

NCELP's Proposed Schemes of Work: Rationale, Scope, and Key Principles

(Part 1: Key Stage 3)

This document describes the principles and processes that informed NCELP's schemes of work (SoW). Our SoW are proposed as principled examples of how language knowledge and practice can be sequenced and re-visited to support progression in the early stages of language development within a low exposure foreign language setting.

This document should be read in conjunction with the documents that provide research-informed rationales for the content: [Phonics](#); Vocabulary, the documents '[Frequency lists, rationale and uses](#)' and '[Focusing on the verb lexicon](#)'; Grammar, the documents '[What determines the difficulty of grammar](#)' and '[Principles for teaching grammar](#)'; and '[Meaningful practice](#)', for further information about the complexities involved in laying out a sequence of teaching.

At the time of writing, we felt that, as a national centre, we had to assume very little knowledge in each language on arrival in year 7, given the mixed picture of primary FL provision and transition arrangements. But we **strongly** emphasise that individual schools should check phonics, vocabulary and grammar knowledge of pupils arriving in year 7, and build on this knowledge (including knowledge about English) wherever possible.

Scope and Resourcing the SoW

To date, NCELP is resourcing its SoW starting with years 7 and 8 (and providing a small number of resources for other levels too). Assuming NCELP continues, it will be possible to teach the SoW using principally NCELP resources. But these resources could be complemented by judicious and *explicitly principled* selection of material from current commercially available resources (such as textbooks), and other resources and learning opportunities online and face-to-face.

NCELP resources could also be used to support other SoW, if those SoW can also be justified by research-informed notions and principles like those provided in other NCELP documents.

Key Principles Underpinning the Development of the SoW

Principle 1) Rate of progress

Our SoW aim to avoid introducing too much language too fast. For the majority of learners aged 11-13, introducing no more than one new main grammatical function every two weeks is likely to set sufficient amount of 'desirable difficulty'. This takes into account the other content and practice requirements: vocabulary, phonics, and the sequencing of practice in modes and modalities that one feature needs, as well as planned revisiting (see Principle 4). In terms of vocabulary, the SoW include no more than ten new words each week, and sometimes fewer words are introduced to facilitate the use of previously learnt language in different contexts. Phonics knowledge, starting within single symbol-sound correspondences (SSC) is built slowly and carefully lesson by lesson through introduction, consolidation and development activities.

Principle 2) The nature of the 'explicit spine'.

NCELP proposes an explicit spine of grammar and high frequency vocabulary. It is not driven by a need to cover pre-determined topics or communicative functions via a holistic approach to sentences, but rather via a focus on the functions of grammar. Although topics are not the explicit driver, our schemes cluster together small, feasible sets of vocabulary, from *all parts of speech* (nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions) that are likely to belong to one, broadly-conceived semantic field. That is, tightly topic-based vocabulary is not at the fore but, rather, an

overt recognition that grammar is one of the key markers of progression, as well as increasing breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge.

Principle 3) Content coverage: Knowledge and practice.

Our SoW are driven by the need to focus on three main bodies of knowledge and provide ample meaningful practice.

i) Phonics

Phonics feature initially in the SoW as regular and frequent short bursts of practice of one or two SSC. This knowledge is then developed through integration with other activities. This might be as it arises in lessons (e.g., encouraging pupils to read aloud, especially unfamiliar words) or in planned aspects of vocabulary and grammar tasks. For example, many of the grammar activities draw on phonics knowledge (e.g., the difference in meaning between 'ai' and 'a' in French).

ii) Vocabulary

NCELP SoW address the *what* and the *how* of vocabulary learning. Vocabulary selection is based on word frequency and informed additionally by a meticulous scrutiny of the awarding body vocabulary lists. Small sets of words from different parts of speech, including the most common verbs, allow students to manipulate verbs and regularly create their own sentences. Our SOW aim to maximise the number of encounters with new language to establish it first, and therefore emphasise the importance of 'out of class' vocabulary learning and pre-learning, using the most reliable (freely available) [online tools](#). In class, students often work in pairs or small groups to consolidate and extend their word knowledge. Structured opportunities for learners to personalise their vocabulary and make meaning are also an important feature.

iii) Grammar

The grammar spine is not driven by traditional 'paradigms' (e.g., full sets of verb, article or adjectival agreements, all at once). However, in its totality the grammar spine will cover the full range of features for persons, subjects, tenses, and aspectual functions ('complete' versus 'ongoing'), and a range of key syntax (word order and relations between words) over time. For example, after the introduction of high frequency verbs (in their infinitive and 'short' forms), small sets of meaningful grammatical features will be introduced and practised (such as expressing the present versus the past in the first person singular). Sets of grammatical functions are brought together every so *often*. For example, after a number of practice sequences have been undertaken, each focusing on pairs of features, a slightly wider planned set of features might be drawn together as required for some activities.

iv) Meaningful practice

Opportunities are built in to the SoW to provide plenty of practice, at different levels of control (structure and support) and spontaneity, in all modes and modalities. The aim of practice is to establish the knowledge of phonics, vocabulary and grammar that is required to understand or express meaning. First, this requires plentiful practice in understanding the new language. These practice activities are carefully designed to ensure that students pay close attention to the meaning and function of words, parts of words (morphology), and relations between words (syntax). Gradually, practice extends to production, which requires learners to recall language and manipulate it to communicate where there is a genuine 'information gap'.

Principle 4) Revisiting and regular knowledge and progression checks

The SoW explicitly builds in the planned re-visiting of language (Phonics, Vocabulary, Grammar). Each classroom resource supporting the SoW also aims to explicitly recognise the language that is required to undertake it, that is: which language will/should be familiar, which will require brief re-visiting, and which will be new and so require introduction and heavy support.

NCELP has taken as guiding principles that revisiting must be: frequent enough to prevent forgetting; spaced enough so that recall is challenging; and systematically planned into the SoW so that it happens. At time of writing, NCELP is building in four 'broad types' of re-visiting: within about a week; within about a month; within about a term; within a year.

Grammar features and high-frequency vocabulary are recycled in new semantic fields and different contexts, which strengthens the knowledge base.

Thorough planning of revisiting in the SoW facilitates regular, low-stakes knowledge checks (informal tests). These are supported by strategic use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) tools, both pre- and post-lesson.

Process for developing the NCELP SoW

First, we drew on research that was relevant to a foreign language context with limited exposure time, which indicated the need to establish bodies of knowledge (Phonics, Vocabulary, Grammar) and to engage this knowledge during meaningful practice. This then drove the creation of a wide range of resources. Presenting and discussing these resources with teachers in the NCELP network informed our thinking, including feedback about perceived positive effects and challenges. These emerging resources and discussions shaped our thinking about what NCELP could confidently propose in terms of a 'sequence of teaching'. We drew on research about the complex nature of language development and the effects of iterative practice. Thus, we recognise that our proposed SoW are not the 'only solution' to the sequencing of language within a time-constrained curriculum.

Our thinking is in line with: (a) the [Review of MFL Pedagogy](#), a report published by the Teaching Schools Council, which drew on research into foreign language learning and teaching and on the knowledge and experience of a wide range of experienced practitioners; (b) Ofsted's current aspirations for [curriculum intent, implementation, and impact](#); and c) preparing a solid foundation for [GCSE content](#) and examinations, which builds on the core grammar and vocabulary outlined in the programmes of study for Key Stages 2 and 3.

Concluding remark

The most important message is perhaps that a 'flip' in planning may be required, so that content and practice both inside and outside the classroom reflect the notion that language development is helped by ensuring a robust foundation of knowledge, in a context with limited exposure to the language.