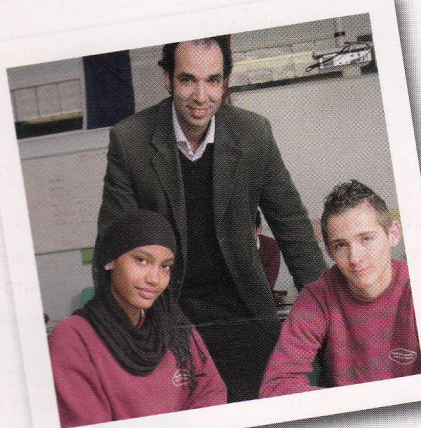




Going glo

Now you'll find more in school language departments than French and German – the world is literally the limit, as **Will Simpson** finds out



Teacher and students at Whitefield Community School get to work with Arabic and Urdu

Language teaching in UK schools may have at one point meant conjugating French verbs or involved ploughing through reams of Latin text, but things are now changing.

In the coming years, as global power shifts from west to east, we may be more likely to hear conversations in Mandarin, Arabic or Bengali.

In fact, alongside traditional modern languages, such as French, German and Spanish, a number of secondary schools are adding an amazing selection of non-European languages to their curriculum.

Take Whitefield Community School in Fishponds, Bristol. Granted specialist language college status in January 2005, the school currently offers Arabic alongside French and German, at Key Stage 3, and Urdu at Key Stage 4.

Whitefield's catchment area includes a large swathe of multi-racial east Bristol so, as Linda Button, head of languages, explains, adding those languages made sense. "We introduced Arabic as an

alternative to German and we have had a wonderfully mixed bunch of pupils taking it – white, Asian, Somali and Afro-Caribbean children," she said. "In Year 10, out of a class of 15, there are quite a few white pupils and a lot of Somali children learning Arabic. Many see it as a Koranic language that they want to learn."

Despite the inevitable difficulties with the script, all the feedback from Whitefield's pupils demonstrated that they enjoyed learning the language, even those from a non-Islamic background.

"The students were interviewed on Radio Bristol recently and a young non-Islamic girl doing Key Stage 3 said she very much saw it as a career path," explains Linda. "Others just see it as something different. It broadens their horizons and enables them to see beyond Europe."

Meanwhile in East London, another specialist language college has taken the step of introducing Mandarin Chinese for all 300 of its Year 7 students.

Part of the reasoning for Kingsford Community School was that they wanted to choose a language pupils would have no prior knowledge of, so they would all start at the same level. There was also the matter of the school's proximity to the City and Canary Wharf.

"It's quite relevant," says director of learning Julian Linathan. "The idea is that the students at the school can be more aspirational about career choices."

PHOTOGRAPHY: REBECCA BRADBURY

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According to the National Centre for Languages (CILT), less than three per cent of schools offer Mandarin as a GCSE subject, but that number could soon rise due to several factors.

New Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) guidelines come in from September, freeing up schools from the restrictions of having to only offer European languages. Meanwhile in February, Ofsted produced a report called *Every Language Matters*, which made a number of recommendations for improving teacher training in non-standard languages, including reviewing PGCE admissions criteria, so that language course applicants can be admitted without a European language.

For Teresa Tinsley, director of communications at CILT, this cannot come too soon if language provision in UK schools is going to diversify.

"At present the major barrier is not having enough trained teachers," she said. "For example, even though we have over 1,000 pupils each year taking GCSEs in Gujarati there are not many teachers. Last year, there were only 35 trainees nationally for all these languages combined – Arabic, Bengali, Mandarin, Punjabi, Turkish and Urdu."

This means local people who speak these languages, and who are interested in teaching, could be a huge benefit to schools. In the meantime, some schools have been going into partnership with the

private sector to recruit staff. Since 2000, HSBC Bank, in partnership with the British Council, has sponsored a number of Chinese language assistants to come to the UK to teach Mandarin in over 80 primary and secondary schools.

Such vacancies are only likely to increase as schools develop their language provision further. Kingsford has been awarded Confucius Classroom status. This means that they are one of five schools nationwide that are given extra resources and support to develop Mandarin in London and the South East. Kingsford is fast becoming an important hub for the spread of the language in the UK.

"We do get a lot of schools emailing us to ask how to start Mandarin lessons, what the best materials are, and if we can help by looking at our model," adds Julian.

It is crucial that more schools follow the lead of Kingsford and Whitefield, Linda points out, to ensure a generation of children are not at a disadvantage in the global workplace.

"Worldwide, the number of people learning English is growing exponentially," she said. "That means there are more people learning to speak English in China than



there are English people! Our workforce is going to be out there with nothing else but English, whereas our competitors will speak Turkish and English, or Chinese and English, or Arabic and English.

"You can see how we are going to lose out in business if we do not take action soon." 