

skills are taught by non-research staff, and there is hardly any place for teaching about the language – about its history, its varieties, its structure, or even its link to culture.

At the same time, he argues that language departments are important because the country needs expertise in languages, but without asking how the study of literature or culture may promote expertise and interest in language. The joined-up thinking that he calls for surely suggests a rather simple answer to the problems of both the language departments and the nation.

If language departments really were departments of language, their identity would be clearer and the nation would see how important they were in language education.

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As simple as ABC...

Michael Worton finds a lack of a “clear and compelling identity for modern foreign languages” (“Speak up to keep languages alive, review says”, 22 October). He also notes a recent change of identity, with the traditional focus on ancient and modern literature being replaced by modern cultural studies. Oddly, he doesn’t mention the most obvious focus of all for a language department: language. Some innovative departments take language seriously, but in most departments language

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