Between 150-200 different languages are spoken by long-term residents of Manchester and the Greater Manchester area.

Around 40% of Manchester’s youth are known to be multilingual. Close to 50% of Manchester’s adult population are assumed to be multilingual.

Close to 20% of Manchester’s adult population declared a language other than English to be their “main language” in the 2011 Census.

Community languages with the largest number of speakers in Manchester are Urdu, Arabic, Chinese, Bengali, Polish, Panjabi, and Somali.

There are also large communities of speakers of Gujarati, Potwari/Mirpuri, Kurdish, Persian, Yiddish, Caribbean Creole English, Pashto, Romani, Yoruba and other West African languages, and knowledge of French, Portuguese and Russian is widespread (often as second languages).

The city’s languages are widely dispersed, but dense multilingual communities can be found in Burnage, Cheetham, Chinatown, Crumpsall, Gorton, Hulme, Levenshulme, Longsight, Moss Side and Rusholme. Notable language communities in the Greater Manchester area include Gujarati in Bolton, Bengali and Sylheti in Oldham, Panjabi and Potwari/Mirpuri in Rochdale and Oldham, and Yiddish and Polish in Salford.

Manchester libraries hold some 20,000 books and other media items in languages other than English. In 2012-2013, such materials were issued more than 70,000 times, with the most frequent demand being for Urdu, Chinese, Bengali, Polish, Persian, and Arabic.

Some 3,000 pupils at Manchester state schools sat GCSE examinations in foreign languages in 2012. The most common languages were French, German and Spanish. Qualifications in community languages included Urdu, Arabic, Polish, Mandarin, and Hebrew. Around 8,000 pupils attend supplementary schools in Manchester, which offer GCSE qualifications in Arabic, Polish, Cantonese, Mandarin and other languages.

Manchester’s commercial sector makes use of community languages to market products and services, and commercial signage in Chinese, Urdu, Arabic, Bengali, Polish and other languages is common in the city’s public spaces.
Language skills are often in demand on the Manchester job market, with online adverts in the first part of 2013 offering jobs in Customer Service, Sales/Marketing, Management Roles and Teaching to qualified applicants with knowledge of Arabic, Cantonese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Panjabi, and other languages, at a salary range of £16,000-£35,000.

80% of Manchester residents whose first language is not English report that they speak English well or very well. 17% – most of them elderly – report that they cannot speak English well, while only 3% (some 2,400 people) cannot speak English at all.

Public sector institutions in Manchester engage interpreter and translation services such as M-four, Language Line, and The Big Word. The main service for Manchester City Council, M-4, handled some 12,000 requests for face-to-face interpretation for over 80 different languages between April 2012 and March 2013. The interpreter service for Central Manchester Hospital Trust responded to more than 31,000 requests during 2012. The highest demand was for Urdu, Arabic, Bengali, Polish, Panjabi and Cantonese. Greater Manchester Police and Fire and Rescue Services often rely on multilingual staff as well as on volunteers to communicate with members of minority communities.