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SUMMARY

September 2015

Analysis of the foreign language skills requirements of French employers

The survey report, 'Analysis of French employers' foreign language skills requirements' is one of the main outcomes of the 2014-2015 LEMP (Languages and Employability) project, led by a consortium of agencies (French Education Ministry, CIEP, Céreq-IREDU, Onisep and CCI France) and jointly funded by the European Commission.

As part of this exercise, several surveys were conducted and cross-referenced. The first quantitative section of the study used an online survey to give insight into the methods of assessing the skills of applicants, the use of

languages in the workplace, the role of languages in recruitment, international mobility, careers and training. The responses of 801 companies were enriched with a second qualitative survey of 14 business leaders giving their experiences of current issues and their personal and professional viewpoints on foreign language skills. Moreover, a third study in May-June 2014 which analysed 1529 job vacancies advertised on public employment service websites (Pôle emploi and Apec), identified employers' language skills requirements.

What do these surveys tell us?



FOREIGN LANGUAGES: AN ASSET FOR RECRUITMENT, CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AND PROMOTION

One in two businesses seeks out foreign language skills when hiring candidates according to a survey of businesses. Where two applicants are equally qualified, the linguistic criterion gives the edge.

Although English cannot be overlooked, the survey analysing job vacancies advertised by public employment services showed that proficiency in two foreign languages are asked for in the case of two out of five vacancies where language skills are a requirement. An interview conducted in the foreign language is the preferred method of checking the applicant's ability, and is used by two thirds of businesses.

Half of all businesses state that they frequently take into account international experiences of mobility in the recruitment phase whereas only 19% state that their employees are regularly mobile. Geographical mobility depends on the size of the business and the scope of its operations: one third of businesses with over 250 employees and 20% of businesses with 10 to 49 employees report frequent travel overseas.

English is top of the list of languages used in the workplace, with German, Spanish and Italian just behind.

The need for greater linguistic diversity is clear as 21 foreign languages are cited by businesses. 22 languages are included by employers in the vacancies advertised by the public employment services (Pôle emploi and Apec).

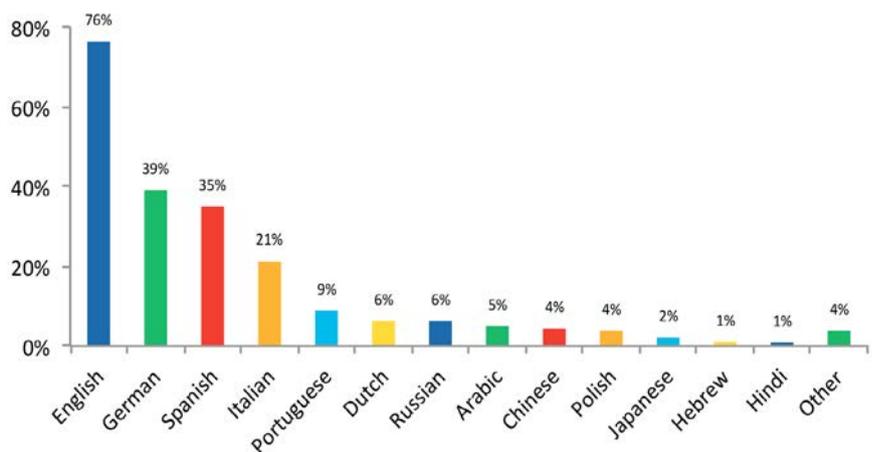
'If you don't speak English you can't have an international career and by giving your career an international dimension, you are able to get more senior, better-paid very interesting jobs.'

CEO of a health-social welfare company with fewer than 10 employees.

'When I left school with a BTS advanced vocational certificate, English was something I enjoyed in my mechanical studies. I started work in the factory and began my career in the production unit. The company expanded internationally and, with my knowledge of English, I had the opportunity to travel with my boss as technical support. If I didn't speak English, I wouldn't have the job I have today. I went from being a technician in the production unit to the process planning department, I was head of the process planning department and now I'm commercial director.'

Commercial director of an industrial firm with 50 to 249 employees

LANGUAGES THE MOST USED IN THE WORKPLACE



Interpretation: 39% of respondent businesses cite German as a workplace language.

Source: enquête DGESCO-CCI France, 2014, analyse Céreq-IREDU.

Languages are crucial for staff employability. Promotion, mobility, but also pay are the main ways in which language skills affect the careers of staff, according to half of business. Foreign languages help employees to access senior positions and favour mobility. Analysis of the 1529 national employment service vacancies suggests that foreign languages boost the chances of accessing stable and better paid employment.

VERBAL AND WRITTEN FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS

At every level of the company, staff may need to speak one or more languages, mainly in the case of executives and senior management (57% and 59%), but also white-collar workers and technicians (48% and 41%) and blue-collar workers (8%). Language requirements vary from one job to another, but also from one department to another. Sales and business development departments (61%), customer services departments (51%) and purchasing departments (45%) are those with the most use for foreign languages.

Analysis of national employment service vacancies shows that the need to use a language increases with the job grade, qualifications and number of years of experience in the labour market. Job vacancies show that a high level of proficiency is required by recruiters in the case of both the first and second foreign languages.

Most businesses use both spoken and written languages ; requiring reading comprehension, written expression (drafting emails, orders etc.), listening (telephone conversations etc.) and oral expression (speaking, presentations etc.). All social and occupational categories need a command of written and spoken languages in the workplace.

Although executives and senior managers use foreign languages in all of their written and spoken forms, technicians, white and blue-collar workers all make use of written and verbal skills too. Technicians and white-collar workers use languages mainly for communicating on the telephone (68%) and receiving and sending email (68%). As for blue-collar workers, they mainly come to use the foreign language when operating software and web programs (32%), working overseas (28%) and working as part of a team (26%).

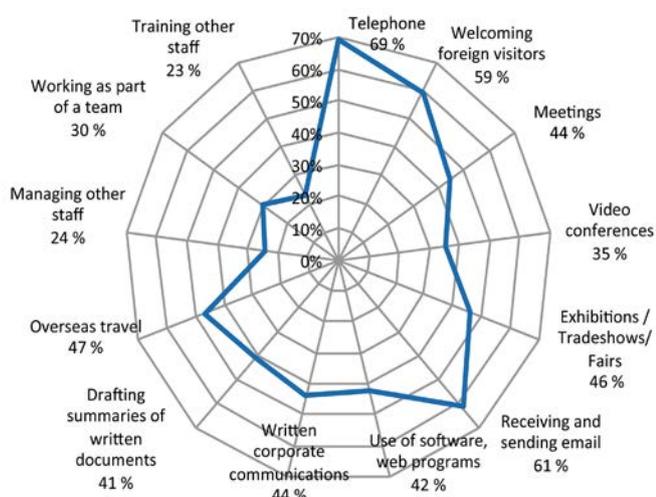
'90% of the company's business is aimed at the export market and English, as a universal language, is used for all positions, from the worker taking delivery from foreign carriers, to the executive working on exports and support staff in the case of other operations (marketing, overseas trade fairs, foreign trade etc.)'

HR Director for a service company with fewer than 50 employees

'All business sectors are affected. They can seek out machines, techniques, products and ideas overseas. All staff work with customers, not just the sales team, whether when answering the phone or conveying simple information.'

CEO of an industrial company with fewer than 10 employees.

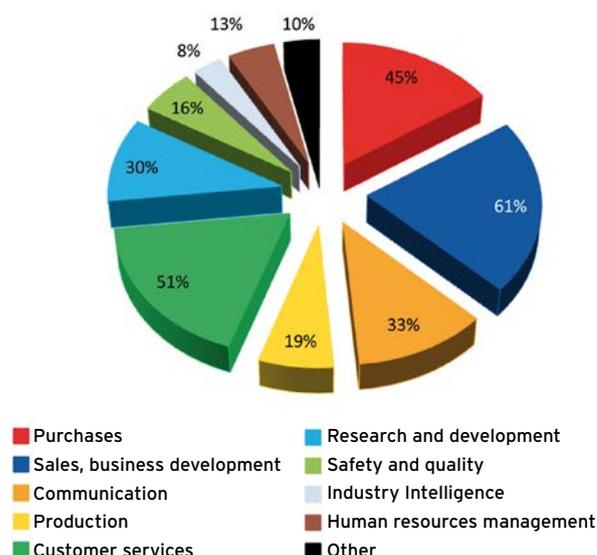
MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE WORKPLACE



Interpretation : 69% of respondents cited the telephone (for at least one category of employees).

NB: percentages add up to more than 100% as multiple answers were permitted.
Source : enquête DGESCO-CCI France, 2014, analyse Céreq-IREDU.

DEPARTMENTS WITH A MORE SPECIFIC USE OF LANGUAGES



Interpretation : 45% of respondents cited purchasing as the company department with the most specific use for foreign languages.

Source : enquête DGESCO-CCI France, 2014, analyse Céreq-IREDU.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES: VALUE-ADDED FOR BUSINESSES

'In general, languages = training = skills = quality. It's important to be able to get out of your comfort zone, to adapt...in short to be less Gallic and more European.'

HR Director for an industrial company with fewer than 10 employees

'Speaking a foreign language is a means of raising your profile and understanding the expectations of other European countries without having to use a go-between.'

Employment, Training and Development manager for a major industrial firm

'Young graduates are still not proficient enough in languages, although we are seeing an improvement. It is a problem that affects first and foremost those not educated to degree level.'

Director for an industrial company with fewer than 50 employees

'I think we would have trouble doing without foreign languages within the group; I feel it's necessary to embrace this way of working involving open-mindedness, research, understanding with other partner countries.'

Director of Human Resources for a major service company

'We have technicians with a BTS advanced vocational certificate in the process planning department and these people are currently taking classes to improve so as to communicate with customers about technical problems by email or telephone. Of course this is a strong point and increases staff productivity.'

Commercial director of an industrial firm with 50 to 240 employees

A **lmost 70% of respondent businesses say that employees with language skills are an asset for the business.** This added-value takes many forms with an emphasis on commerce (import-exports, marketing), communications (developing foreign trade, promoting customer loyalty), a better understanding of and approach to foreign customers as well as greater open-mindedness facilitating communication. Language skills show the company in a positive light.

A **third of businesses report that they have difficulties recruiting applicants with the right language skills for the job.** They say that these difficulties mainly arise from inadequacy of school and university education (60%), lack of practice or experience overseas (12%), a lack of interest in or motivation for language-learning (6%), a disconnection with the realities of the business world (7%) or insufficient language diversity.

A **lmost a quarter of businesses run regular language courses for their staff to improve communication within the company and overseas. The bigger the company and the scope of its operations, the more frequent the courses.** Classes held one-on-one or in small groups are preferred as they seem more suitable for employees wishing to progress quickly.

Almost 16% of businesses (mainly those with international or European operations) are implementing a strategy to develop languages within the company.

It is about improving communication (facilitating relations with foreign interlocutors, being quicker and more effective etc.), promoting personal skills development (increasing range of skills, helping staff to feel more at ease with a foreign language etc.), to become more professional (making staff more autonomous and responsive, increasing productivity etc.) and, ultimately, contributing to the company's standing (business development overseas, entering new markets etc.)