourism Marketing, International Business Management and European Business Management.

## Studying and Working Abroad Options

Studying or working abroad as part of your university studies is a fantastic way to build on your language skills, immerse yourself in the culture, meet new people and add to your CV. There is no better way to learn about a language and culture than by being surrounded by it!

Most universities that offer language related degrees or courses, and even those that don't, also provide students with opportunities to study or work abroad which generally fit into one of the following types.

### Compulsory

If you decide to study for a specialist language degree, combine 2 or 3 languages or take a language as part of a joint degree with another subject, you will find that many universities require you to spend a compulsory placement year abroad. These types of course usually last for 4 years (with the 3rd year spent abroad) and are often referred to as 'sandwich' courses. Placement years often involve attending a university as a student, carrying out a work placement or assisting in a school. You will have to spend the year in a country that speaks the target language. If you are studying 2 languages, you can often split the time between 2 countries.

Your university will support you in organising a year abroad and keep in regular contact with you while you are abroad.

### Optional

A number of universities, such as the University of Wolverhampton and Coventry University give students on specialist or joint language degrees the option of studying or working abroad as part of their course. Although this is optional, it is usually strongly recommended to students, as the experience and skills learnt are so valuable in preparation for the final year of study. If such an option is taken, this typically takes place in the 3rd year and would therefore make the degree 4 years in length.

### Short Placements

Some universities offer short placements, often undertaken out of term time, to support university wide language programmes that are available to all students.

### Erasmus Placements

The majority of UK universities support the Erasmus Programme which provides UK undergraduates with the opportunity to study or work in another European country and provides funding to support this. Study placements can be part of your degree course and usually last from 3 to 12 months during the 2nd or 3rd year of study. Work placements are available in your first year of study and also usually last from 3 to 12 months, although for some, shorter ones can be arranged. Work and study options are also available if you fancy combining both.

**To find out more about Erasmus, visit [www.erasmus.ac.uk](http://www.erasmus.ac.uk)**

**Keele University**, as part of their university wide languages programme, offer students who meet the required level the opportunity to study abroad. Students who complete Beginners or Intermediate courses in German, Japanese or Spanish can apply to study at a Keele partner university in Germany, Japan or Spain for 3 to 4 weeks during the Easter or summer vacation periods.

***"Studying a language alongside physics sets me apart from others when looking for career opportunities"***



### Thomas Arnot

Thomas is studying a Physics degree combined with an International Study option at the University of Birmingham which offers a wide range of courses with study abroad options. Having studied German at school he continued with this as his language element requirement for his degree. Thomas also took the opportunity to study Japanese as well and then discovered he could spend a year in Japan as part of his course.

Having already studied Japanese independently while at school and university, he felt this was a fantastic opportunity to develop his skills.

Thomas decided to combine his physics studies with language learning for a number of reasons. Family members have played a part in encouraging and motivating him to learn languages and he has always been committed to learning such skills. Travelling throughout his childhood also resulted in a feeling of frustration when not able to communicate in another language and made him realise how important language skills are. Thomas also firmly believes that his combination of skills will set him apart from others and open up many more career opportunities than those traditionally associated with physics.

Thomas chose Japanese as he wanted to study a non-European language and found the cultural aspects fascinating. Thomas has taken advantage of other opportunities to increase his knowledge by becoming involved in the University of Birmingham's Japanese Society and mixing with Japanese students. For his third year, Thomas will be spending a year in Japan as an exchange student at the University of Kobe.

During his final year Thomas plans to continue with Japanese as he does not want to lose the skills he will acquire whilst in Japan. He plans to work abroad and also wants to learn French and Korean. Thomas believes that learning a language can balance out other studies through diversification, looks great on a CV and makes people more rounded.

### **Want to study abroad but don't speak another language?**

Erasmus enables students from all subject areas to take part and some of the courses available are taught in English. You may even be able to get funding to learn a new language through an Erasmus Intensive Language Course or revisit a previously learnt language in preparation for your visit.

## Want to Find Out More?

There are many organisations and sources of information and advice that can help you find out more about the benefits of learning a language and help you find the right course for you.

**Cilt, the National Centre for Languages**, has a wide range of information regarding all areas of language learning.  
[www.cilt.org.uk](http://www.cilt.org.uk)

**The Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies** hosts resources about the advantages of language skills and information about studying languages at university.  
[www.llas.ac.uk](http://www.llas.ac.uk)

**The Languages Work** website provides information about relevant careers and a range of case studies.  
[www.languageswork.org.uk](http://www.languageswork.org.uk)

**The University and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS)** website enables you to search all courses available at UK universities.  
[www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

**Aimhigher** provides lots of general information and advice about studying at university along with information about specific institutions and courses.  
[www.aimhigher.ac.uk](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk)

**The Connexions** service offers a wide range of information, advice and guidance to young people in relation to learning and careers. They can also put you in touch with a personal advisor.  
[www.connexions-direct.com](http://www.connexions-direct.com)

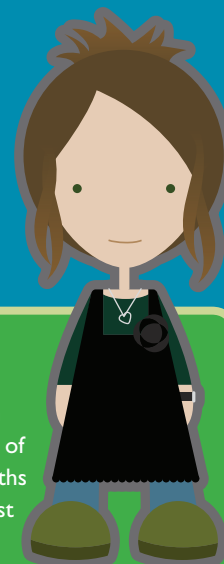
**The Erasmus** (British Council) programme offers university students the opportunity to study abroad as part of their course. Visit the website to find out more about the programmes they offer.  
[www.erasmus.ac.uk](http://www.erasmus.ac.uk)

**The Independent Newspaper** has an online section dedicated to getting into university which includes A-Z guides for courses and institutions and forums that you can contribute to.  
[www.independent.co.uk/student/into-university](http://www.independent.co.uk/student/into-university)

You will also find a wide range of blogs and social networking pages dedicated to language learning and university life.

**University College Birmingham** offers a 2 year Foundation Degree combining Tourism with Modern Languages (French, German, Spanish or Italian). The course involves the opportunity to undertake an overseas visit in the 1st year and a compulsory exchange in the 2nd year during which students study their main language. A subsidiary language can also be taken in the 2nd year. The entry requirements are currently 100 points, a GCSE in French or Spanish at grade C or above or post-16 studying of language units.

*“Studying a language module broadens your horizons and helps to break up an intense maths schedule”*



### Heather Emery

Heather is studying a Maths degree which involves study in Europe at the University of Birmingham. The course consists of 5 Maths modules and 1 Spanish module for the first 2 years of study and then incorporates a year abroad in the 3rd year living in Spain. Heather has studied lower intermediate Spanish in her first year and has progressed to higher intermediate Spanish in her 2nd year.

From a wide range of languages offered at her school, Heather chose to study French, Russian and Latin, continuing with French and Russian at GCSE. She also chose to drop a technology subject in order to do a GCSE in Spanish. At the time French was Heather's strongest language and so she continued it to AS level before her passion for mathematics came to the fore as she chose Mathematics, Further Mathematics and History for her 3 A levels. When it came to University, Heather originally chose to study Mathematics on its own. However, on attending an open day, she heard about the option of studying in central Europe, which she was not previously aware of and changed her course to incorporate this. Heather found the first year challenging because she had not studied any Spanish for two years. However, she quickly picked it up and has finished her 2nd year with excellent marks.

Heather claims that studying the Spanish module has contributed greatly to her enjoying her degree. She is looking forward to her year abroad and has aspirations of living in Spain permanently if all goes to plan.