

# Towards an inclusive multilingual university



Terry Lamb  
University of Westminster  
President FIPLV

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*ECSPM Symposium*  
*Saarbrücken*

# Overview

The Multilingual University, a Westminster Learning Community

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI) and the multilingual university

First steps

Research and engagement activities: towards a linguistically inclusive university

Next steps

Questions and discussion



## Multilingual University Westminster Learning Community

- Dr Julio Gimenez
- Dr Saskia Huc-Hepher
- Prof. Terry Lamb
- Dr Katie Mansfield
- Dr Lucia Llano Puertas
- Martin Percy
- Alexandra Rappoport
- Dr Margherita Sprio

Why set up a Westminster Learning Community on the Multilingual University?

# International university

“Our enduring and embedded commitment to internationalisation is evidenced by Westminster’s place in the top 20 in the UK and in the top 30 globally for international students according to 2024 Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings with 48% of Westminster students classed as international.”

“With a student body of over 21,000 students from 169 countries”

“The University's teaching and research staff hail from more than 80 countries”

<https://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-university/global-westminster>

# Linguistic diversity: Inner London school population



- 1983: 149 languages - 16.2% of school population (ILEA\*)
- 1987: 184 languages - 22.7% (ILEA)
- 2000: 300+ languages (32.14%) (Baker and Eversley 2000)
- 2018: 54.4% of 10-11 year olds have English as second language (National Pupil Database)

\* Inner London Education Authority

Increasing multilingualism because of internationalisation and widening participation  
e.g., Odeniyi & Lazar (2020)

# EDI and the Multilingual University Westminster Learning Community

- Established to raise awareness of multilingualism in the University and to promote its inclusion in and contribution to the strong Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) commitments of the University:

## University EDI Strategy 2021-2025

“As a compassionate institution, **we commit to an inclusive culture that allows students and colleagues to reach their full potential, regardless of** their age, disability, sex, gender, gender identity, marital/ civil partnership status, pregnancy, maternity and paternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, ethnic or national origins, family circumstances, nationality, political beliefs and affiliations, socioeconomic background or other quality.”

British Academy (2019) Languages in the UK: A call for action. From the four UK-wide National Academies: The British Academy; with the Academy of Medical Sciences; the Royal Academy of Engineering; and the Royal Society

- The **good news is that the UK already has untapped reservoirs of linguistic capacity.**
- There is a **disconnect between mainstream education and community-based language learning.** The language-learning that goes on in thousands of complementary (or supplementary) schools in the UK has little public visibility. It is scarcely ever connected up with the learning done by the same children in mainstream schools. **Although their extra linguistic competence has the potential to be an educational asset, some of these children even actively conceal it, feeling that it is irrelevant or embarrassing.** This is bad for social cohesion: it weakens any positive connection and psychological integration between the children's community or home life and their school life.
- **Attitudinal change is needed** which shifts away from a model that sees a few people as good at languages and most people as bad, towards a model of a spectrum of linguistic competence.

# The British Academy (April 2025) Key findings and discussion (pp51-52)

- **Multilingual capabilities can enrich academic disciplines and are integral to research excellence, impact and integrity**, not least in a globalised and interconnected research environment.
- While there is rich multilingual potential among UK academic researchers, this potential may be underutilised and undervalued, and **language use can sometimes remain ‘hidden’ within the research process**.
- Looking ahead: **there is a need to capture, incentivise and capitalise on multilingualism in academic research in the UK**

# Putting the idea of an inclusive multilingual university on the agenda: first steps







# Towards a linguistically inclusive university

- 1. Understanding the extent of our multi/plurilingualism**
- 2. Beginning to explore and challenge the monolingual habitus**

# Research methodology



Online survey questionnaire – quantitative and qualitative



Focus groups; in-depth discussions; visual methods

Multilingual University event  
EAP and MA Linguistics classes  
Participatory exhibition



Data analysis - Iterative Thematic Inquiry (ITI) (Morgan and Nica 2020)

# THE WESTMINSTER MULTILINGUAL SURVEY

Have your multilingual voice heard!



Our University is one of the most multilingual and multicultural institutions of higher education in London, and it would be very useful to know what languages we speak and use!

Complete The Westminster Multilingual Survey and be represented in the final report!  
It only takes 5-10 minutes.

You can complete the survey by using this link

<https://westminster.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/the-multilingual-university-language-survey-20231>

Or scanning this QR code



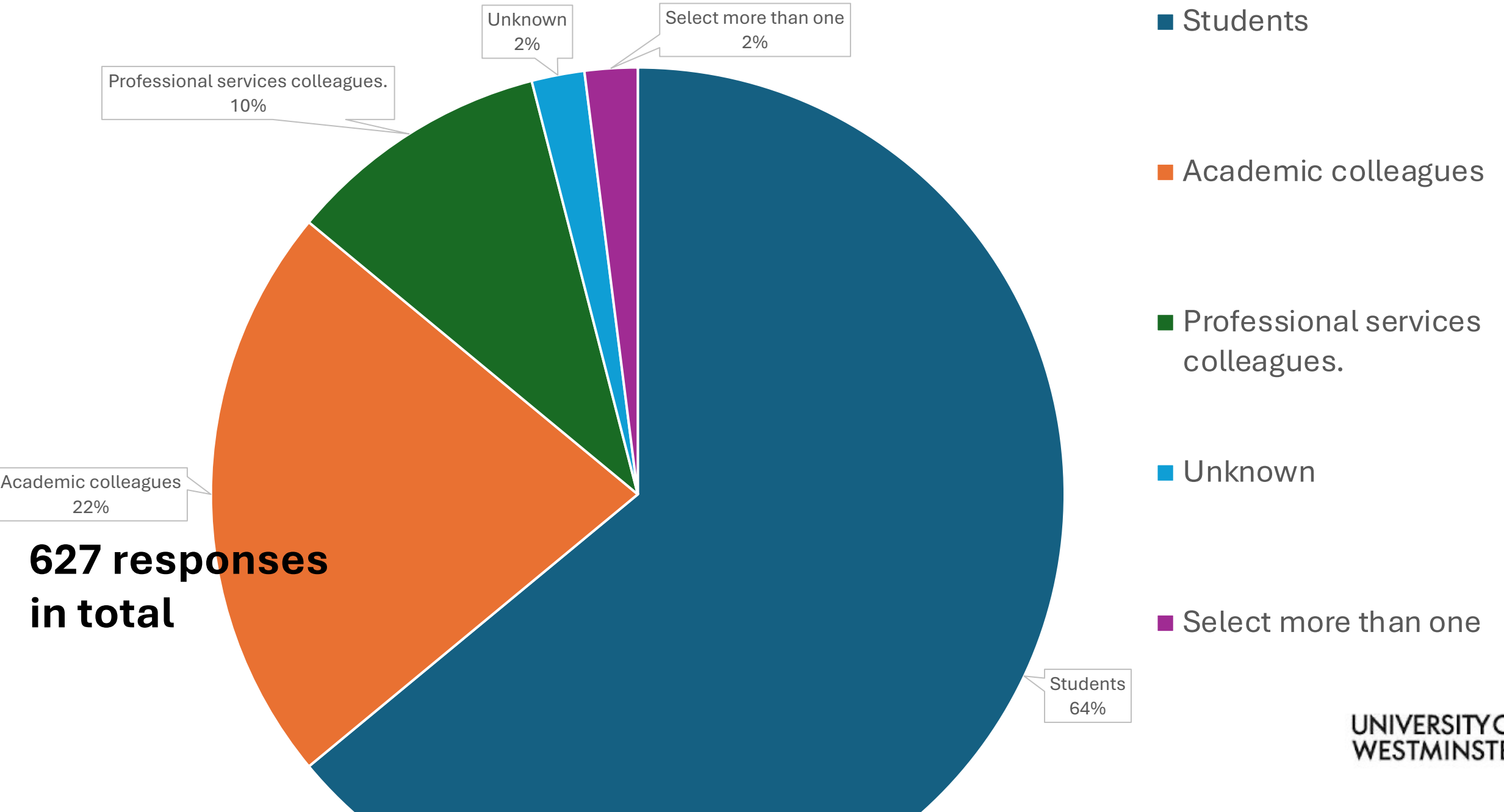
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# Influenced by the Council of Europe's work on multilingualism and plurilingualism

- **multilingualism** (the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual level)
- **plurilingualism** (the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner). Plurilingualism is presented in the CEFR as **an uneven and changing competence, in which the user/learner's resources in one language or variety may be very different in nature from their resources in another**. However, the fundamental point is that plurilinguals have a single, interrelated, repertoire that they combine with their general competences and various strategies in order to accomplish tasks (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001 Section 6.1.3.2).

# Who participated in the survey?



**627 responses  
in total**

# Multilingual Westminster!

From 627 responses:

- 133 languages named by participants
- 61 language varieties named by participants

*How many more would we find if everyone had responded?*

## Top 20 languages according to percentage of survey mentions

	Language	Mentions	%		Language	Mentions	%
1	English	387	62.7%	11	Chinese	27	4.4%
2	French	174	28.2%	12=	Bengali	25	4.1%
3	Spanish	122	19.8%	12=	Urdu	25	4.1%
4	German	105	17.0%	14	Sinhala	24	3.9%
5	Italian	83	13.5%	15	Mandarin	23	3.7%
6	Russian	56	9.1%	16	Turkish	22	3.6%
7=	Arabic	44	7.1%	17	Japanese	20	3.2%
7=	Hindi	44	7.1%	18	Romanian	19	3.1%
9	Tamil	32	5.2%	19=	Korean	18	2.9%
10	Greek	28	4.5%	19=	Persian	18	2.9%

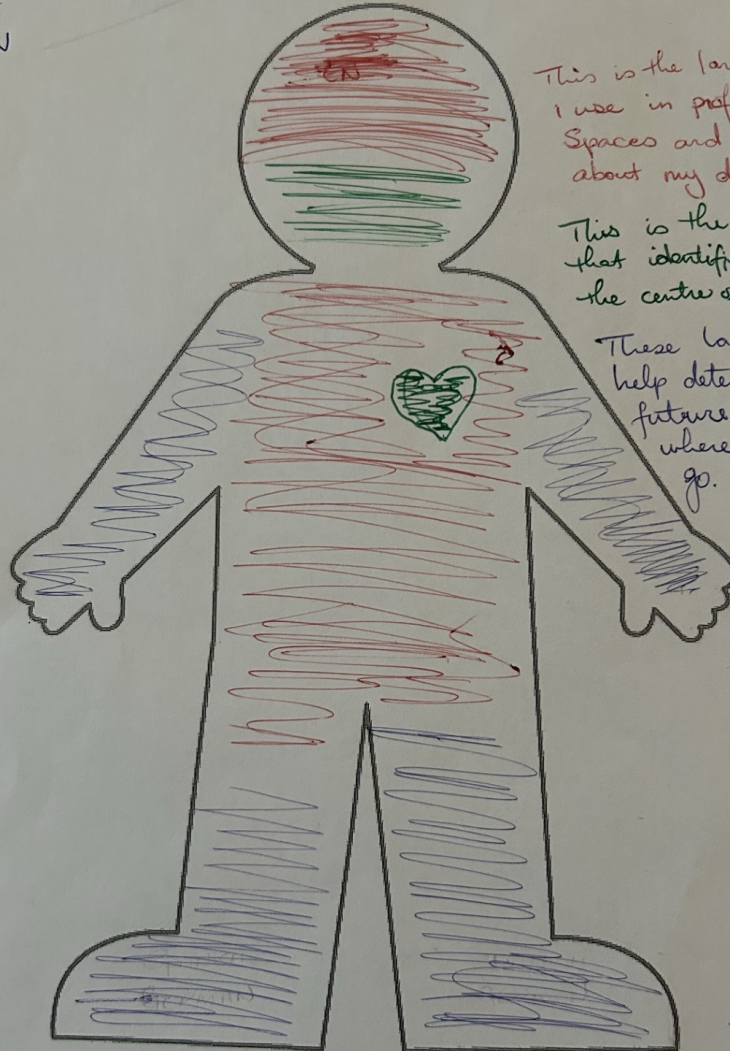
# Linguistic diversity at Westminster

Celebrating, embracing and strengthening  
multilingualism in our university

Fyvie Hall

University of Westminster

ENGLISH - TRINBAGONIAN  
ENGLISH - TRINBAGIAN  
DIALECT  
SPANISH  
GERMAN



This is the language  
I use in professional  
spaces and how I go  
about my day.

This is the language  
that identifies me and  
the centre of my being.

These languages  
help determine my  
future and  
where I can  
go.

KAVR1: DEVKATE

☐ - KOREAN

▣ - JAPANESE

■ - THAI

▤ - HINDI

▥ - ENGLISH

◻◻◻ - SINHALESE

▧ - MARATHI

▨ - GERMAN

My mother is Sri lankan, so though I was born & brought up in India - I spent summer vacations in Sri Lanka & thus I can speak this language but not read or write - I will learn it though.

I ~~don't~~ started watching the content & thus find it intr-esting

I took an AI level course in it & have been aiming to learn more in it.

I have been a huge fan of Kpop & K Dramas since school days & I can converse, speak & understand basic to intermediate level of conversation

This is the language that I use for professional areas of my life (Education & Career) - thus it occupies the rational place.

As my mother-tongue it's the easiest language for me to be able to express myself, so it's literally my heart

Another language similar to Hindi - same writing script but different vocabulary & pronunciation. I learnt it in school & my family is from Marathi culture but I'm not that great in it - can converse read & write on intermediate level.

← Again a fan of Anime since school-days so I picked up certain phrases, vocabularies, & greetings in it

# Reflections on Linguistic Diversity

What would you say is the single greatest advantage of knowing more than one language? Please write below in any language you choose.

- “Language is **intertwined with culture**, offering a unique lens through which one perceives the world”.
- “More languages means **broader vision**”.
- “Being able to spot both our **similarities and differences** through language e.g. **concepts and words that only exist in certain languages, idioms and how they translate across languages, how language affects the way we perceive concepts such as time or colours etc**”.
- “**You can be a different person** whenever you choose!”

## **Can your parents speak languages which you can't? Which languages would you like to pass on to your children? What are your experiences of this?**

I agree - my mother is a first generation immigrant who moved to the UK aged 7. Had her parents not insisted on her practising her Spanish every day after school she wouldn't be able to read and write in the language as well as she can. My brother and I were not brought up bilingually so whilst I took an active interest in the language, my brother cannot speak Spanish at all. However, his girlfriend hopes to break this cycle by learning Spanish so that they can bring up their future children bilingually.

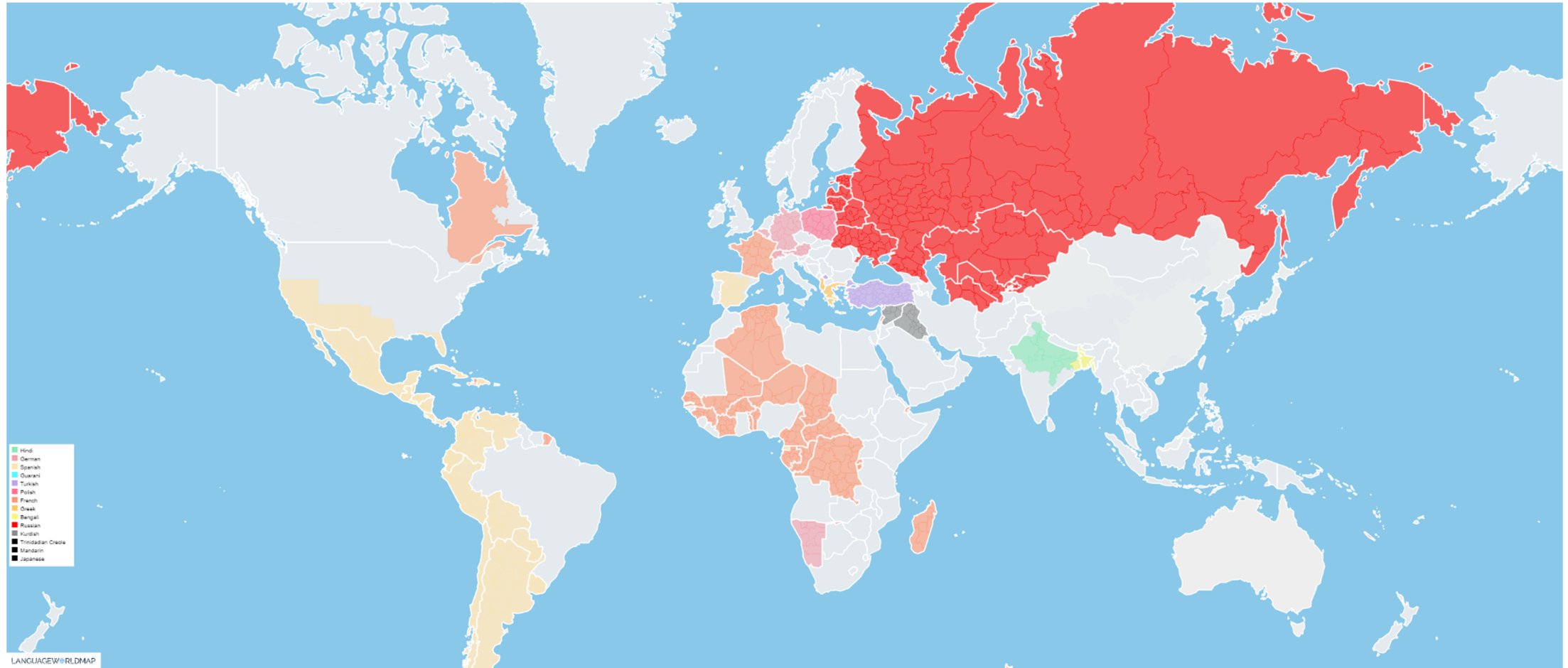
### **Translanguaging**

I usually switch from my L1 to English when I'm speaking with my friends. Sometimes, because I don't want some people understand us! Sometime, because I can't find the proper word to express what I mean. Fore example I use the English word "already" a lot when I'm speaking in my L1 because there is not such a word to convey the same meaning. This means I say the whole sentence in my L1 and then I use "already" in the middle. However, some people use code-switching because they think it's more prestigious to use English words in their speech.

### **Accents/dialects**

Our table discussed that accents are tied closely to acceptance, which is then tied closely to identity.

# Which languages do you use in some way outside the university?



Mahathi Hindi Haryanvi German Spanish Guarani Portuguese Albanian Turkish Polish Dereje Arabic French Persian  
Greek Bengali Tamil Russian Urdu Romanian Ukrainian Norwegian Italian Twi Mandarin Japanese

# Do you feel comfortable using your language at UoW? Why or why not?

## Yes - Comfort Zones

Students generally feel comfortable using own language:

- In open spaces where others speak same language;
- In language classes as fosters better language environment;

## No - Discomfort in Multilingual Settings

Majority feel uncomfortable using their own language in group work within classes:

- Might exclude others;
- Despite linguistic diversity, English tends to dominate in public areas –
- **“We are unified through our use of English. It is one thing we all have in common and it is therefore more inclusive to use English. The more multicultural we become, the more unsure we are where we are (sic)”.**



# Do you use any of your languages in your academic studies?

## Yes

- To translate essays/assignments from my first language into English
- To take notes

## No

- ‘Other languages shouldn’t be used in classrooms. There are numerous languages – we won’t be able to keep track.’
- **‘This is an English-speaking country so we should speak in English.’**
- **‘We should stick to English for lectures and assessments. I came to the university to become more fluent in English. I find foreign accents difficult to understand and find it easier to understand lecturers who are native speakers.’**



PhD research:

“Multilingual ideologies and practices among Russian-speaking university students in London”

Alexandra Rappoport

- **Multilingualism as a resource:** various perspectives and skills, helps to think critically and gives access to resources.
- **Multilingualism as a problem:** a threat towards improving English. Multilingual learning is confusing and time-consuming. Content is learned in English - no need for multilingualism. Multilingual communication in class can exclude others.
- **Personal factors:** educational and migration experience – some participants were confident users of English and did not require multilingualism as a support. For others, lack of academic skills in other languages; lack of opportunities to use other languages.
- **Multilingual practices:** informal communication, independent studies. Drafts in other languages to improve quality of writing, formulate ideas. Resources in other languages to have different perspectives, access information. Multilingual research and data collection.

<https://vimeo.com/975019839?fl=pl&fe=sh>



# Towards a linguistically inclusive university

1. Understanding the extent of our multi/plurilingualism
2. Beginning to explore and challenge the monolingual habitus
- 3. Ensuring that our linguistic landscape reflects our linguistic diversity**
- 4. Valuing our multilingualism and plurilingualism**



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A DIVERSE  
MULTILINGUAL  
UNIVERSITY  
IT ALL STARTS HERE



# Celebrating the European Day of Languages 2025

## Westminster, The Multilingual University

CELEBRATE THE EUROPEAN DAY OF LANGUAGES  
**LANGUAGES OPEN HEARTS AND MINDS**

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2025

University of Westminster - Regent Street Campus

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### WHAT'S HAPPENING?

#### \*Collaborative Exhibition - Why Languages Matter!

- Drop by, share your languages, and contribute to our exhibition
- Celebrate our community's linguistic diversity (200+ languages identified)
- Launch of the 2025 Multilingual Survey - takes just 5 minutes!

#### \*Film Screening - Classic French Cinema

- Regent Street Cinema, 5 pm
- Special reduced ticket price, £8.
- [Click here to buy!](#)

### JOIN US!

Be part of the celebration of Westminster's multilingual identity, a rich resource for all.







# Why Languages Matter!

**Do YOU know Why Languages Matter?**

**Choose any of the cards and add your thoughts.  
Feel free to make it look colourful!**

**Please add your cards to the exhibition and contribute  
to this ongoing project, which will soon be going GLOBAL!**

Please note: Your contributions will be on public display in the University and may be uploaded to a website or used in a presentation later. The contents may also be used to inform newsletters or research articles. This is why you are not required to include your real name – you may choose to remain anonymous if you wish.

My favourite language is.... Darija

....because.... It reminds me how  
proud I am of my roots ☺



Why Languages Matter!

My languages: Spanish, Darija, Arabic, French, English.

Who I am (optional):

**The places where I feel most comfortable speaking a language other than English**

**are...** in my home, with my friends and family, with my colleagues

**...because....** we share the language, there is no judgement or condemnation, there is the pleasure of expressing myself in another language of my heart.

Why Languages Matter!

**My languages:** French, English, Spanish

**Who I am (optional):**

I like knowing another language

because.... it helps me to <sup>feel</sup> connected to more people from different walks of life. I really love the fact how people can express themselves better when they know the other person can understand their language. It's a splendid feeling when you find someone who speaks your language in an unknown room.

Why Languages Matter!

My languages: English, Hindi, Odia, Bengali, Gujarati, Marwari,  
Who I am (optional): Bhojpuri, Assamese.

I like knowing another language because....

I can read articles and conduct research in many languages and access more information, communicate with many people, stay connected with my family

Why Languages Matter!

My languages: English, German, Russian, Italian

Who I am (optional): Alex ♥

## Knowing another language matters because...

It is good for your brain ; Great for understanding other cultures ; histories as well as keeping culture alive!

Why Languages Matter!

My languages: Tsalagi, English, Spanish, (Arabic, French, Italian (Sicilian))

Who I am (optional): N/A

# Towards a linguistically inclusive university

1. Understanding the extent of our multi/plurilingualism
2. Beginning to explore and challenge the monolingual habitus
3. Ensuring that our linguistic landscape reflects our linguistic diversity
4. Valuing our multilingualism and plurilingualism
- 5. Developing a language policy for the University**
- 6. Developing language sensitivity across our teaching – understanding that all teachers are language teachers**
- 7. Challenging linguistic discrimination**
- 8. Building our collaborations with language communities beyond the University**

# Multilingual universities in anglophone contexts

The **monolingual habitus** (Gogolin 2008) in multilingual universities

- “In the case of Anglophone higher education, this is **manifested in a fixation on English in isolation from the rest of the linguistic repertoire and an atomistic approach to language support**, in which the language and literacy practices of the academic community are compartmentalised and taught discretely, separated both from the subject of study and with little or no reference to broader linguistic repertoires. This approach positions those on language support programmes within **deficit discourses and as in need of language remediation**, thus encouraging the **erasure of ‘multilingual capital’** (Eversley et al., 2010) by rendering it worthless or a hindrance for the activities of the academy. As studies have shown, this contributes to **feelings of stigmatisation and marginalisation within the sector.**” (Preece & Marshall 2020: 119)

# Equality, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI) and decolonising the university

- **How can teaching, research, supervision in the multilingual university be hopeful, transformative, and socially just?** (Bhatt et al 2022: 434)
- **“Language issues, apropos linguistic justice, multilingualism and the like, are absolutely central to decoloniality.** What is needed is a concerted and collective endeavour to not just understand **how forms of multilingualism are pivotal in everyday teaching in higher education**, but to also **stimulate critical debate about the role of language in a way that crosses disciplinary boundaries and allows researchers in different contexts to learn from each other**” (Bhatt et al 2022: 426)
- Socio-economic inequalities: the **“stratification of linguistic diversity”** (Preece 2019: 404); language as “a salient factor in racialization and racism on American college campuses” (Holliday & Squires 2020: 1)
- **“Research and “epistemic injustice”** (Fricker 2007): “the hostility of seemingly ‘neutral’ academic conventions, policies and practices that tend to recognise knowledge only when it is produced in certain ways and modalities, mainly in English, written, and described as ‘intellectual’; “the linguistic glass-ceiling of academic publishing” (Bhatt et al 2022: 433, 427)

HUMAN RIGHTS,  
DEMOCRACY  
AND THE RULE OF LAW

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

DROITS DE L'HOMME,  
DÉMOCRATIE  
ET ÉTAT DE DROIT

## Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture

*Challenging societal attitudes towards language and culture*

**Professor Terry Lamb**  
University of Westminster, London

# Recommendations for higher education

d. invite higher education institutions to review their policy and practices with a view to ensuring that their graduates are equipped with the linguistic and cultural resources needed to participate in the democratic processes of Europe's diverse societies;

e. encourage universities and other competent institutions and agencies to engage in research that contributes to international understanding of plurilingualism and intercultural dialogue at all educational levels and in all social domains;



# Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education

[Home](#) / [Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education](#)

All those signing the Declaration stress the need for change in Higher Education, so that multilingualism in teaching and learning, in research and publishing, governance and communication is legitimated through explicit institutional language policies. The petition is addressed to: (a) the Education Department of the Council of Europe, (b) the Higher Education Unit of European Commission (EAC.B.1), (c) the European University Association (EUA), and (d) the Higher Education Institutions across Europe. The petition is now **on-line**.

# Decolonising the University

‘...to decolonise the imagination and to pluralise the possibilities for the future by pluralising knowledge in the present in order to enable dialogue, relationships of solidarity and, ideally, the collective creation of non-hegemonic systems. (Andreotti 2010: 9)

Andreotti, V. 2010, ‘Global education in the “21st century”’: Two different perspectives on the “post-of postmodernism”’, *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, vol. 2, pp. 5–22.

<https://vimeo.com/975019839?fl=pl&fe=sh>



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**Спасибо!**

**Tānan!**

**Paldies!**

**Merci beaucoup!**

**Благодарам!**

**Muito obrigado!**

**Vielen Dank!**

**Mersi!**

**Dziękuję**

**D´akujem!**

**Takk!**

**Ačiū!**

**Thanks a lot!**

**Շնորհակալություն!**

**Kiitos!**

**Ευχαριστω!**

**Dank je wel!**

**Mille grazie!**

**¡Muchas gracias!**

**Faleminderit!**

**Hvala!**

**Grazzi!**

**Tak!**

**Děkuji!**