

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

This chapter consists of the results jointly collected from the survey and the case study, which provides data on at least 30+ secondary pupils – and for certain topics up to 66 pupils – with communication disorders. The reason for the variation in sample number is that more generalised data was received back from education authorities. Other data could only have feasibly targeted a specifically known group (for example MCDU parents.) There is also a short section on results for research question one, which draws partly from literature, partly from questionnaires.

Collation of Data

In order to collate data from questionnaires, interviews and case study findings in a useful way, I have sub-divided those targeted into three groups.

Group One (sent Questionnaire One) referred to nineteen pupils who were identified as being high functioning autistic or Asperger, in other local authority areas, but not in units or bases. This group provided mainly quantitative, partly qualitative data (it also provided me with the Report on Gaelic Medium Education in Highland Region). Because those who responded were dealing with the situation as they found it, they were not influential policy-makers in MFL experience for this group, having other areas of equal responsibilities. Questions and therefore answers were less in-depth.

Group Two (sent Questionnaire Two) referred to 36 pupils, known to be in autism-specific bases or units attached to secondary schools. Six bases were sent the questionnaire – four were returned usefully completed, one was not returned (new base) and one communicated by telephone. This questionnaire produced more qualitative than quantitative data and allowed additional interesting comparison (beyond remit of this study) into other factors such as intake of a wider autistic population and those with additional impairments (ADHD) as well as the ratio of pupils to teachers.

Group Three (sent Questionnaire Three) were specifically the MCDU pupils and their parents (see Case Study) – the eleven current pupils in MCDU.

The maximum number of pupils referred to in this study was 66 pupils. Some of the data refers to smaller numbers, which are explained as they occur.

As a starting point, I ascertained the number in the total group who currently were learning a foreign language and additionally where those who were learning MFL had their MFL lesson.

Figure 1 below shows that the majority was learning one (French) and that it was most likely to be in a mainstream class with support. A smaller percentage were having lessons in a base, perhaps due to few bases existing across Scotland and having no specialist MFL teacher for base-teaching, rather than an actual preference for mainstreaming in MFL.

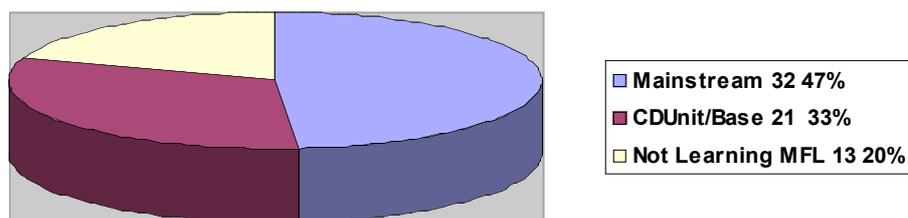


Figure 1 Overview of MFL learning for CD pupils.

Exploration as to why the remainder of these 66 pupils, 13, are not learning a MFL is beyond the remit of this study. However, the fact that one autism-specific unit does not offer MFL at all is relevant to research question one and will be discussed in the final chapter. Other reasons were because they have already completed basic level or certification in MFL, or asked to be withdrawn because of barriers arising.

Barriers

All groups were able to identify barriers in the MFL classroom. Some were mentioned as significant by two groups, some by three.

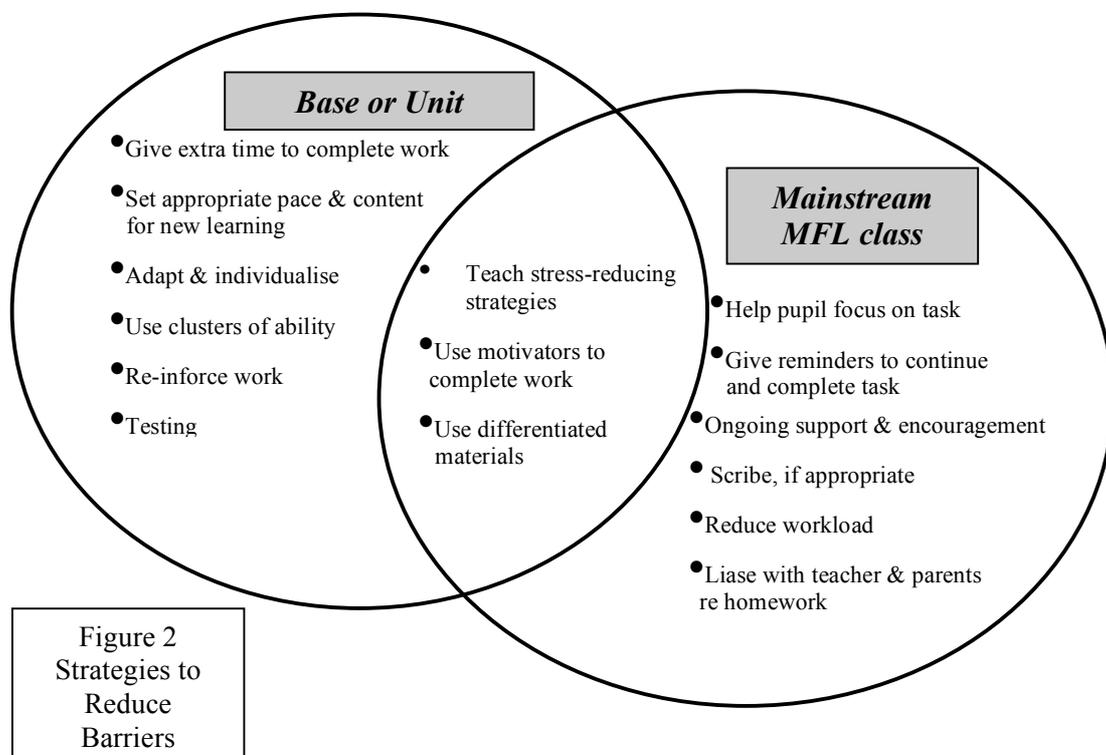
The core social deficit of autism is highlighted as one problem area, as was difficulty with transitions. A reluctance to speak the MFL and a problem with the pace of the mainstream class were identified which may be related to the other problem area – of inappropriate classroom behaviour.

All the groups found that there were difficulties in learning MFL emanating from dyslexia and low cognitive ability within this population. As these both can occur without autism, they are not autism-specific barriers, and one or other might not be present at all in another group of high functioning CD pupils. The lack of concentration and high stress level are probably one and the same barrier for many of this population, although a lack of interest was cited as a reason for little concentration. The high stress level noted by all three groups as a barrier will be discussed further in the next section.

Strategies to reduce barriers

Groups were asked to consider their strategies for reducing barriers and where they would use them.

The findings are presented in Figure 2 below. Some of the strategies were used in either the base or mainstream, but a few were applicable to both locations.



They were also asked whether these strategies were successful. Results are shown below in Figure 3

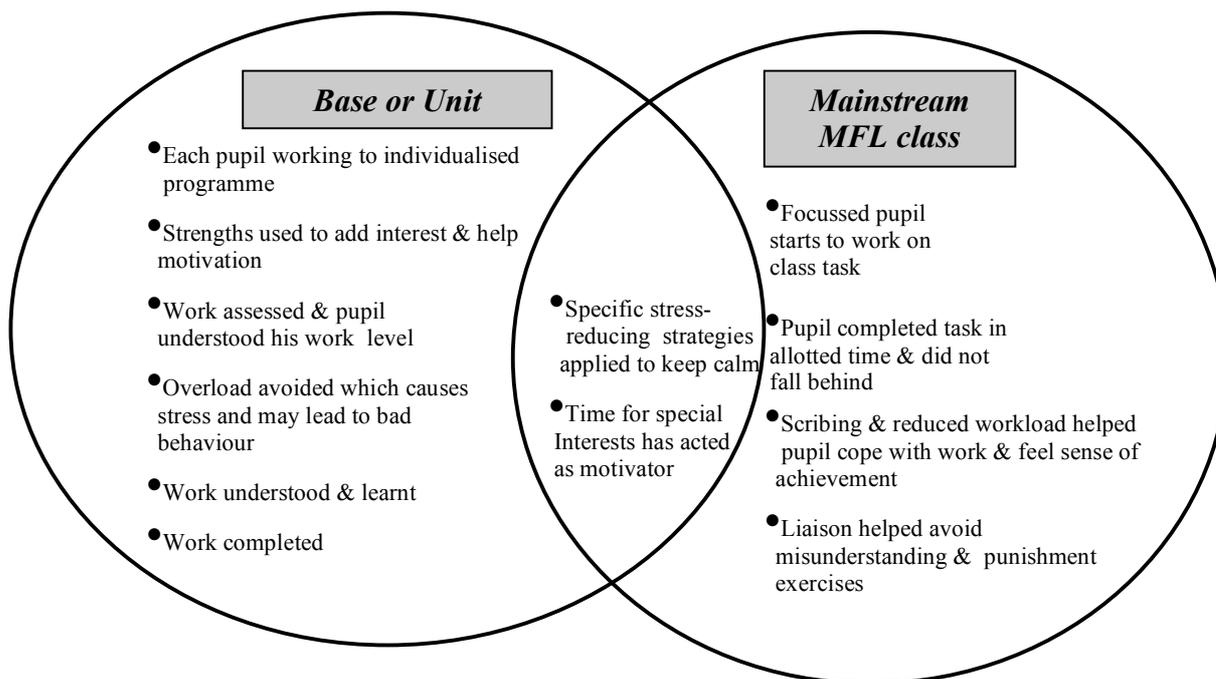


Figure 3
Are strategies shown in Fig. 2 useful?

Again, strategies were seen to be successful in either the base or mainstream and two were common to both locations

Dyslexia as a factor

In order to explore the experience of learning MFL for communication disordered pupils with added dyslexia, literature on the subject was considered (see literature section), questions were asked to groups one and two about numbers in this apparently “dual group”, and an interview with a dyslexia researcher carried was out. The table below shows the number of pupils with additional dyslexic difficulties in the survey.

NUMBERS OF PUPILS WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDER/DYSLEXIA	Pupils affected	Percentage
Group 1	3 out of 19	15.8%
Group 2	2 out of 36	5.5%
Group 3	3 out of 11	27.27%
Totals	8 out of 66	12.12%

Table 1 CD pupils with additional dyslexia.

In order to investigate if barriers – and perhaps strategies – for supporting dyslexics in learning a MFL are the same, have certain common applicability or are completely different to those found in pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder, consideration was given to whether the latter share the same dyslexic barriers (as identified by Crombie & McColl, 2000), and vice-versa, whether those with dyslexia share the barriers autistic people have in accessing the curriculum.

Comparison of dyslexic and autistic barriers

Table 2 below gives the results based on findings of Crombie and McColl (2000), and also from my observations on dyslexic pupils and my complementary grid of CD learner characteristics (See Epilogue). These findings refer to the particular group in MCDU at time of research (those with high-functioning autism) and are therefore not necessarily reliable.

Barriers	Dyslexics	Autistic Spectrum [High-Functioning]
phonological processing	yes	no
memory	yes	yes (organisational issues)
auditory discrimination and perception	yes	no
sequencing	yes	no
writing	yes	sometimes
processing information	yes	sometimes
directionality	yes	sometimes
grammar / syntax	yes	no
visual discrimination and recognition	yes	no
transitions	no	yes
lack of organisation	yes (memory deficit)	yes (central coherence deficit)
difficult behaviour	not necessarily	not necessarily
reluctance to use MFL	if yes, because can't	if yes, because won't
mainstream pace	yes	yes
low cognitive ability	no	autistic - yes / maybe Asperger - no
anxiety / stress	sometimes	yes

Table 2 Comparison of common dyslexic and autistic barriers.

Additional data was gathered in the interview with a network support manager and researcher who has a special interest in dyslexia. She and another researcher have written and published articles specifically on dyslexia and learning foreign languages.

In our discussion and in most of her answers to my questions, she referred me to this literature, which contains much of practical advice for MFL teachers working with this population. When asked which secondary subjects are the hardest and easiest for dyslexic pupils, she was reluctant to commit herself, saying that it depended on the individual. However, language dependent ones would tend to be more challenging than practical or visual ones. In answer to the question whether dyslexic pupils encountered any particular problems learning a foreign language, she referred me to the dyslexia specific barriers as in table 2 above, such as phonological difficulties, short term memory, processing and so on. She also mentioned speed (of work, and organisational issues) in a mainstream class being a problem. As far as strategies are concerned, she referred me to appropriate parts of her writings, particularly mentioning the benefits of a multi-sensory approach. She felt that small teaching groups would be beneficial to this population.

In considering barriers which dyslexic and autistic spectrum pupils might exhibit, she felt that approaches suggested for those with dyslexia would probably benefit a wider at-risk population, such as CD pupils and that the strategies could be "married."

Level of cognitive ability as a significant factor

A pupil's cognitive ability level is seen as a relevant issue when exploring the MFL learning experience of a group of 66 pupils with communication disorder. It is perceived as a potential barrier in those pupils, who already have another type of impairment.

The writings of articulate Asperger adults (see literature section) suggest that high cognitive ability helped them mask their impairments and carried them through to independent adulthood. Liane Holliday Willey (1999) confirms that it was mainly her high IQ which meant her Asperger traits never completely took her over and stopped her bid for a mainstreamed life, as she puts it. In other words, cognitive ability may make a critical difference to outcome.

To test the significance of a high cognitive level, as opposed to the lower cognitive ability mentioned in questionnaire answers as a barrier, I conducted the next interview with a senior teacher in our mainstream MFL department. She has had "Barbara" (S4) in her mainstream French class since the middle of S1 without support, apart from the first week. Barbara started her education at five years in a semi-residential school for autistic children who also have challenging behaviour. She was described in reports as being an easily distressed child, with no peer group interaction, withdrawing a lot into a fantasy world. Her attention was hard to hold, she was echolalic and had quite challenging behaviour. When Barbara came to the MCDU, she was clearly a very able girl and worked much faster than the other four in her French class at that time. For most of our pupils, learning French in a small group with a specialist teacher has seemed more beneficial to them than mainstream. However, it was felt that Barbara would cope with the pace of a mainstream French class, and she was integrated after only one term in the MCDU French class.

When I asked this teacher to describe Barbara's current level, she described her thus:

- Credit level pupil, working towards Standard grade (2002,) likely to get grade 1. (The top grade)
- At end of S3, second top in whole year, (227 pupils,) and missed MFL prize by 1 mark.

I asked her about any barriers or problems that Barbara seemed to have in her class. Her answers were as follows. She felt there were no problems in terms of her actual learning. Barbara could occasionally misunderstand her tone of voice, taking slightest correction to be a row. Once, on arriving late when class in full swing (after coming from her music lesson) she became very flustered, and interrupted the lesson to get her instructions. Her social interaction is impaired but improving. She feels Barbara is still on the social fringe of a good class. Barbara finds the five minutes at the end of each class – when pupils pack up and chat – the hardest to cope with.

We considered the specific potential barriers of questionnaires one and two. Her answers were as follows.

- No reluctance to speak MFL. Quite the opposite – she has no self-consciousness

- Definitely no cognitive problem, she is able to give extended and intelligent answers beyond what is required.
- Well organised (apparently), homework done.
- Concentrates well.
- No dyslexic difficulties.
- Anxiety sometimes apparent, but usually quite well hidden.
- No difficulty in getting started or finished. The teacher added that her lessons have a totally predictable structure.

Overall, this teacher felt that the MFL has been beneficial for Barbara because “she’s highly intelligent and very good linguistically.” As her teacher, she felt that she hadn’t had to do anything very different for Barbara – just remind herself sometimes that her occasional inappropriate behaviour didn’t warrant the row another pupil would have received. She felt that Barbara had not been attention seeking, and had been a delight to teach. She was sure Barbara could carry on with MFL to a more advanced level, if she chose to.

It would be impossible to generalise from one interview with a MFL teacher in mainstream working with one very high functioning autistic girl. However, Barbara is clearly a very striking example of how there can be progress along the continuum of autistic spectrum disorders and (minimally) an interesting case of extraordinary achievement in the MFL among other subjects, given her still very obvious autism impairments. The question of level of cognitive ability will be discussed further in the next section.

The perceived value of a MFL

Another area I felt it was important to explore was the views of pupils, parents and teachers – as to what kind of learning experience the MFL is.

Firstly, in order to find out how valuable or otherwise a learning experience for CD pupils the MFL may be, teachers in Group Two (35 pupils) were asked to rate, on a scale of one – ten, their agreement or disagreement that on balance it is beneficial for these pupils. The findings showed that there was some agreement at least that it is beneficial, three giving five, one eight and one, ten points. Some noted it was very beneficial if a pupil was interested and motivated, but if not, it was useless and stressful. Others felt pupils had received a high level of support in their new unit, which might not be possible in the future, and that MFL could therefore become more stressful experience.

The enthusiasts felt this subject broadens experience and increases awareness of other peoples and cultures so is beneficial and that it can be easier for some CD pupils to communicate using another voice or persona. One drew attention to the fact that she felt it depended entirely on the level of cognitive ability and that for those of lower ability it was not a valuable experience.

Secondly, parents and pupils in Group Three were asked on questionnaire three whether they felt French was a useful addition to the subjects studied S1 – 4. Most parents discussed this at home with the pupils before filling in the questionnaire. 10 parents answered in the affirmative, one answered maybe.

Group three parents and pupils were asked what their reasons for this might be. They were asked to pick possible reasons from a list (as many as they wanted) or to add their own. The results were as follows, based on responses from 11 MCDU parents / pupils

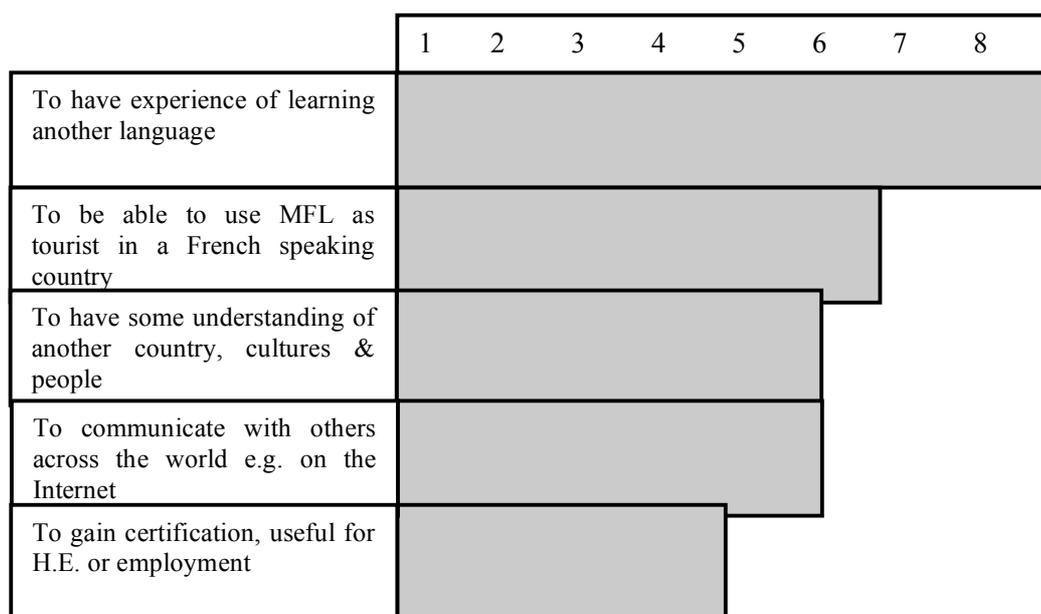


Figure 3 Reasons for CD pupils to learn MFL.

Group 3 parents were also asked if they felt French was harder than all other subjects or the same in level of difficulty to other non-practical subjects. All respondents answered French to be the same as other non-practical subjects. These responses included those coming from parents of dual CD / dyslexic pupils.

When asked if they would encourage their children to continue learning any language after standard grade or Access certification in S.4, six answered that they would encourage them, five answered that they didn't know. None answered a definite no.

Group Three parents were asked to select ten subjects from this list of 14, and rank them in importance for their son's or daughter's future prospects and needs:

Mathematics	Computing	Drama	History	Home economics
Physical Education	English	Geography	Business studies	Religious Education
Social/community skills	French	Technical	Science	

The results are summarised in the figure below. (1 ranks highest to 14 lowest).

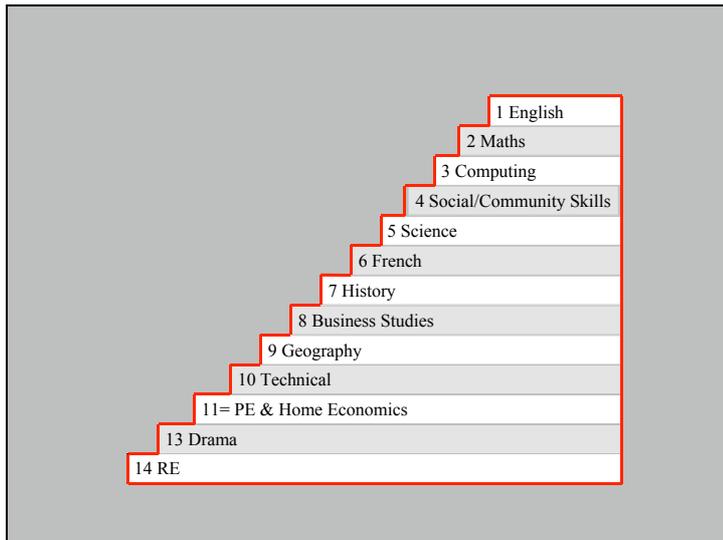


Figure 4 Result of survey into MCDU pupils' subject priorities.

This concludes the findings from the questionnaires.

DATA COLLECTION FOR RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

In order to explore the criteria used to decide at the appropriate starting age who does or does not learn a second language (research question one) I collected data from legislation, literature, reports and the survey.

As this paper is concerned with those who have a communication disorder on the autistic spectrum, a starting point for this section is the charter for persons with autism. This was adopted as a written declaration by the European Parliament in 1996 and its guiding principle is that people with autism should share the same rights and privileges enjoyed by all of the European population. Its third declaration is for: “The right of people with autism to accessible and appropriate education”. Although this is not binding legislation, one might expect its declarations to be heeded five years on.

The Standards in Scotland’s Schools Act (2000) states that every child of school age should receive from its local council an education in a mainstream inclusive setting. It also states that education in a segregated special school would only be appropriate in exceptional circumstances. The local authority must therefore provide an education that will develop:

“The personality, talent, mental and physical ability of the young person to their fullest ability” (sections 1 – 2). This is confirmed in the Glasgow City Council’s report “Impact of disability on children, young people and families” (2001) which considers inclusive mainstream education as appropriate for almost all children of school age (amongst its other recommendations).

The question of how much time on MFL learning each school aged child is entitled to, was considered by the Scottish Executive’s Action Group on Languages (2000). The Scottish Executive’s Education Department (SEED) in 2001 has now endorsed these findings. Each child will have an entitlement of five hundred hours of MFL instruction, most likely beginning in earnest in Primary 6, and possibly being completed earlier than the current S4. The object of these recommendations is not only to build on what has been achieved since the introduction of compulsory

languages in 1989, but also to allow teachers more flexibility of time-scale, rather than a diminishing of the MFL experience. The education minister has stated that all pupils should have “a progressive and coherent experience” of language learning, the exception being those individuals who have a specific learning difficulty.

The criteria for decisions as to who should learn a MFL are thus clearly stated, and the group being researched does not appear from this description to be excluded. Very possibly there will be further clarification of those who may be excepted. To date, where doubt on this issue has arisen, local councils have looked to the Nine Considerations section for “Exceptional withdrawal from modern language learning in mainstream school”, published in 1997 in relation to the “Europe, Language Learning and Special Educational Needs” project (SOEID 1994-96).

The main points of the project, relevant to this research, are that pupils are entitled to an MFL course that suits their needs, which will normally be in an integrated classroom setting. Pupils should aim for Standard Grade, but consideration should also be given to alternative assessments (and languages), for example, Access 3. As failure is a huge barrier to success, ways to increase motivation need to be tried. Before withdrawal from this subject is contemplated, the MFL department would need to prove that every possible step had been taken to evaluate, then meet, the pupil’s needs. There could be justification in withdrawing pupils with significant difficulties in literacy and language, and this would appear to be the point reinforced by the Education Minister recently. However, this should not be undertaken lightly as re-integration into MFL can be tricky, and all extra support methods and strategies would need to be explored first, in consultation with the Learning Support department.

It would appear, therefore, that high-functioning pupils with a communication disorder on the autistic spectrum will continue to be entitled to a foreign language, and there would appear no justification from all the above recommendations of the last five years to except the pupils in the group researched from an entitlement of five hundred hours of MFL teaching.

A parallel situation arose in Highland Council, who have implemented immersion programmes in some of their schools, the Gaelic Medium Education programme (GME). In a report by Highland Council on the issue of withdrawal of certain pupils who might have particular difficulty in accessing the curriculum delivered this way, it was recommended that pupils who have pronounced and severe speech and language, sensory or communication difficulties, should not enter the programme. Once again, this would appear to exclude these high-functioning autistic pupils from withdrawal. The report also recommended that pupils who were having difficulty with GME because of dyslexia should have the content reduced to speaking only, which could then be supported in the home environment. This is, however, in contrast to Swansea education authority in Wales, which is highly committed to the inclusion of those with dyslexia in their Welsh medium immersion programme in schools. By using multi-sensory strategies, they have achieved considerable success with this group, once the pupils have cracked the code of what is apparently a largely phonetic language. Crombie & McColl (2000) working in Scotland have made similar findings about the value of multi-sensory techniques in learning the MFL.

In Chapter Six, I will try to evaluate the extent to which these legal guidelines and recommendations are being put into practice in schools and CDUs across Scotland.