

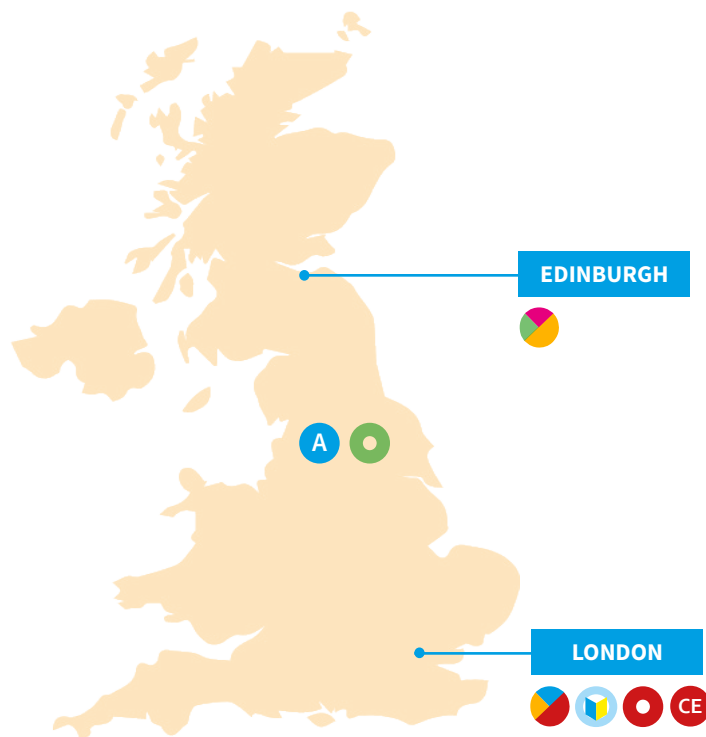









**2024**

The world learns  
**Spanish**

**UNITED KINGDOM**

# Introduction



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|---|--|---|
|  Education Office        |  ALCE: Spanish Language and Cultural Heritage Programme   |  Spanish School      |
|  Education Advisers      |  ALCE: Spanish Language and Cultural Heritage Centre (25) |  Language Assistants |
|  Spanish Resource Centre |  |   |
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Numerous studies indicate that in the United Kingdom, proficiency in foreign languages is crucial to foster productivity and the economy. However, the foreign language skills of the British population are insufficient to meet the needs of society. The decline in the number of students enrolled in foreign language courses in secondary and higher education, combined with the removal of the mandatory requirement to study a language from the age of 14, has exacerbated the situation. Additionally, Brexit has reduced student motivation and decreased school exchanges with other countries.

The British government has implemented measures to improve language teaching, such as reforming language exams and creating the National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE). These initiatives aim to increase the number of students choosing to learn a language beyond the age of 14 and improve motivation for studying foreign languages.

Spanish has experienced continuous growth in the British educational system, especially in comparison with other languages like French or German. It is the most studied foreign language in A-level exams and is gaining ground in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams, with an increasing number of students taking exams in this language. Furthermore, Spanish teaching has spread across both public and private primary schools, particularly in Northern Ireland.

The growth of Spanish in British primary education is slower than in secondary education and A Levels due to several factors. Firstly, French has traditionally been the predominant foreign language at this stage, and its deep-rooted presence in the education system, along with the wide availability of resources and trained teachers, makes the introduction of Spanish more challenging. Despite the increasing interest in our language, the lack of specialised Spanish teachers and the difficulty of retraining French teachers pose a significant obstacle. Moreover, in primary education, languages are often taught by generalist teachers with limited training in foreign languages, further slowing the expansion of Spanish. Lastly, the flexibility of the curriculum allows schools to choose which language to teach, favouring the continued dominance of French in many institutions and restricting the progress of Spanish at this educational stage.

The British educational system faces a challenge due to the shortage of qualified language teachers. The Languages Teacher Training Scholarship (LTTS) programme seeks to attract new teachers, especially in Spanish, and the Embassy Education Office has intensified its efforts to support Spanish teaching through various initiatives and in collaboration with British universities.

The main advancements in Spanish language teaching in the United Kingdom in the last two years are as follows:

- In 2023, the NCLE was launched to support the promotion of Spanish and improve teacher training with the goal of increasing the number of students beyond the age of 14 and those taking foreign language exams at GCSE level.
- The LTTS programme, managed by the British Council, has attracted many applicants interested in qualifying as Spanish teachers, with close collaboration with the Education Office.
- Between 2022 and 2024, the Education Office has increased its training offerings, benefiting an average of 120 British teachers per month through continuous professional development (CPD) programmes in Spanish.

## Spanish in the Education System

In global terms, as already emphasized, the evolution of language teaching figures in the United Kingdom is quite alarming. Spanish is not immune to this reality and has also been affected by the decline in the number of secondary students studying a language. However, unlike French and German—the other two main foreign languages in the UK education system—Spanish has managed to withstand the downturn more effectively.

In fact, at certain levels and in specific regions, Spanish has already become the first foreign language, and overall, it shows signs of progress that suggest this trend will soon extend to all levels and regions of the United Kingdom.

The 2023 edition of the ‘Language Trends’ report, published by the British Council, highlights that Spanish has solidified its position as the foreign language of choice for high school students in England, as it has ranked first in A-level (Advanced Level) exams for the fifth consecutive year. According to this report, this trend is expected to continue in the coming years.

The following table shows the evolution in England of the three main foreign languages in national exams at the end of the equivalent of high school (A-level):

|         | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| French  | 9422 | 9332 | 8646 | 8539 | 7874 | 7607 | 7557 | 7671 | 7347 | 6463 |
| Spanish | 6998 | 7941 | 7702 | 7813 | 7591 | 7932 | 8033 | 8433 | 8496 | 7464 |
| German  | 3953 | 3791 | 3573 | 3422 | 2859 | 2864 | 2666 | 2507 | 2646 | 2198 |

In the GCSE exams, at the end of compulsory secondary education, a significant improvement has also occurred. Between 2011 and 2023, the number of English students choosing Spanish has doubled, and the figures are now nearly on par with those of French.

|         | 2014    | 2015    | 2016    | 2017    | 2018    | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| French  | 157 175 | 147 356 | 134 420 | 121 095 | 117 925 | 122 803 | 124 404 | 124 739 | 122 746 | 125 151 |
| Spanish | 87 836  | 85 217  | 87 136  | 85 184  | 89 577  | 96 811  | 104 280 | 108 982 | 107 488 | 120 198 |
| German  | 57 513  | 51 986  | 47 756  | 41 762  | 42 509  | 41 222  | 40 748  | 36 933  | 34 966  | 33 677  |

Since 2021, Spanish has held the top position in Northern Ireland for GCSE exams. Considering that it was precisely in this region where Spanish took the lead in A-levels, the fact that it has also reached the top spot in GCSE exams predicts a trend that is likely to spread across the entire United Kingdom.

|         | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| French  | 5852 | 5533 | 5179 | 4709 | 4301 | 3924 | 3681 | 3567 | 3151 | 3010 |
| Spanish | 3490 | 3734 | 3593 | 3877 | 3817 | 3254 | 3583 | 3683 | 3573 | 3479 |
| German  | 1158 | 1044 | 1162 | 937  | 1050 | 677  | 835  | 692  | 706  | 557  |

In Scotland, both in the National 5 exams (equivalent to GCSEs) and in the Advanced Highers at the end of high school, Spanish has followed a generally upward trend and is very close to becoming the most popular choice. This situation has already occurred in the final exams usually taken in the course equivalent to the first year of high school: in 2023, Spanish became the most chosen language by Higher students.

The table below shows the evolution of the three main foreign languages in Scotland's national Higher exams.

|         | 2016  | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| French  | 4581  | 3918 | 3780 | 3417 | 3167 | 3177 | 2498 | 2282 |
| Spanish | 2600  | 2809 | 2795 | 3054 | 2902 | 3016 | 2463 | 2604 |
| German  | 1.019 | 890  | 817  | 787  | 780  | 716  | 504  | 520  |

In addition to the final exams, Spanish has also significantly improved its position in the offerings of educational institutions. In primary education, Spanish is taught in 30% of English schools and in 44% of Welsh schools; in Scotland, where the teaching of two languages in primary school is included, this figure reaches 48%; and in Northern Ireland, although language teaching is not compulsory at the primary level, more than half of schools have chosen to include it voluntarily, with Spanish being the most commonly selected option.

In secondary schools, the offering of Spanish is widespread: it is present in 75% of state-funded schools, a figure that rises to 93% in private schools.

The expansion of Spanish is also evident in the number of teachers. In England, the most recent statistics show that there are 9,078 Spanish teachers in state-funded schools. Similar to the trends seen in national exams, French and German have seen a reduction in both the number of teachers and teaching hours over the past decade, while Spanish has consistently shown an upward trend. The number of Spanish teachers has increased by 34%, and the number of Spanish teaching hours has risen by 68% since 2011.

In the teaching sector, many educational institutions face the annual challenge of staffing their language departments due to the lack of specialist teachers to fill vacancies. To address this, the LTTS programme offers a financial grant of £28,000 for graduates who wish to complete their training and become accredited as teachers in England. The goal is to increase the number of language teachers, which is crucial for Spanish to maintain its growth in the educational system. The Education Office, aware of the strategic role this programme plays, collaborates closely with the British Council in both promoting the call and selecting candidates for the LTTS scholarship. Additionally, selected candidates are provided with specialized training and access to the educational platforms managed by the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports: Veo en Español (streaming platform) and eLeo (digital library). In the 2024 LTTS scholarship call,

the push for Spanish is evident, as two-thirds of applicants have applied for training to become Spanish teachers, marking a substantial increase compared to previous years.

On the other hand, in post-secondary non-university education, known as Further Education, which includes all non-university education after secondary school and high school (vocational and continuing education, adult education, etc.), Spanish also holds a leading position. According to the 2023 study by the British Academy, Languages Provision in UK *Further Education*, when focusing on programmes offering language qualifications at the Entry level or as additional training (Languages for Leisure), Spanish is clearly the most popular language among British adults, being offered in 78.8% of continuing education centres.

## **Presence of languages in post-secondary non-university education (Entry Level/Languages for Leisure)**

In Higher Education, as in other stages of the British educational system, the trend in the number of students studying languages as part of their university degree is marked by a significant overall decline. According to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) data, the centralized admission system for UK universities, the two most popular languages chosen by students starting a language degree are French and Spanish, with nearly identical numbers. This joint first position of these two languages has a different interpretation for each, in contrast to the situation a decade ago. In 2012, French was clearly the leading language in British higher education, with 58% more students than the next most popular language, Spanish. Over this decade, the number of French students has followed a downward trend, with the number of students beginning French studies reducing by 51%. Spanish studies, on the other hand, now occupy a much larger proportion of foreign language degrees compared to a decade ago.

However, given that this group has significantly reduced, this reality aligns with the fact that Spanish has also experienced a decline in the number of new students, although less pronounced than in other languages—especially compared to French—yet still concerning: the number of new students enrolling in Spanish studies has decreased by 23% in the cited period.

It is undeniable that Spanish has gained significant ground in the UK: besides the proportional increase seen over French in university studies in the past decade, since 2019, it has been the most chosen language in the British high school final exams, a situation that is expected to replicate in the near future in compulsory secondary education. Thus, there is a clear rise in the number of students taking Spanish at the pre-university level. However, caution is needed, as this growth is not leading to a corresponding increase in university applications for Spanish studies.

The study *Languages Learning in Higher Education: Granular Trends*, published by the British Academy, provides a detailed analysis of language teaching at universities, showing that this decline is not uniform: while the demand for language-only studies has drastically decreased, this decrease is much more moderate in programmes combining a foreign language with a non-language subject (such as Spanish combined with economics, sustainable global development,

political studies, international relations, or even mathematics). This might reflect a shift in motivations and attitudes among new students when choosing a language as part of their educational programme. The difference could also be explained by external factors and may be related to how higher education institutions are adapting their offerings to the new times.

## Spanish International Education Programmes in the United Kingdom

The Spanish Embassy Education Office coordinates the educational programmes developed by the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training, and Sports (MEFD) in the United Kingdom, collaborates in the administration of exams for the Integrated Centre for Distance Education (CIDEAD) and other academic institutions, manages procedures such as handling inquiries and providing information about equivalences, validations, scholarships, and grants, promotes and strengthens bilateral relations, and offers educational advice and information. It also organises and participates in teacher training activities and Spanish language promotion, as well as contributes to bringing Spanish language and culture closer to teachers, Hispanists, and students, as well as anyone interested in Spain and the Spanish-speaking world.

Achieving these objectives relies on close collaboration with British authorities, organizations, and institutions. This network of collaborators includes long-established partners, as well as new ones joining to expand the reach of Spanish language training, promotion, and dissemination actions in the UK. These collaborators include national authorities and agencies, such as the relevant educational ministries in different regions, the British Council, local institutions and agencies responsible for teacher training, UK universities, and teachers' associations.

After the UK's departure from the European Union, some issues in bilateral educational collaboration have arisen, which the Education Office has analysed and studied in search of ways to maintain cooperation on terms similar to those before Brexit. As a result of this analysis, an agreement was signed in June 2023 between Spain's Ministry of Education, Vocational Training, and Sports and the UK Department for Education regarding the mutual recognition of qualifications, enabling access to university studies in both countries.

In the field of university exchanges, Brexit has also brought challenges in areas such as funding for stays and student visa processing, to which both parties are working together to find solutions. Thus, in May 2024, the British Council, in collaboration with the Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education (SEPIE), organised a meeting in Edinburgh between British and Spanish universities, with over fifty higher education institutions participating, along with the Education Office. The goal of such meetings is to explore opportunities for expanding collaboration and enhancing exchanges between higher education institutions in both countries.

| Spanish Embassy Education Office                |   |
|---|---|
| Education Advisers                              | 3 in London and 1 in Edinburgh  |
| Centres and programmes                          |   |
| Spanish Resource Centre                         | Centro de Recursos de Londres   |
| Spanish School                                  | Instituto Español Vicente Cañada Blanch   |
| Spanish Language and Culture Heritage Programme | Agrupación de Lengua y Cultura Españolas (ALCE):<br>25 venues in Greater London |
| Language assistants                             | 209 Spanish assistants in the UK<br>857 British assistants in Spain             |

## Vicente Cañada Blanch Spanish School in London

The Spanish School Vicente Cañada Blanch is a publicly owned Spanish state school that also operates as an independent school under the British education system. It follows the Spanish curriculum, offering formal education to students of all nationalities, though the majority come from Spanish-British mixed families. Situated in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London, the school employs 37 teachers, either appointed by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports (MEFD) or recruited locally. As an integrated institution, it provides high-quality education from Early Years to Sixth Form for 424 pupils aged 3 to 18.

The school's promotion plan to strengthen its reputation as a leading educational institution in the United Kingdom aims to increase the proportion of students from non-Spanish-speaking households, currently at 15%. As a multilingual and multicultural school, one of its greatest strengths is its focus on the teaching and promotion of foreign and co-official languages.

Spanish is the primary language of communication within the school, although students achieve a high level of proficiency in English, facilitated both by the school's location and the fact that several subjects are taught in English. Additionally, French is taught from primary education through to the second year of Sixth Form, and Galician is offered as an optional subject in secondary education.

Academic excellence and a strong commitment to educational quality are core values of this institution, supported by the leadership team, teaching staff, and families. This dedication has established the school as an international benchmark and a model of linguistic and cultural integration in London.

## Spanish Language and Culture Programme (ALCE)

Through the Agrupación de Lengua y Cultura Españolas (ALCE) in London, nearly 2,200 children aged 7 to 17 with Spanish origins, enrolled in the British educational system, receive supplementary

classes outside school hours aimed at enhancing their cultural and linguistic competence. In the last decade, the number of students has doubled, and London has become the largest Spanish Language and Culture school within the network of ALCE schools worldwide. Students are divided into 25 classrooms, mostly concentrated in the Greater London area, and are taught by a team of 14 Spanish teachers assigned to the UK. The London branch also manages two classrooms in Dublin.

The ALCE programme follows a hybrid model that combines in-person and online tuition. Every week, students engage in 1.5 hours of in-person lessons held Monday to Friday in British educational institutions after school hours. Additionally, they complete the equivalent duration online through the Ministry's "Aula Internacional" platform. The curriculum is divided into five progressive levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, and C1) and caters to different student profiles (mainly, Spanish as a native language or as a heritage language). Special emphasis is placed on developing social, intercultural, and autonomous learning skills in Spanish.

Upon completion of the programme, students take the Spanish Language and Culture Certificate (Certificado de Lengua y Cultura Españolas) exam, issued by the Ministry, which certifies proficiency in Spanish at the C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Since 2022, this certificate has been included in the UCAS database, the central admissions service for UK universities, which is accessible to all higher education providers in the UK via UK ENIC. Therefore, students with this certificate can submit it as part of their academic history when applying for university studies in the UK, allowing it to be considered as merit during the admission process.

## Language Assistants

The role of language assistants has a significant impact on the promotion and improvement of Spanish teaching in UK schools. The British Council is the UK body responsible for managing the programme, working closely with the Spanish Embassy Education Office, which offers support and training to over 200 Spanish language assistants.

In the 2023-24 academic year, the number of Spanish language assistants in the UK increased substantially, rising from 157 to 209. In the 2024-2025 academic year, both the number of positions and the number of schools receiving assistants increased.

The Education Office monitors the adaptation and progress of the assistants and designs a training plan to facilitate their integration into the British educational system while providing them with tools and resources for teaching Spanish. Training includes in-person sessions in London and Manchester, a session in Northern Ireland, and an online event. Some of the teaching proposals created by language assistants, based on these training meetings, are featured in the annual publication *Acti/España*. The Education Office also awards an annual prize for the best tandem between a language assistant and the Spanish department at their host school.



Spanish language assistants

## Teacher Training

Teacher training is one of the key pillars supporting the promotion, dissemination, and support of Spanish language teaching in the UK, carried out by the Education Office. To this end, in recent years, efforts have been made to enhance training actions by offering various formats — online training, which allows reaching all regions; strategically distributed in-person sessions across the country; and immersion courses — while incorporating a variety of content — methodology, digital tools, resources, and language proficiency for Spanish classes — and targeting different audiences — primary, secondary, and other educational stages. Additionally, new initiatives have been implemented, such as specific training activities for students in the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme, enabling future Spanish teachers to learn about the opportunities and resources offered by the Education Office from the very start of their training.

During the 2022-2023 academic year, more than twenty training activities were organised, benefiting around 1,200 Spanish teachers in the UK. For the 2023-2024 academic year, the number of training opportunities increased to twenty-six, with over 1,500 teachers attending. This represents one training session every two weeks, which, considering average attendance, means that every month 120 British Spanish teachers have the opportunity to receive new resources, ideas, and reflections on classroom practice.

| Teacher Training - Professional Development   |                      |         |                        |         |
|---|----------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
|   | Number of activities |         | Number of participants |         |
|   | 2022-23              | 2023-24 | 2022-23                | 2023-24 |
| British / Local teachers of Spanish   | 20                   | 26      | 1200                   | 1500    |
| Teachers from Spain associated with the programmes of the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports in the UK | 5                    | 8       | 115                    | 121     |

For the organization of in-person training activities, the Education Office collaborates closely with local institutions and agencies responsible for teacher training and participates in various workshops and other training proposals organised by different entities, including technical advisors, schools, universities, and Spanish publishers. A crucial support for holding workshops and training sessions is the network of British universities, as their collaboration provides the spaces needed for the meetings, facilitates communication during each training session about relevant topics for primary and secondary school teachers, and helps disseminate the event among schools that are part of their "Outreach" programmes. These outreach programmes are designed to motivate students from disadvantaged communities to consider higher education and provide them with the necessary tools to do so. The universities chosen for collaboration rotate to broaden the Education Office's reach, ensuring various areas and institutions benefit from this initiative. During the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years, the Education Office organised such meetings at universities such as Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester Metropolitan, Newcastle, Oxford, Portsmouth, Queen's University Belfast, St Andrews, and Strathclyde.

In London, the "Spanish Workshops" (Talleres de español) are held each June at the Vicente Cañada Blanch Spanish School. These workshops, organised by the Education Office in collaboration with the Government of Castilla y León in Spain, have a long tradition and are highly regarded by schools and Spanish teachers across the UK. The event brings together around one hundred teachers from various levels of the British educational system: primary, secondary, and higher education.

Through the programme for foreign Spanish teachers, the Ministry also provides training opportunities for British teachers on various aspects related to Spanish language teaching methodology and didactics. Due to pandemic restrictions, these courses were moved online, but since 2022, they have returned to in-person sessions, while maintaining an online parallel offer. During the summer months, selected British teachers can take part in courses held at the National University of Distance Education (UNED) centres in Ávila and Segovia or at the Menéndez Pelayo International University (UIMP) in Santander. In the last quarter of 2022 and 2023, online courses were also offered in collaboration with UNED.

Another immersion opportunity for British teachers is offered by the Government of Castilla y León for selected teachers through the Education Office. These professional development courses take place in various cities across Castilla y León during British school holidays: in summer and the October, February, and Easter breaks. In addition to didactics and cultural courses for advanced-level Spanish teachers, a new Spanish immersion training programme has been introduced for different proficiency levels. This programme combines online training with an intensive week in Castilla y León, enabling teachers with more limited language skills to improve their Spanish. Since 2022, nearly two hundred British teachers have participated annually in these immersion courses.



Teacher training

## Publications

The publications of the Education Office in the UK and Ireland are key resources in supporting Spanish language teaching. The wide range of open-access materials available to the educational community regarding Spanish and Spanish as a foreign language (ELE) in the UK offers, on the one hand, language training for students across various educational stages, and on the other hand, updates on didactics and methodological reflection.

The quarterly journal TECLA features different sections showcasing realities and experiences in Spanish language teaching in the UK and Ireland. It also offers didactic sequences for the classroom or linked to the cultural world. Some sections serve as an open forum for contributions by teachers and educational agents in the UK—language experts and educational managers. Although its format has evolved over time, TECLA has a long history and provides valuable classroom proposals and insights into the state of Spanish teaching in the UK. Since the end of 2022, the journal has included a new section, TECLArne, resulting from a collaboration agreement with the Spanish Radio and Television Corporation (RTVE). This section presents didactic material for the Spanish classroom based on content from Radio Nacional de España, including student materials, teaching guides, and solutions.

Ministerio  
de Educación, Formación Profesional  
y Deportes

**TECLA**  
REVISTA DE LA  
CONSEJERÍA DE EDUCACIÓN  
EN EL REINO UNIDO  
E IRLANDA

2/2024



Acti/España is an annual compilation of activities developed by language assistants for different educational stages and levels—primary and secondary (A1, B1, and B2). It responds to the characteristics of the various contexts in which the assistants work. With 28 issues published by 2024, it serves as an excellent resource bank for those joining as language assistants and for those interested in finding dynamic classroom activities focused on developing communicative and sociocultural competencies.

Another editorial line parallel to the one for teaching materials is the one focused on guides for those joining the programmes in the UK as language assistants, teachers, or advisors, as well as those aimed at promoting and disseminating Spanish and the activities of the Education Office in various formats such as brochures, leaflets, foldouts, and posters. These promotional materials are designed for use in educational centres to inform students in the UK and their families about why Spanish is their best option for the future.

For promotion and dissemination, social media platforms are also employed. The Education Office maintains a presence with the profile @consejeriauk on X (formerly Twitter), where it gathers nearly 7,000 followers, and also on Instagram with the same profile. The @consejeria\_uk\_ie Instagram account is exclusively dedicated to sharing ideas and resources for teaching Spanish, with weekly posts under the hashtag #tipsforspanish.

## **Actions and Initiatives**

As part of its strategic plan to promote Spanish language and culture in the UK, the Education Office organises annual activities such as the "Best Spanish Student in the UK" award, recognizing top students in Spanish. The department also participates in major language fairs, conferences, and competitions, including Language World and the annual ELE UK and AULC conferences. Additionally, the Education Office collaborates with British schools through workshops and cultural events, supports good practices like those from Hackney Learning Trust and the Bilingual Primary School in Brighton and Hove, and engages in initiatives like the Edinburgh Spanish Film Festival, offering teaching materials and expanding the reach of Spanish culture across the UK.

## **Support and Promotion of Spanish in the United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom hosts three Cervantes Institutes in London, Manchester, and Leeds, with the latter being affiliated with the University of Leeds. In May 2023, the first Cervantes Chair at the University of Edinburgh was launched to promote Spanish language and culture in Scotland. The Education Office collaborates with these institutes in promoting Spanish and offers training courses for teachers. It also works with the UNED in London and other Spanish regional governments such as the Junta de Castilla y León and Junta de Andalucía. The department maintains partnerships with international cultural institutions and local organizations, further fostering Spanish language education in the UK.