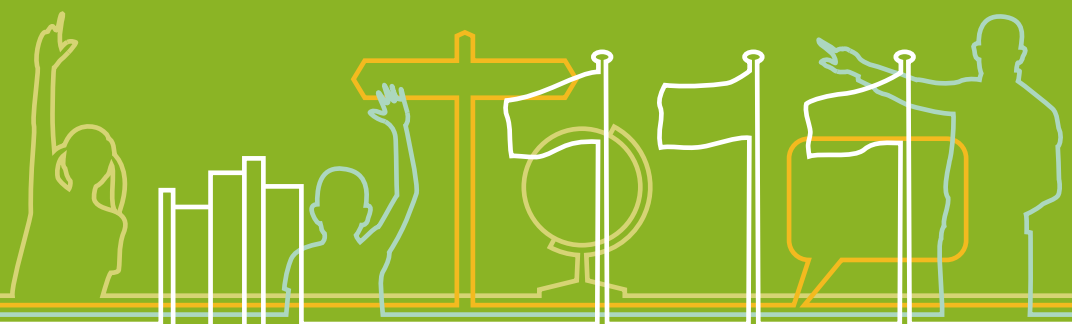


# Language Trends Wales 2015/16: The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in Wales





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## About the authors

**Teresa Tinsley** established and developed the Language Trends series of surveys which have charted the health of languages in various sectors of education since 2002. As well as producing and analysing information on the situation of languages in English secondary schools, the surveys have also covered provision for community languages across the UK, and language learning in Further and Adult Education. Formerly Director of Communications at CILT, the National Centre for Languages, Teresa founded Alcantara Communications in 2011 and since then has undertaken policy-focused research on languages for the British Academy and the British Council, as well as CfBT Education Trust. Her work for CfBT included an international review of primary languages, Lessons from abroad, as well as the Language Trends reports from 2011 to 2015.



Teresa Tinsley

**Kathryn Board, OBE**, was Chief Executive of CILT, The National Centre for Languages from 2008 and in that role worked with specialists and a wide range of educational institutions to provide advice on educational policy related to the teaching of languages as well as on initiatives aimed at increasing language learning across the UK. Before joining CILT, she spent 30 years working for the British Council in a number of international and management roles. She also led for Education Development Trust (formerly CfBT Education Trust) on the development of a Languages strategy and the delivery of a number of national projects to support language teaching in English schools. Now partially retired, she continues to work on research projects where she can bring in her expertise. Kathryn speaks Spanish, German and Dutch and is currently working hard on improving her Arabic.



Kathryn Board, OBE

## Acknowledgements

The authors are very grateful to Claire Gorrara of Cardiff University, to the MFL leads in the regional consortia Anna Vivian Jones, Amy Walters-Bresner and Sioned Harold, to Ceri James and to staff at British Council Wales for their support in encouraging schools to respond to the survey, and identifying suitable schools for the case studies. We would particularly like to acknowledge the time and effort of all teachers who completed this year's survey and provided the researchers with such rich evidence and comments. The information that respondents have provided is vital in understanding the national picture and in developing the capacity of all of us to improve provision. We would also like to thank the schools featured as case studies in the report for their kindness in helping with this research.

# Executive summary





## *Language Trends Wales 2015/16* is the second in a series of annual reports on foreign language teaching in Welsh schools, commissioned in response to growing concerns about the diminishing status of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in Welsh secondary schools.

The research is based on online surveys completed by teachers in representative samples of schools from across the country, as well as a select number of case study visits to schools which demonstrate a real commitment to the teaching of MFL and which are finding interesting and innovative ways to overcome a range of challenges including declining take-up at Key Stage 4 and pupil attitudes to MFL. This year a survey of primary schools in Wales has also been included for the first time in order to explore the potential for introducing foreign language teaching at a younger age.

The number of pupils in Wales studying a foreign language to GCSE declined by an alarming 44 per cent between 2002 and 2015. Against this background, the Welsh Government is undertaking extensive educational reform including developing a new curriculum based on the findings of the Donaldson review, *Successful Futures*, introducing new GCSEs and A levels, and strengthening the Welsh Baccalaureate. In June 2015 the Welsh Government launched its *Global Futures* plan to improve and promote MFLs in Wales; it also promotes the ambition for Wales to become a 'bilingual plus 1' country.<sup>1</sup> *Language Trends Wales 2015/16* looks in depth at what is happening to foreign language teaching in schools across Wales and examines the impact that the many reforms and initiatives are having on MFL teachers and their pupils, and the potential for development in primary schools. This report explores the extent to which the recently established Centres of Excellence, set up as part of the *Global Futures* plan, are beginning to engage MFL teachers, and gauges teachers' reactions to the proposed changes to GCSE and A level exams in foreign languages.

The research presented in this report was carried out under the joint management of the British Council and the Education Development Trust between January and March 2016 and is based on responses from 124 secondary schools and 190 primary schools, with response rates of 58 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively.

The number of pupils in Wales studying a foreign language to GCSE has declined by an alarming 44 per cent between 2002 and 2015

<sup>1</sup>Welsh Government (2015)

## Key findings

### Secondary

- Only a short amount of time is being allocated to teaching MFL in Key Stage 3 – the only phase in which the subject is compulsory. About 40 per cent of schools offer less than the two hours per week minimum recommended by Estyn.<sup>2</sup>
- In the majority of schools, fewer than a quarter of pupils are learning an MFL in Key Stage 4, and 60 per cent of schools report declines.
- The Welsh Baccalaureate and the reduction of option slots are the main reasons for the most recent declines in take-up to GCSE.
- Teachers believe that improving careers advice, changing the assessment and marking of the GCSE exam, increasing the number of free choices and ensuring that MFL appears in all option blocks would be the best ways to improve take-up of MFL.
- There has been a high level of involvement in efforts to promote MFL, but although these have had a beneficial impact on attitudes, they have not substantially improved take-up.
- Schools working in more disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to report that pupils do not appreciate the value of learning a foreign language and more likely to have very low take-up of MFL.
- There is a high level of awareness of the new Centres of Excellence, and teachers hope they will provide opportunities to network and share practice and teaching resources.
- There is a high level of participation in continuing professional development (CPD) provided by exam boards and in networking events provided by local authorities.
- Although the vast majority of secondary schools do not receive intakes of pupils who have already studied a language in primary school, there is a relatively high level of involvement with local primary schools on MFL matters.
- Groups for MFL post-16 are very small, and numbers are declining. As a result, post-16 MFL is increasingly becoming financially unviable.
- MFL is losing out in the drive for Welsh, numeracy, STEM and a narrow view of literacy.

### Primary

- Just over a quarter of responding primary schools already provide some access to foreign language teaching, though this is more frequently extra-curricular or informal than systematically structured teaching.
- French is the most frequently taught language in primary schools, followed by Spanish.
- Languages are more often taught to older pupils in primary school, although a small number of schools offer French or Spanish in Key Stage 1.

Schools working in more disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to report that pupils do not appreciate the value of learning a foreign language

<sup>2</sup> Estyn is the office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales.



- Schools which teach languages tend to draw on existing members of staff with the necessary skills.
  - Primary schools look mainly to their local secondary schools as a potential source of support for MFL teaching.
  - Although more than three quarters of the primary schools surveyed are supportive, at least in principle, of the introduction of MFL teaching, respondents stress the need for additional funding and training. Many primary heads already feel overburdened by a crowded curriculum and see MFL as potentially competing with priorities to improve the teaching of Welsh.
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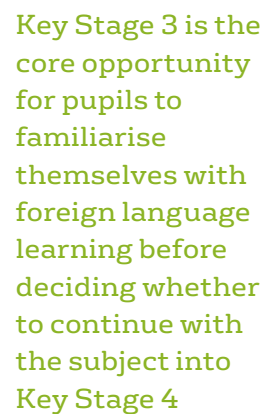
## Languages in secondary schools

The number of pupils in secondary schools in Wales studying a language to GCSE has been declining since 2002. Responding to this year's 2015/16 Language Trends survey, some 60 per cent of schools report that they have seen declines over the past three years in the number of pupils opting to study a language to GCSE. The majority of schools – more than two thirds – report that take-up of languages in Key Stage 4 is below 25 per cent of the cohort. The introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate and the necessity of reducing the number of option slots for foreign languages are the main reasons schools give for the most recent declines in take-up at GCSE.

Against this background of sharp decline at Key Stage 4 and GCSE, Key Stage 3 remains the only phase in which MFL is compulsory in schools in Wales. Key Stage 3 is the core opportunity for pupils to familiarise themselves with foreign language learning before deciding whether to continue with the subject into Key Stage 4. However, the survey found that some 40 per cent of schools offer less than the minimum two hours of MFL tuition a week recommended by Estyn.

In an effort to stem the decline in pupil interest in languages, teachers have been highly proactive in organising and taking part in activities and campaigns to promote MFL in school. In particular, the Routes into Languages initiative led by universities has reached 69 per cent of respondents to our survey. There is tangible evidence from the Language Trends research that these are having a beneficial impact on attitudes, but they have not substantially improved take-up.

Teachers believe that there are three actions which would be most likely to improve take-up of MFL at Key Stage 4. The first of these is to improve careers advice demonstrating the benefits of language skills in the workplace. The second is to make changes to the assessment and marking of the GCSE exam, which is currently seen as harsh and inconsistent, and the third is to ensure that languages appear in each of the option blocks from which pupils in Year 9 make their subject choices. Teachers also believe that increasing the number of free choices available to pupils would have a beneficial impact on take up. There is a significant socio-economic dimension to the issue of low take-up of MFL. Schools working in more disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to report very low take-up of MFL and poor pupil appreciation of the value of language learning. Such schools are also less likely to have been involved in efforts to promote MFL to pupils.



Key Stage 3 is the core opportunity for pupils to familiarise themselves with foreign language learning before deciding whether to continue with the subject into Key Stage 4

Coinciding with the publication of the first Language Trends research report for Wales in May 2015, the government launched its *Global Futures* plan aimed at increasing the take-up of MFL in secondary schools across Wales and building capacity in the workforce to teach MFL from Year 5 upwards. As part of this initiative a number of regional Centres of Excellence have been created to act as hubs for training and resources, and to share best practice. The 2015/16 Language Trends research has sought to track the new Centres of Excellence and assess their progress towards achieving the aims of the *Global Futures* plan. Responses by teachers to the 2015/16 survey show that there is a high level of awareness of the new Centres of Excellence and that 62 per cent of responding schools have already been in touch with their local centre. Teachers hope these centres will provide the opportunities to network and share practice and teaching resources. Teachers of MFL also report a good level of participation in CPD provided by exam boards (82 per cent) and in networking events provided by local authorities (67 per cent). However, there are also signs that schools are beginning to struggle to release teachers for training opportunities as a result of budget constraints and heavy workloads.

Although most secondary schools do not consistently receive pupils who have already studied a language in primary school, as many as 78 per cent of secondary teachers believe that teaching languages to pupils in Key Stage 2 would be likely to improve take-up later in secondary school. There is an encouraging level of existing contacts: nearly half of responding schools have at least some involvement with one or more local primary schools on MFL matters. The focus is usually on Year 6 pupils and collaboration on transition programmes to smooth pupils' transfer from primary to secondary school. Transition programmes frequently include an introduction to MFL in the shape of a short, intensive block of lessons or a number of lessons spread across one or several terms.

The numbers of pupils opting to study an MFL at GCSE are small, and the numbers continuing to A level are even smaller and continuing to decline to the point where a post-16 MFL offer is becoming financially unviable for many schools. Schools have worked imaginatively to try to continue to provide MFL at post-16, including creating partnerships or consortia with other schools (e.g. one school in the group offers languages, and pupils from the other schools are transported to/from the school for MFL lessons). However, this solution appears to be unpopular with pupils and is encouraging further declines in those opting for post-16 MFL. In this year's survey, one in five schools with post-16 pupils does not offer language A levels – a higher proportion than last year.

In a crowded curriculum schools are rightly having to put resources and time into responding to centrally driven initiatives to improve attainment in Welsh as well as numeracy and literacy. The long-term national campaign to increase the number of pupils focussing on STEM subjects has also been very successful: pupils and their parents are now aware of the career benefits of skills in science and maths. However, with such fierce competition for precious school resources and attention, MFL is losing out. There is insufficient awareness of the contribution that languages make to developing literacy in general or of the fact that foreign language skills are useful alongside STEM skills in a competitive economy.

In a crowded curriculum schools are rightly having to put resources and time into responding to centrally driven initiatives to improve attainment in Welsh as well as numeracy and literacy

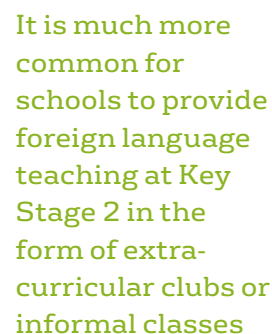
## Languages in primary schools

Although the teaching of a foreign language is not statutory in Welsh primary schools, the *Global Futures* plan seeks to build capacity to teach MFL from Year 5, thereby helping to develop the government's ambition for Wales to become a bilingual plus one country. Although the Welsh Government previously funded a number of pilot projects, there is very little evidence of the extent to which primary school children in Wales currently have access or exposure to foreign language teaching. It was therefore thought to be of interest to focus a strand of this research on establishing a clearer picture of what is already happening in MFL at Key Stage 2.

A little over a quarter of the schools responding to the survey report that they provide some MFL for their pupils although this is only very occasionally systematic, structured teaching. It is much more common for schools to provide foreign language teaching at Key Stage 2 in the form of extra-curricular clubs or informal classes. More often than not, it is the older children in the school (usually those in Year 6) who receive occasional classes or a short block of tuition to introduce them to MFL as part of a transition programme as they prepare to move to secondary school.

The majority of schools which do offer an MFL at some point in Key Stage 2 teach French, with Spanish the second most frequently taught language in primary schools in Wales. The choice of foreign language is likely to be influenced by which languages teaching staff have learned themselves, since the research shows that schools which teach languages tend to draw on existing members of staff with the necessary skills. There is also evidence from both primary and secondary teachers that primary schools look to their local secondary schools as a potential source of support for MFL teaching.

The survey also explores the likely degree of interest if MFL were to be introduced at some point in the future as it has been in England and Scotland, and what resources and expertise would be available for primary schools to draw on. While the great majority of responding schools report that they are in favour of MFL at Key Stage 2 in principle, they also make it very clear that this favourable view is conditional on sufficient budget being available for training and resources. Primary heads report that they already feel overburdened by a crowded curriculum and too many centrally driven initiatives. Many see MFL as potentially competing with priorities to improve the teaching of Welsh.



It is much more common for schools to provide foreign language teaching at Key Stage 2 in the form of extra-curricular clubs or informal classes

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## Conclusions

The principal conclusions of the 2015/16 Language Trends research exercise for Wales are set out below along with a proposal for future action that will help strengthen the place of MFL in schools and ensure the success of the *Global Futures* plan.

## Secondary

1. Secondary schools are working very hard to try to change their pupils' attitudes towards foreign languages in order to increase take-up at Key Stage 4, but are finding this a huge challenge. Although some initiatives have been effective in changing attitudes, they are having little impact on take-up when it comes to option choices, particularly following the introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate and an increased focus on core subjects. It is clear that a focus on pupil attitudes alone will be insufficient to improve take-up, as long as MFL remains one choice among many and has a reputation for being more difficult than many other options.
2. Estyn has stated that two hours of MFL tuition per week is the absolute minimum for pupils to make satisfactory progress in the subject, yet as many as 40 per cent of schools set aside less time than this for MFL. It is possible that the low take-up of MFL at GCSE may be partly the result of pupils not feeling sufficiently prepared to begin a GCSE course and not confident that they will be successful.
3. As with last year's Language Trends survey, this year's school-based research found further evidence of perceptions that MFL and Welsh are competing with one another rather than being complementary. In some cases a poor pupil experience of Welsh as a second language in primary school negatively affects their subsequent experience of MFL because they do not start the new language with generic knowledge about language learning and transferable language-learning skills which they could use to fast-track their progress with the new language.
4. There is clear evidence that school leadership is a critical factor in driving an increase in take-up of MFL. Policy-makers need to provide incentives for school leaders to encourage more pupils to opt for MFL by raising the stakes and holding schools to account for improving Welsh children's learning in this neglected curriculum area. Particular attention should be given to schools working in more challenging socio-economic circumstances, since pupils in such areas are least likely to recognise the value of language learning, and least likely to be involved with existing initiatives to promote MFL.

## Primary

5. Around one quarter of Welsh primary schools already provide at least some access to foreign language teaching for their pupils – generally in Year 6 as part of a wider transition programme to secondary school. It is rarely structured systematically and relies on the skills of existing teachers or the occasional support of local secondary schools. The introduction of systematic foreign language teaching in Welsh primary schools would need to have a clear vision and implementation plan including budget, training and support, with prioritisation and resources.
6. The majority of primary school teachers support the idea of introducing foreign language teaching in primary schools in Wales, but many stress the need for additional training and resources, or believe that Welsh should take priority in the primary phase. While primary schools look to their local secondary school for the support they would need to teach foreign languages, this research shows that many secondary schools would not be in a position to act as the backbone

The majority of primary school teachers support the idea of introducing foreign language teaching in primary schools in Wales, but many stress the need for additional training and resources

of a major national initiative. The majority of secondary school teachers (almost 80 per cent) believe that starting to teach a foreign language in primary school would 'definitely' or 'probably' improve take-up when pupils choose their options in Year 9.

### Looking to the future

Teachers in primary schools are concerned about what they see as an overloaded curriculum and would not necessarily welcome the imposition of MFL as another curriculum subject, particularly without adequate additional funding and resources. However, the development of a new curriculum with Welsh, English and MFL positioned in a common area of learning (as recommended by Professor Donaldson)<sup>3</sup> would provide a unique and vital opportunity to overcome these concerns in a way which benefits multiple literacy and language competence.

By developing a triple literacy approach for primary schools, which builds on existing experiences and recommendations arising from previous publicly funded projects, the government could reconceptualise what it means to learn a foreign language in Wales. Using Welsh and English tuition to provide children with more explicit knowledge about generic language and language-learning skills, and combining this with an introduction to foreign languages and cultures, would give pupils a more solid foundation from which to make more rapid progress in MFL in Key Stage 3. Where relevant, pupils' existing knowledge of other languages spoken in their homes and communities should also be exploited. This approach would require far less investment in development and training than if MFL were introduced as a new stand-alone subject in the primary curriculum.

At the secondary level, bringing MFL, Welsh and English teaching together into one curriculum area should create more opportunities for interventions which benefit all language subjects – thus reducing perceptions that they are in competition with one another. At the same time, the Welsh Government needs to ensure that sufficient teaching/learning time for MFL is available in Key Stage 3, and that there are additional incentives for both schools and pupils to encourage greater take-up of MFL in Key Stage 4. These actions would provide a much-needed message about the value of all languages by government and other influential national bodies, and help the subject to be taken more seriously when pupils make their option choices in Year 9.

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<sup>3</sup> Donaldson (2015)

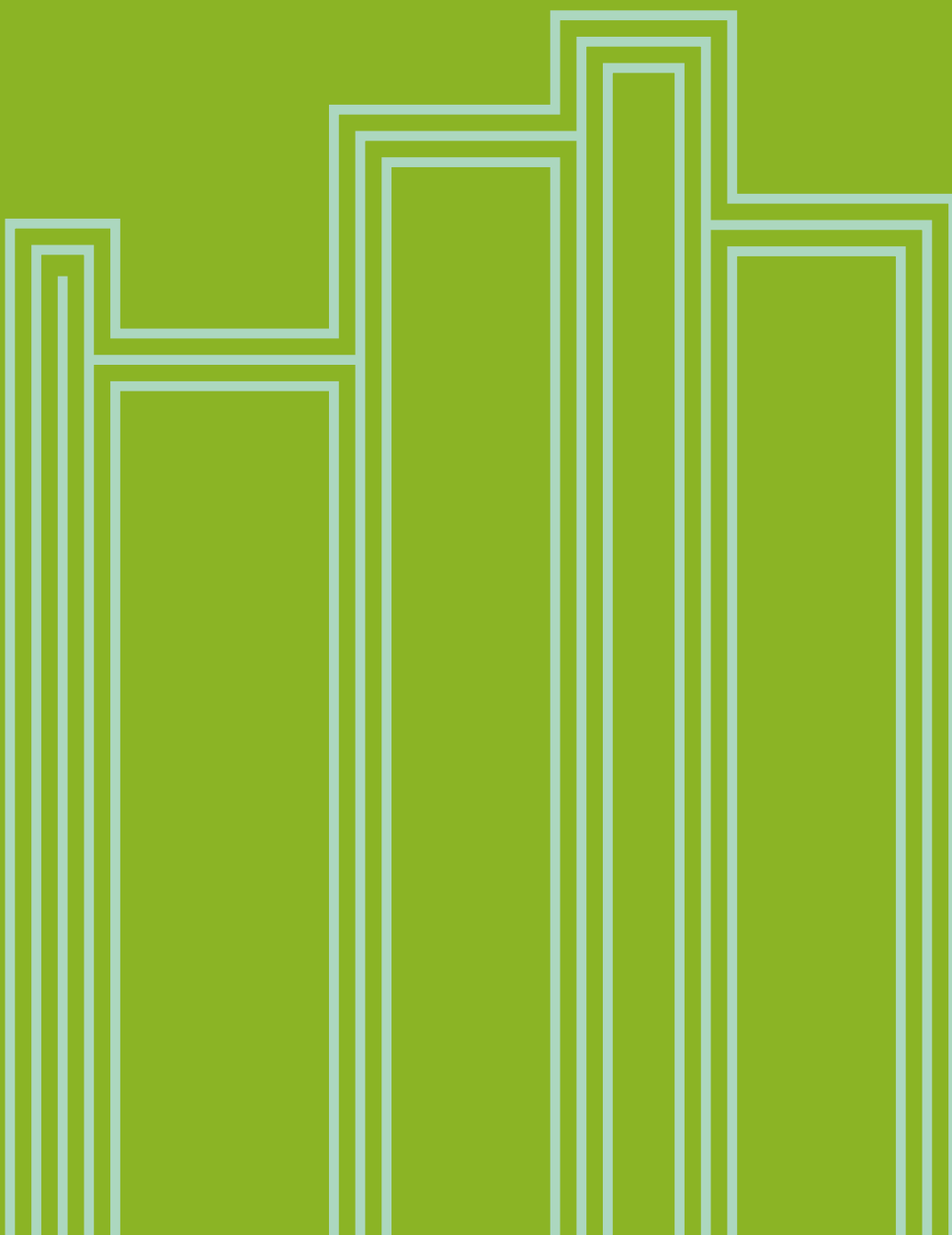




Task-based  
Language Learning  
and Teaching  
Rod Ellis

Chapter 1

# Introduction



# This second annual Language Trends survey for Wales is designed to bring forward information to support the implementation of the Welsh Government's *Global Futures* plan.

One year ago, Language Trends 2014/15<sup>4</sup> was published at a key moment of change for educational policy in Wales, with the introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate, the development of new GCSE and A levels, and the publication of Professor Donaldson's review of the curriculum.<sup>5</sup>

## The policy context

The Language Trends research was commissioned in response to growing concerns about the diminishing status of MFL in Welsh schools as a result of serious declines in the number of pupils taking the subject to GCSE and A level. As the report was made public in June 2015, the Welsh Government announced its *Global Futures* plan 'to improve and promote modern foreign languages in Wales, 2015–2020'<sup>6</sup>, which was eventually published in October 2015.

*Global Futures* aims to encourage learners to extend their knowledge of other cultures by becoming 'bilingual plus 1', in other words, studying English, Welsh and at least one MFL from primary to examination level. The plan has three aims:

- To increase the number of young people choosing to study MFL subjects at GCSE, A level (or their equivalents) and in higher education
- To improve the teaching and learning experience of MFL for learners aged 7–19, building towards a 'bilingual plus 1' system in which the formal teaching of an MFL begins in Year 5
- To improve MFL attainment levels

*Global Futures* set out three strategic actions linked to achieving these aims, the most significant of which was the creation of school Centres of Excellence in each of the four regional consortia to support teaching professionals and to enable MFL to be taught effectively from Year 5 onwards.

This year's survey was therefore launched with the aim of supporting the development of the *Global Futures* policy by gathering information which would:

- Deepen understanding of the processes in secondary schools that either encourage or discourage the take-up of languages at GCSE and A level by greater numbers of pupils
- Gather information on existing provision for MFL in primary schools, and the resources that schools would be able to draw upon in developing it

*Global Futures* set out three strategic actions... the most significant of which was the creation of school Centres of Excellence in each of the four regional consortia

<sup>4</sup> Board and Tinsley (2015) <sup>5</sup> Donaldson (2015) <sup>6</sup> Welsh Government (2015)

- Investigate the needs of MFL teachers and the types of support they would most welcome from the Centres of Excellence

## New data on the need for languages

The 2014/15 report referenced some key statistics and research on the value of foreign-language competence to individuals, businesses and the wider economy and society, linking this to Wales' aspirations for competitiveness and prosperity in the global economy.<sup>7</sup> These are not repeated here. However, two reports published in the last year provides a stark picture of how Welsh teenagers will be left behind in the global economy unless more can be done to ensure that a foreign language forms part of their core education.

The British Academy published a vast amount of data gathered during its *Born Global* project, which drew on the views of more than 600 employers.<sup>8</sup> The study found new evidence of a high demand for young people with the linguistic, analytical and intercultural communication skills and global mindset provided by the study of a foreign language. It highlighted the misunderstandings, operational problems, client dissatisfaction and supply chain difficulties faced by firms without sufficient capacity in languages, and pointed to a serious under-supply of linguists to fill positions in international institutions and specialist roles in translating, interpreting and teaching. The project's author described the attributes of the 'Born Global' generation that will drive future economic success:

*'The Born Global Generation will be even more internationally mobile, tech savvy, cosmopolitan and hyper-connected. It is from this generation that we will source future leaders of local and global companies, building the social fabric of our communities and networks worldwide. The key to success will come from cultural and intellectual agility, arising from international experience and the ability to speak more than one language.'*

A Europe-wide study on *Foreign Language Proficiency and Employability* highlighted the competitive advantage for individuals with language skills as well as the added value of such skills for businesses across the economic spectrum. The benefits were especially noted by employers in the accommodation and food services, and transportation and storage sectors.<sup>9</sup> The study recommended that:

*'National governments, career guidance services and public employment services should inform employees, job-seekers and new entrants about the distinct advantage foreign language skills provide in the labour market.'*<sup>10</sup>

This evidence fully endorses the aims of the *Global Futures* policy and highlights the importance of its success.

Welsh teenagers will be left behind in the global economy unless more can be done to ensure that a foreign language forms part of their core education

## Languages in the curriculum

The 2014/15 Language Trends report provided a detailed historical overview of policy development on MFL in Wales.<sup>11</sup> Several changes have taken place since last year's report. Following the publication of Professor Donaldson's *Successful*

<sup>7</sup> Board and Tinsley (2015) <sup>8</sup> Holmes (2016) <sup>9</sup> Beadle et al. (2015) <sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. xviii <sup>11</sup> See Board and Tinsley (2015)

*Futures* report, the Welsh Government announced that it is developing a new curriculum, which will be available for first teaching by September 2018 and that a New Deal for the Education Workforce will provide training and support for teachers. The new curriculum will include six Areas of Learning and Experience for pupils aged 3 to 16, one of which will be Languages, Literacy and Communication. Welsh will remain compulsory for all pupils up to age 16.

The Language Trends 2014/15 report found that English, Welsh and MFL were regarded in most schools as quite separate subjects, and that opportunities for the learning of one language to support others were being missed. The considerable benefits of bilingualism were therefore not being fully exploited to facilitate the learning of third or fourth languages.

A 2013 Welsh Government review of Welsh as a second language found that for many learners in secondary schools, this was a 'very tedious experience' and urged fundamental change to give every child in Wales the opportunity to reap all the benefits of fluency and to develop a bilingual workforce for the future.<sup>12</sup>

In order to deepen understanding of the apparent disjunction between the learning of Welsh and MFL, this year's Language Trends survey included a number of visits to secondary schools, where researchers had the opportunity to talk directly to pupils about the full range of their language-learning experiences and gather the views of teachers and head teachers.

The Language Trends 2014/15 report found that English, Welsh and MFL were regarded in most schools as quite separate subjects, and that opportunities for the learning of one language to support others were being missed

## Global futures

The *Global Futures* plan sets out a clear series of actions to be taken by the Welsh Government and its partners to boost the profile of MFL in schools. These include a marketing and communication campaign, providing language and career role models as speakers in schools, and a mentoring scheme using undergraduate language students. It also commits to reviewing the approach taken by schools in devising GCSE option blocks, and to looking at the branding and presentation of exam syllabuses. Through the Centres of Excellence, it will ensure that MFL teachers can network and share best practices with each other and with their feeder primary schools, and it will draw on the resources of the British Council and language institutes such as the Goethe-Institut to provide more visits and cultural exchanges, which boost learning opportunities and motivate learners.

These measures represent a considerable effort to coordinate and guide the actions of key stakeholders who can help drive change. Ministers have in the past drawn attention to the fact that low take-up in MFL is not a uniquely Welsh issue, but a phenomenon which affects the whole of the UK.<sup>13</sup> However, there are some important ways in which the *Global Futures* plan differs from policies in England and Scotland, which have been developed to address similar problems of declining take-up in MFL.

One key difference is the absence of any significant new resourcing. The Scottish Government spent £9 million on its 'One plus two' model between 2013 and 2015, and a further £9 million in 2015/16.<sup>14</sup> As part of its National Language Strategy,

<sup>12</sup> Welsh Government (2013) <sup>13</sup> National Assembly of Wales (2012) p. 14 <sup>14</sup> Denholm (2015)

England set aside more than £35 million per year for teacher training, workforce development and regional and national support for primary schools which has since enabled the last government to introduce compulsory language teaching from age 7.<sup>15</sup> In order to boost take-up of the subject at GCSE, it has adopted another approach: incentivising take-up through the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The EBacc is a basket of traditional academic subjects, including a language, which is used as a performance measure for schools. After it was first introduced, entries for language subjects at GCSE rose from 40 per cent of the cohort in 2011 to 49 per cent in 2014. This proportion has since slipped back to 48 per cent (still considerably higher than the estimated 20–25 per cent of Welsh teenagers who take MFL to GCSE), but the policy has now been strengthened further and schools will be increasingly expected to enter at least 90 per cent of the age group for languages GCSEs.<sup>16</sup>

This year's Language Trends survey for Wales focuses on which measures teachers feel would be likely to increase the number of pupils taking languages – and the barriers affecting take-up which go beyond pupil preference or ignorance of career opportunities – in order to highlight what more might be done to achieve the Welsh Government's objectives.

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### MFL in Key Stage 3

Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 have long shown that pupils find it hardest to reach the expected level in MFL and Welsh as a Second Language. Although the proportions have been increasing, in 2015, 21 per cent of boys and 10.4 per cent of girls failed to reach the expected level 5 or higher in MFL. The proportions for Welsh as a Second Language are lower still, suggesting that the failures to acquire language-learning skills are linked.

Language Trends 2014/15 found that 43 per cent of secondary schools had recently reduced the time allocated for language teaching in Key Stage 3, and uncovered evidence that an unspecified number of schools were not meeting Estyn's recommendation to timetable MFL for a minimum of two hours per week.<sup>17</sup> This was a concern, since pupils are likely to be put off opting for MFL at GCSE if they have had only rudimentary experience of language learning in Key Stage 3. The 2015/16 survey therefore asked how much time schools set aside for MFL in Key Stage 3, and whether this is likely to provide a sufficient foundation for a GCSE course.

### New GCSEs and A levels

Draft specifications have now been published by WJEC for French, German and Spanish GCSEs and AS/A levels to be taught from September 2016. Separate specifications have been published under the Eduquas brand which conform to the new English requirements for GCSE and A level exams. Although they are very similar, the Welsh specifications differ from the English ones as follows:

<sup>15</sup> The Languages Company (2003) <sup>16</sup> Board and Tinsley (2016) <sup>17</sup> Board and Tinsley (2015) p. 23

- Welsh GCSEs will continue to use the 8-point scale A\*-G, while the English ones will use a 9-point scale from 1–9.
- The content of Welsh GCSEs have a Welsh ‘flavour’ and have been designed to meet the requirements of the Welsh Baccalaureate.
- Welsh AS continues to be linked to A level and can be taken in stages, whereas England now requires the ‘decoupling’ of AS from A level, which is a separate exam taken all at once at the end of the two-year course. Otherwise the content and structure reflect the new A levels in England.

The Language Trends research looks at the impact of the exam regime on take-up of MFL, and seeks to provide deeper insights into the situation of languages post-16.

This year's survey includes data from case study visits and interviews with pupils, teachers and head teachers

### Language Trends 2015/2016

This year's survey adds to the information and insights provided in 2014/15 in three ways:

- It explores different issues affecting secondary education, including pupil attitudes and the reasons for low take-up
- It includes data from case study visits and interviews with pupils, teachers and head teachers
- It includes findings from both primary and secondary schools.

The results of the surveys are prefaced by an analysis of the latest GCSE and A level examination entries, highlighting trends in take-up since 2002/2003. The findings from the separate surveys of primary and secondary schools are combined in a number of overarching conclusions and recommendations, which will hopefully be of interest to policy-makers, school leaders and national organisations as well as teachers – without whose valuable input this research would not have been possible.

Chapter 2

# Research design and data collection





# This is the second edition of the Language Trends survey of schools in Wales.

The first survey of Welsh schools took place in 2014/15, focussing exclusively on secondary schools. Since then the Welsh Government has published plans to make Wales 'bilingual plus one', and has advocated the introduction of MFL teaching into primary schools. This second research exercise therefore not only sought to deepen understanding of factors which affect MFL teaching in secondary schools, but to gather information from primary schools on the extent of MFL teaching that currently takes place at that level, and their views on potential future development.

The surveys are designed to provide evidence to inform policy development by acting as a two-way conduit between schools and government, on the one hand charting the impact of government policies in schools and on the other reflecting the views and experiences of language teachers as they adapt to changing contexts for foreign-language teaching in schools.

This second research exercise not only sought to deepen understanding of factors which affect MFL teaching in secondary schools, but to gather information from primary schools on the extent of MFL teaching that currently takes place at that level

## Analysis of examination data

Entry and achievement figures for public examinations such as GCSE and A level provide one of the few comprehensive sources of national data on the situation of language education in secondary schools. The survey findings are therefore prefaced by a presentation of examination data relating to languages to set the schools' responses within a broader context and enable a more insightful interpretation. The data, provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), comprise entries from learners of all ages and from all types of institutions including schools, further education (FE) colleges and adult centres.

## Development of the questionnaires

The questionnaires were developed during autumn 2015 by the researchers in consultation with an advisory group comprising representatives of both commissioning organisations, the British Council (Wales) and Education Development Trust, Estyn, and the University of Cardiff/Routes into Languages Cymru. Consultations were also held with the Welsh Government. The questions were uploaded bilingually onto the online survey platform Survey Monkey and trialled in early January 2016. The questions covered the following areas:

### Secondary questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised questions consistent with those asked in 2014/15 for the purposes of longitudinal analysis, and included a number of new questions aimed at unpicking current and emerging trends or policy directions. It also explored pupils' attitudes towards MFL, measures taken to promote the subject and the extent to which such efforts have been successful. The following areas were covered – all new apart from those starred:

- Whether all (or almost all) pupils study a foreign language throughout Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9)\*
- How much curriculum time is allocated to MFL in Key Stage 3
- What proportions of pupils, in schools with different profiles, are studying an MFL in Key Stage 4, and whether this has changed over the past three years or so
- How many slots for free option choices pupils have for GCSE courses, not counting compulsory subjects
- Whether any pupils are prevented from studying a foreign language in Key Stage 4\*
- What measures teachers believe would be likely to increase take-up of languages in their school
- Whether schools have already been involved in measures to promote MFL, and if so, how effective these have been
- Pupils' attitudes towards MFL
- The extent to which secondary schools are aware of the Centres of Excellence created as part of the Welsh Government's Global Futures plan, and what they hope to gain from them
- Language teachers' involvement in CPD\*
- The extent to which secondary schools are receiving pupils who have learned a foreign language in primary school\*
- Whether secondary schools have contacts with their feeder primary schools about MFL learning
- Current school trends in the take-up of languages post-16\*
- Reasons why MFL numbers are increasing/declining post-16

#### **Primary questionnaire**

- The extent to which primary schools provide foreign language teaching to pupils (i.e. in addition to English and Welsh)
- If so, which languages and year groups this involves, who provides the teaching, and how systematic or structured it is
- If MFL are not taught, what is the main reason why
- The extent to which primary schools are aware of the Welsh Government's Global Futures plan
- Whether primary schools would welcome moves to support the introduction of MFL teaching into primary schools
- What resources primary schools would be able to draw on in order to develop provision for MFL teaching

It also explored pupils' attitudes towards MFL, measures taken to promote the subject and the extent to which such efforts have been successful

## Data collection

In January 2016 an invitation to complete the online questionnaire was sent out in English and Welsh to all 212 secondary schools and all 1,278 primary schools in Wales, addressed to the head of languages in the case of secondary schools and the head teacher for primary schools. The letters were signed by the chief executives of Education Development Trust and the British Council.

Reminder letters were sent to heads of languages/head teachers to arrive in schools the week after half term, with a deadline of the end of the spring term for responses. Non-responding schools were emailed with a further reminder and telephoned by bilingual staff who were able to explain the purposes and importance of the survey, and arrange for PDF versions of the questionnaire to be sent to those who preferred to respond by email or in hard copy. These responses were later transferred onto the Survey Monkey database.

A total of 124 secondary schools and 190 primary schools responded to the survey, yielding response rates of 58 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively. The response rate from secondary schools was slightly lower than that achieved in 2014/15 but still sufficient to be broadly representative of the national profile of secondary schools in Wales. The response rate from primary schools was expected to be lower, given that MFL is not a curriculum subject in Key Stage 2.

Comparisons of the achieved sample with the national population of schools have been carried out (see Appendix) which show that the profiles of the responding schools are a good match with schools throughout Wales in terms of the type of school and medium of instruction, although there is a very slight bias in the secondary responses towards Welsh-medium schools. When analysed by regional consortium area, there are proportionately more secondary responses from the ERW area (South West and Mid Wales), and proportionately fewer from Central South and South East Wales than would be expected given the national distribution. The primary school responses show a slight bias towards responses from North Wales, and slightly lower representation from primary schools in the ERW area.

The profiles of the responding schools are a good match with schools throughout Wales

## Analysis of the data

Researchers were interested in exploring any patterns in the responses to the survey by socio-economic indicator or type of school. The relatively small sample means that when broken down further, the number of schools in each sub-sample is rather small and data on response variance is therefore less reliable. Nonetheless, the responses to a number of questions were analysed by socio-economic indicator (free school meals quartiles) and by type of school, and included as charts or commentary within the text where any patterns could be detected.

## Case study visits and interviews

In order to illustrate some of the quantitative and qualitative findings of the survey, and increase understanding of the issues, a small number of case studies are featured in this year's research exercise. The aim was to provide teachers and others reading the report with a number of working examples of schools committed to providing their pupils with positive experiences of language learning, and to have the opportunity to gather additional evidence from pupils and head teachers as well as language teachers responding to the survey. The researchers identified four secondary schools to visit, one in each of the regional consortia.

### Selection of schools

The following criteria were used to select schools for the case study visits:

- Above-average results in MFL in Key Stage 3
- Above-average take-up of MFL in Key Stage 4
- Above-average general achievement at Key Stage 3 and 4, as measured by the Welsh Government's threshold measure for Level 2, including maths and English/Welsh
- Categorized as Green or Amber by Estyn

The goal was to include a mix of Welsh-medium, English-medium and, if possible, bilingual schools as case studies. It proved difficult to identify schools meeting these criteria as some of the data is not easily available, and some – for example, take-up of MFL in Key Stage 4 – is not available publicly at all. Members of the advisory group kindly provided researchers with lists of schools that had been active participants in Routes into Languages activities; these were used to draw up a short list of schools to visit. The approaches to schools were kindly supported by the MFL coordinators in the regional consortia. In one case a school was approached because it had won a prestigious award from the British Academy for its innovative work in languages.

### Conduct of visits

Only three of the four schools identified were able to support a visit during the research period; the fourth case study is therefore based on a telephone interview. Researchers conducted a half-day visit to the other three schools, where they interviewed teachers and conducted focus groups with pupils. They were also able to observe language lessons and interview a member of the senior leadership team (SLT). The focus was on provision and take-up of languages in each key stage, pupil attitudes towards language learning, and the part that languages and language qualifications played in pupils' aspirations for their future careers. Information gathered during the visits was supplemented by data published on the My Local School (Wales) website.<sup>18</sup>

The aim was to provide teachers and others reading the report with a number of working examples of schools committed to providing their pupils with positive experiences of language learning

<sup>18</sup> [www.mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk](http://www.mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk)



Chapter 3

# School examination data in Wales



## The figures shown below are taken from the JCQ entry statistics published each August.

The figures cover all GCSE and A level entries for Wales, including those from FE, adult and voluntary education providers. The earliest figures available are for 2001 for A levels and 2002 for GCSEs, while the latest figures available are those for 2015.

### GCSE

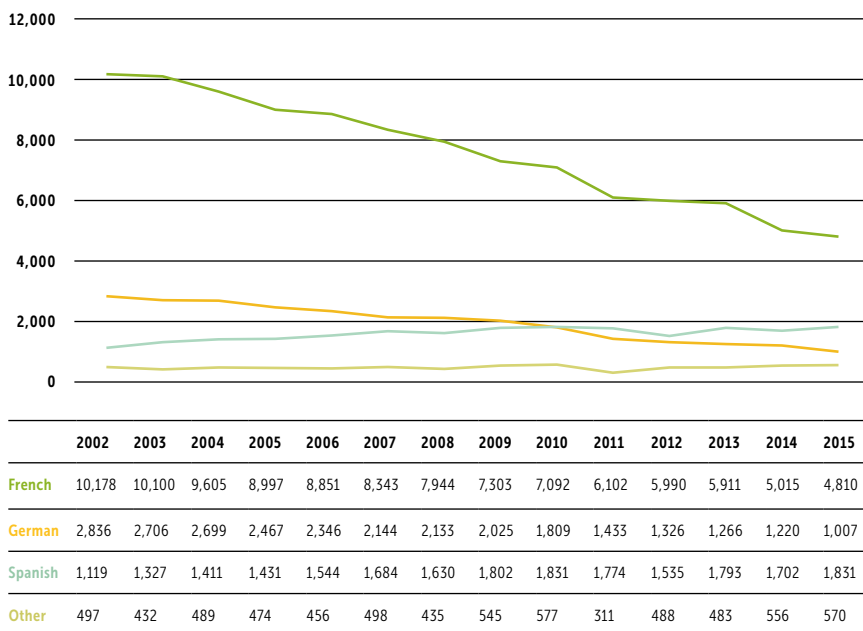
On publishing the results for Wales for summer 2015, JCQ reported that entries had continued to fall in French and German, but increased in Spanish. Entries for French fell by 4.1 per cent between 2014 and 2015, while entries German decreased by a substantial 17.5 per cent. Spanish showed an increase of 7.2 per cent which reversed a reduction of approximately the same proportion in the previous year. The JCQ also reported that outcomes fell at grades A\*-C by 1.5 percentage points for French, 0.6 percentage point for German and 1.2 percentage points for Spanish. However, in each of the languages well over 70 per cent of candidates continued to achieve grades A\*-C.

An analysis of trends in entries since 2002 shows that MFL entries at GCSE have fallen by 44 per cent between 2002 and 2015 – although entries for all subjects also fell by 10 per cent during the same period. French and German, traditionally the most widely taught foreign languages in Welsh schools, have seen the steepest declines. Entries for French are now less than half (47 per cent) of what they were in 2002 and German entries are only about one third (36 per cent) of those recorded in 2002. However, as Figure 1 shows, entries for Spanish have grown, albeit erratically, from a low base.

The ratio of combined French, German and Spanish entries to entries across all subjects declined from 5 per cent in 2002 to just under 3 per cent in 2015, dropping by 0.1 per cent between 2014 and 2015.

An analysis of trends in entries since 2002 shows that MFL entries at GCSE have fallen by 44 per cent between 2002 and 2015

FIGURE 1: GCSE MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENTRIES FOR WALES, 2002-2015



**GCSE entries for MFL by gender**

Entries from female candidates heavily outweigh those from males in all language subjects, accounting for 62 per cent of entries. Entries for Spanish show the most bias towards female entries, while those for ‘Other languages’ the least (see Figure 2). The bias towards female candidates has not changed substantially since 2002, when the ratio was 61 per cent girls to 39 per cent boys.

**Other languages**

In the ‘Other languages’ category there are potentially a further 16 modern foreign languages, as well as Irish, Latin and Ancient Greek, which are currently offered at GCSE; however, the JCQ is not able to supply a breakdown of these for Wales because the numbers are very small. It is likely that many of the entries in the ‘Other languages’ category come from the FE, adult or voluntary sectors since the results of this survey show that there is very little teaching of languages other than French, Spanish and German in Welsh schools.

**Data from Statistics Wales**

Unlike the English Department for Education, Statistics Wales do not publish data on the proportion of the age 15 cohort taking different subjects. However, they do publish raw numbers (see Table 1). This data shows that the number of 15 year olds taking all MFL subjects combined is only two thirds of the number taking history or additional science, and only 23 per cent of the number taking mathematics.

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FIGURE 2: GCSE RATIO OF FEMALE TO MALE CANDIDATES, MFL SUBJECTS, 2015

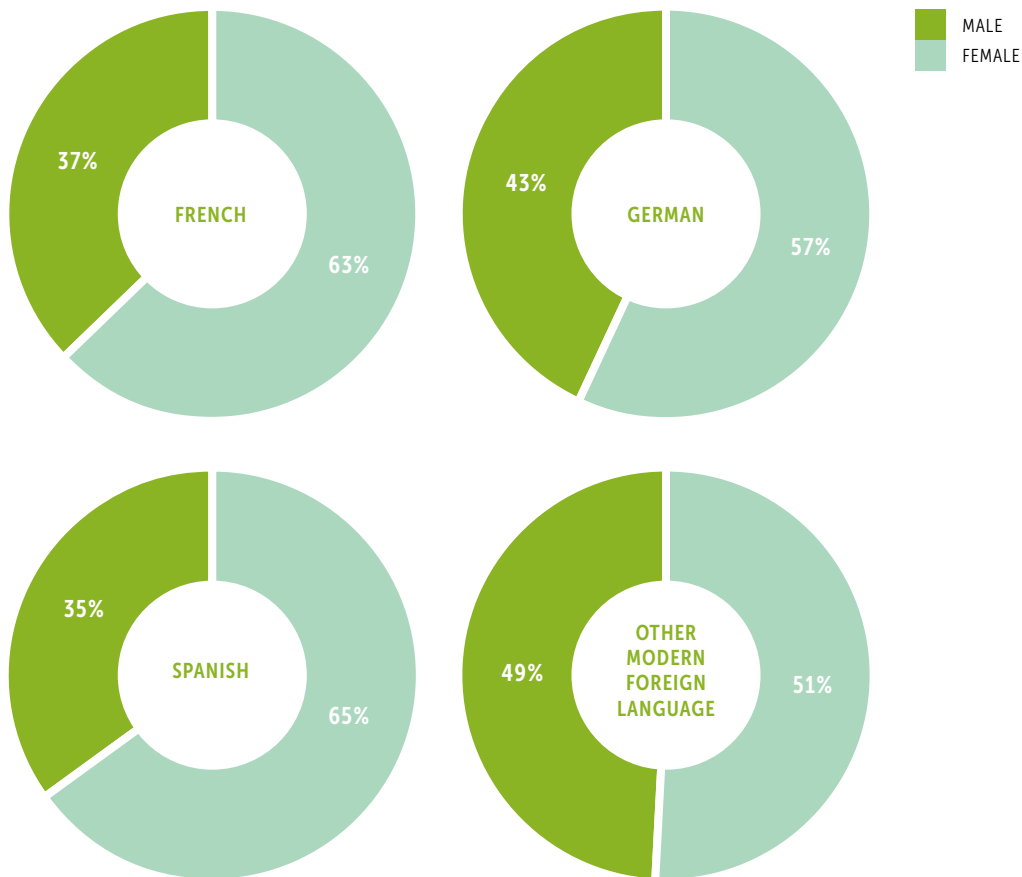


TABLE 1: NUMBER OF AGE 15 CANDIDATES TAKING SELECTED SUBJECTS, 2015

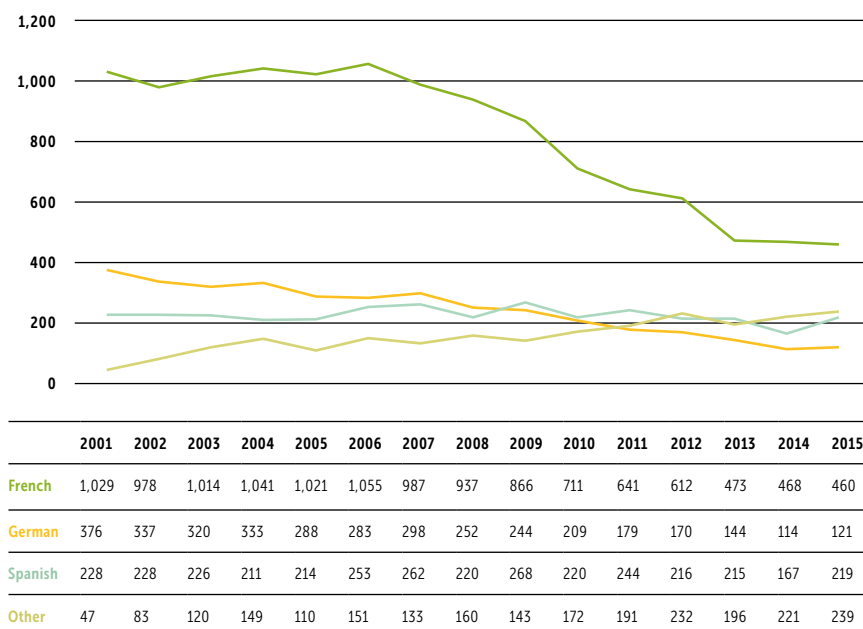
Subject	Number of age 15 candidates, 2015
French	4,793
German	1,024
Spanish	1,745
Other languages	394
All MFL	7,956
History	11,667
Additional science	11,927
Mathematics	34,871

<https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Key-Stage-4/gcseentriesandresultpupilsaged15only-bysubjectgroup>

## A level

As reported in the 2014 Language Trends survey, entries for MFL subjects at A level remained steady between 2001 and 2006, but since then the main languages have seen steep declines (see Figure 3). While entries for A level subjects generally have grown by 8 per cent since 2001, entries for MFL have declined by 38 per cent. Entries for French now stand at 45 per cent of their 2001 level, a decline of more than half, while German has lost more than two thirds of its entries over the same period (-68 per cent). Despite increasing its numbers at GCSE, Spanish has lost 4 per cent of entries at A level since 2001. Only 'Other languages' show an increase, with numbers rising from just 47 in 2001 to 239 last year (more than either German or Spanish). This most likely reflects the increased presence of pupils in Welsh schools with home languages other than English and Welsh.

FIGURE 3: A LEVEL MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENTRIES WALES, 2001-2015



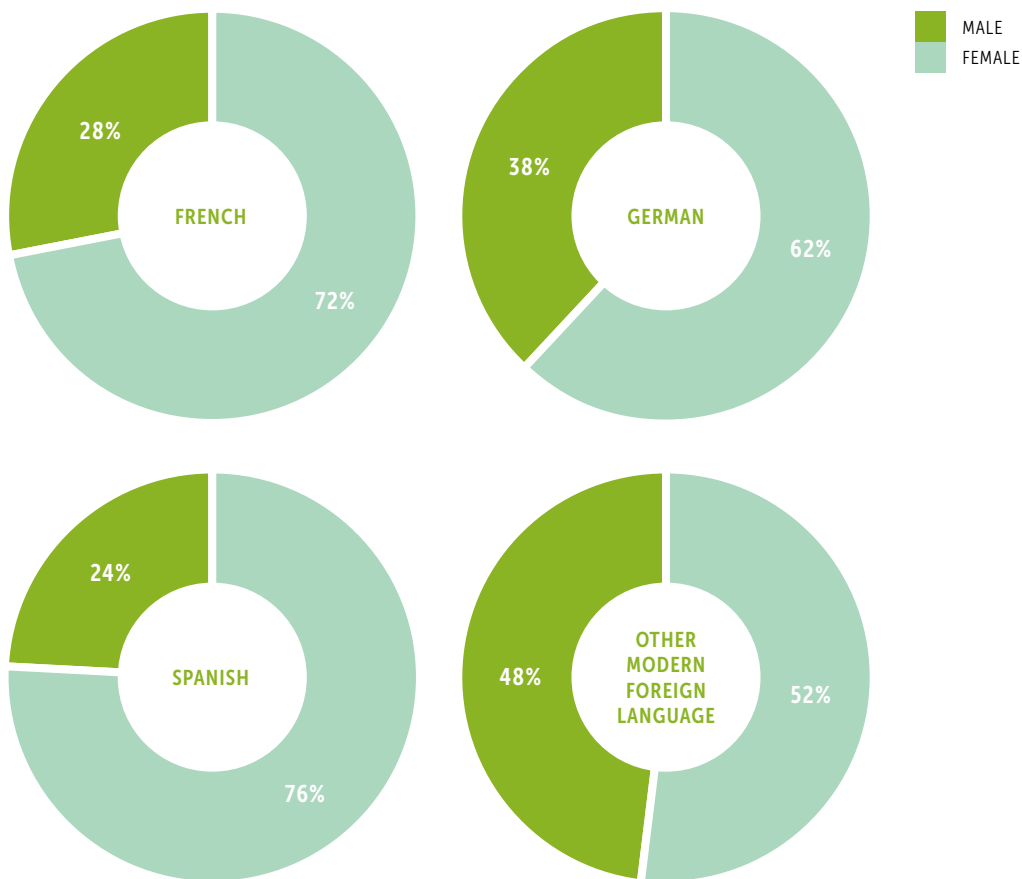
One positive sign is that in 2015 A level entries for MFL, apart from those for French, increased, with Spanish registering a 31 per cent 'bounce'. This increase partly compensates for very steep declines in Spanish and German between 2013 and 2014. However, the longer-term trend indicated by the figures provides little basis for optimism.

### A level entries in MFL by gender

The gender bias at A level is more marked than it is at GCSE: females represent 67 per cent of entries for MFL subjects. As with GCSE entries, Spanish is the most gender-marked language, with more than three quarters (76 per cent) of candidates female, followed by French with 72 per cent female candidates. German has a higher ratio of boys (38 per cent) and 'Other languages' show a more equal pattern of entry between the genders (48 per cent boys, 52 per cent girls).

One positive sign is that in 2015 A level entries for MFL, apart from those for French, increased, with Spanish registering a 31 per cent 'bounce'

FIGURE 4: A LEVEL RATIO OF FEMALE TO MALE CANDIDATES, MFL SUBJECTS, 2015



### Other languages

As noted above, the 'Other languages' are not generally taught as mainstream subjects in Welsh schools. They may come from the FE or adult education sector, or from pupils who have access to those languages in their homes and communities and prepare for examinations outside the main school day. A total of 17 further languages in addition to the three main European ones are currently offered at A level, but the JCQ do not provide a breakdown of these entries for Wales alone, except for specifying that there were no entries for Irish.

Chapter 4

# Findings from the survey of secondary schools



# This year's survey of secondary schools explores provision and take up for MFL in Key Stages 3 and 4, and Post 16.

In order to build on the findings of *Language Trends 2014/15*, and to provide a more detailed picture of the factors influencing provision for and take-up of MFL, some of this year's survey questions were different from those used last year while others were consistent with those used in 2014/15 to facilitate longitudinal analysis. Among the new areas explored are pupils' attitudes towards MFL, measures taken to promote the subject and the extent to which these have been successful.

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## Key Stage 3

### Do all (or almost all) pupils study a foreign language throughout Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9)?

Almost all schools in the survey, with the exception of just four, responded that all pupils study a foreign language throughout Key Stage 3. Where this is not the case, schools state that a relatively small number of pupils are 'disapplied' who have particular learning difficulties for which they need additional support:

*'14 per cent in Year 9 are withdrawn for literacy.'*

*'Pupils who have speech and language difficulties are often disapplied from French. This can vary between 3–5 per cent of the cohort in each year group.'*

*'5 per cent, sometimes without discussion with me as head of department.'*

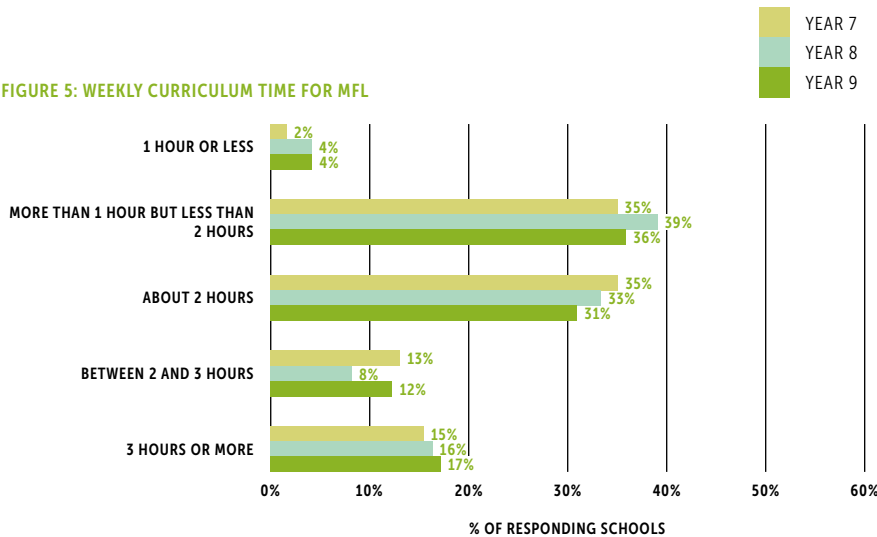
In the 2014/15 survey, the proportion saying that not all/almost all pupils studied a language at Key Stage 3 was slightly higher at 5 per cent, although 29 per cent reported that some lower-ability pupils were 'disapplied' (which is assumed to mean individuals, rather than groups of pupils).

### How much curriculum time is allocated to MFL per week in Key Stage 3?

The majority of schools, more than two thirds in each case, set aside 1–2 hours per week for MFL in Years 7, 8 and 9 (see Figure 5). Whilst it is rare that schools allocate less than one hour per week, around 40 per cent of schools do not meet Estyn's minimum recommendation of two hours per week.<sup>19</sup> Only around a quarter of schools (slightly more in Years 7 and 9) allocate more than two hours per week. In the 2014/15 survey, 43 per cent of schools reported that lesson time for MFL in Key Stage 3 had been reduced, while 7 per cent said that it had been increased.

<sup>19</sup> This contrasts with England, where in 2013/14, only 10 per cent of schools allocated less than two hours and the majority of schools (52 per cent) set aside 2.5–3 hours. Board and Tinsley (2014), p. 70.

FIGURE 5: WEEKLY CURRICULUM TIME FOR MFL



Further detail on the organisation of curriculum time for MFL is provided in the following comments from respondents to this year’s survey:

*‘Our two top sets in Year 9 get two hours a week. Other Year 9 classes get either two or three hours a fortnight. All groups in Years 7 and 8 get either two or three hours a fortnight.’*

*‘Year 7 get four hours of French a fortnight. Years 8 and 9 top sets get three hours of French a fortnight and two hours of Spanish a fortnight. Years 8 and 9 lower sets get three hours of French a fortnight.’*

Where some schools have reduced Key Stage 3 to two years, this has meant that MFL study is curtailed after only two years:

*‘Over the last four years the school has cut the number of lessons (50 minutes) taught in Years 7, 8 and 9. We have cut back from five lessons/fortnight to three lessons/fortnight.’*

In order to investigate any correlation between the socio-economic status of the school population (as indicated by the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)) and the amount of time allotted to MFL in Key Stage 3, the responses to this question were analysed according to the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM in each school, grouped into quartiles. This analysis shows that schools dedicating less than two hours to languages are more likely to be in the high FSM quartile (52 per cent across all Year 8 groups, compared to 43 per cent across all schools).

Schools dedicating less than two hours to languages are more likely to be in the high FSM quartile

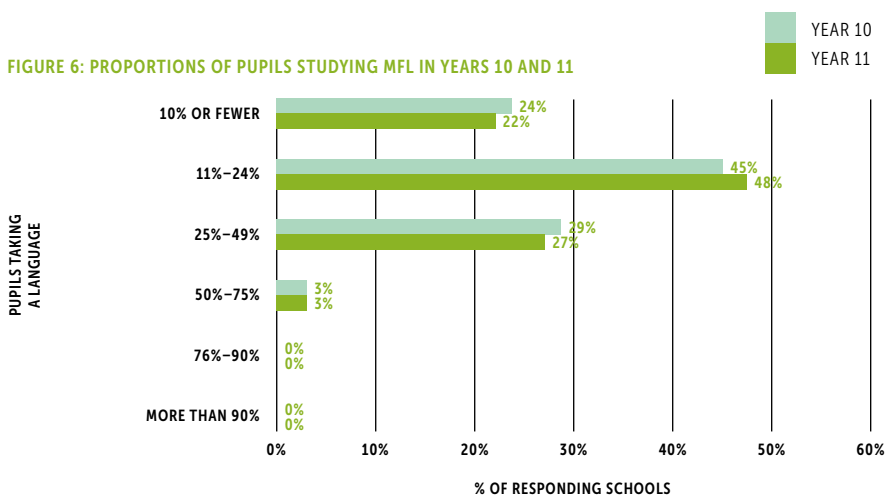
The first Language Trends survey carried out in 2014/15 found that 43 per cent of schools reported reductions in weekly lesson time for MFL. Although this question was not repeated in this year’s survey, the issue was still noted in a number of free comments by respondents.

## Key Stage 4

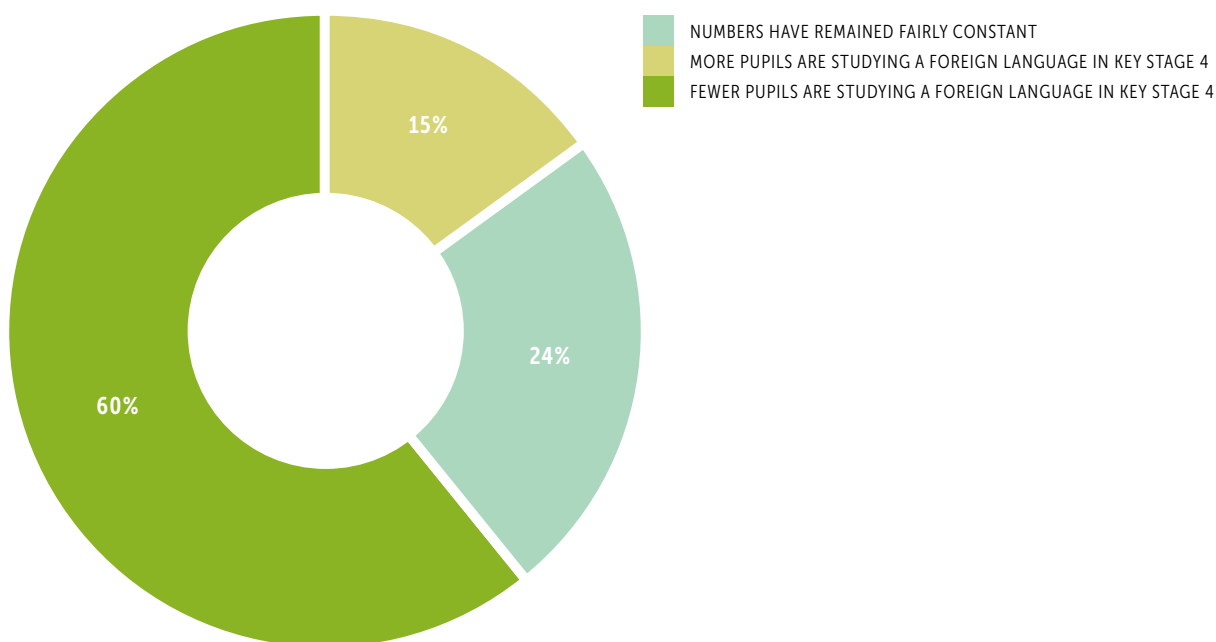
### What proportion of pupils is studying MFL in Key Stage 4?

It is extremely rare for a Welsh school to have more than half its pupils taking a language in Key Stage 4 – just three schools in the survey reported more than 50 per cent take-up in Year 10. As shown in Figure 6, fewer than a third of schools have more than 25 per cent of their pupils taking a language beyond the compulsory phase, while nearly half of all schools report that take-up is between 11 and 24 per cent. In nearly a quarter of schools (24 per cent), take-up of MFL is less than one in ten pupils in Year 10. Sixty per cent of schools report that pupil numbers for foreign languages in Key Stage 4 have fallen in the past three years, while only 15 per cent say they have increased (see Figure 7).

Fewer than a third of schools have more than 25 per cent of their pupils taking a language beyond the compulsory phase



**FIGURE 7: SCHOOLS REPORTING HOW THE PROPORTION OF PUPILS TAKING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN KEY STAGE 4 HAS CHANGED OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS**



Combining responses to the two questions above shows that in 11 of the 19 schools where more pupils are now studying a language in Key Stage 4, take-up is still below 25 per cent, and in one case it is below 10 per cent. The three schools where take-up is above 50 per cent have all seen numbers remain fairly constant (see Table 2).

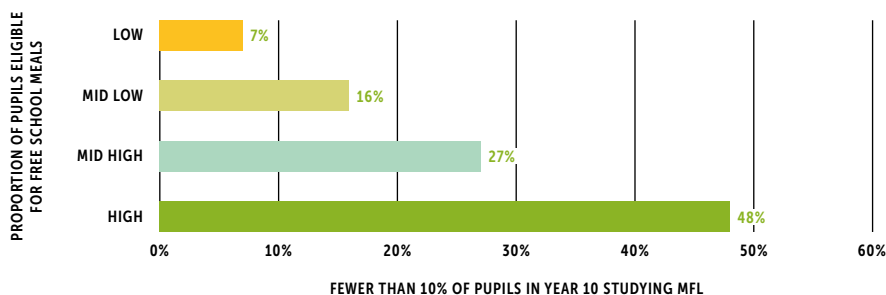
TABLE 2: CHANGES IN TAKE-UP OF MFL BY CURRENT PROPORTIONS OF PUPILS TAKING THE SUBJECT IN KEY STAGE 4

	What proportion of pupils in your school is currently studying a modern foreign language in Key Stage 4?				Total
	10% or fewer	11-24%	25-49%	50-75%	
More pupils are studying a foreign language in Key Stage 4	1	10	8	0	19
Numbers have remained fairly constant	9	7	11	3	30
Fewer pupils are studying a foreign language in Key Stage 4	19	39	16	0	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>123</b>

In order to investigate any correlation between the socio-economic status of the school population (as indicated by the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM) and schools with very low take-up of MFL, the responses to this question were analysed according to the proportions of pupils eligible for FSM in each school, grouped into quartiles. This analysis shows a clear tendency for schools with high numbers of pupils eligible for FSM to have low proportions of pupils studying languages in Key Stage 4 (see Figure 8).

Schools with high numbers of pupils eligible for FSM to have low proportions of pupils studying languages in Key Stage 4

FIGURE 8: SCHOOLS WITH 10% OR FEWER PUPILS STUDYING MFL IN YEAR 10, BY FSM QUARTILE





A similar pattern is also evident for Year 11. Further evidence of a correlation between take-up of languages and socio-economic factors is provided by the three schools in the research which have more than 50 per cent take-up of MFL in Year 10, all of which are in the lowest quartile in terms of numbers of pupils in receipt of FSM. However, there is no pattern in responses to this question by type of school, medium of instruction or region. Similarly, school characteristics do not affect the likelihood of their reporting either increases or declines in take-up over the last few years.

The qualitative evidence from two respondents explaining the reasons for their success in increasing pupil numbers at Key Stage 4 suggests some important lessons in how this might be achieved more widely:

*'High-quality teaching throughout Key Stage 3. Sufficient curriculum time. In option blocks MFL is only against three other subjects. Pupils are engaged in a wide range of activities outside the classroom – exchanges, trips, speakers. We have after school clubs, trained pupil language ambassadors (PLAs), Extended Day for Learning (EDL) – these all raise the profile of MFL within the school. We have excellent results at GCSE and A Level.'*

*'Hard work from the department, accessing help from CILT Cymru<sup>20</sup>, Routes into Languages, talks by business language champions, trips to Paris, focussing on the advantages of MFL in terms of applying to university, communication skills, the Erasmus+ scheme, learning how to learn an MFL so they can learn more later. Persuading SLT to stop practice of replacing MFL with some literacy lessons in Key Stage 3.'*

Respondents who report decreases in the numbers of pupils opting to study a language in Key Stage 4 over the last three years highlight the Welsh Baccalaureate and pressure on options choices as the reasons for this:

*'The main reasons for the decrease are the development of the new Baccalaureate which has reduced the time available for option subjects and the new GCSE exams in core subjects which also require more time. Other reasons are the introduction of new GCSE subjects like psychology and economics and too many set 1 learners who are doing practical subjects.'*

*'There is more pressure on options choices; the introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate has narrowed choice further and impacted on the amount of time available for non-core subjects; the introduction of extra stand-alone literacy lessons in Key Stage 3 at the expense of non-core subject time means that pupils have to work harder to make adequate progress to be able to cope with starting GCSE, which adds to the impression that MFL is hard.'*

*'The percentage studying a language in Year 10 is smaller now. The Baccalaureate has curtailed children's choices so fewer have decided to carry on with a language.'*

*'The triple science option has started so we are losing able pupils who would previously have done double science with a modern language.'*

*'Option choices are very restrictive. French is seen as a difficult GCSE. They already do Welsh so they don't see why they need a second language.'*

Respondents who report decreases in the numbers of pupils opting to study a language in Key Stage 4 over the last three years highlight the Welsh Baccalaureate and pressure on options choices as the reasons for this

<sup>20</sup> CILT Cymru closed in July 2015

### How many slots for free option choices do pupils have for GCSE?

The majority of schools say that pupils have three free option choices, and comments highlight that the number of 'free' options is reducing:

*'4, but this is reducing to 3 for the current Year 9 and in subsequent years.'*

*'2-5, depending on how many science subjects they study.'*

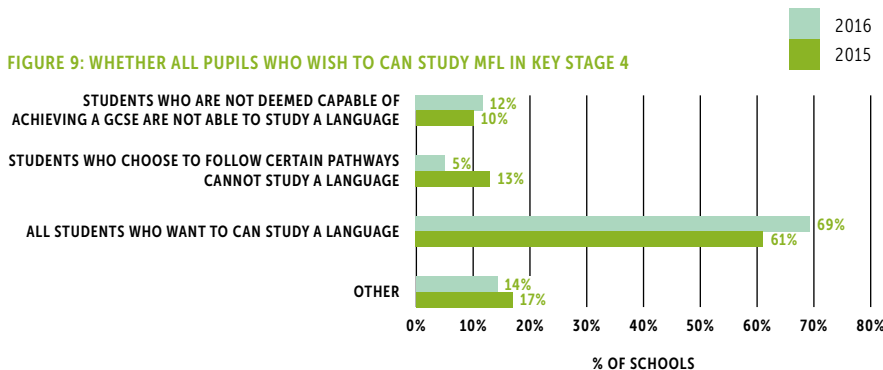
*'5 option columns – languages appear in 2 only.'*

*'As of this year there are three columns and students have to choose one from each as we are introducing the Welsh Baccaulaureate.'*

MFL fares badly where there are so few slots available and so much competition from other subjects

### Are any students prevented from studying a foreign language at Key Stage 4?

Responses show that MFL is a free choice in the majority of schools, with less than a quarter of schools restricting choice (this picture is very similar to England). This question was also asked in the 2014/15 survey (see Figure 9). The variations between the two sets of responses are more likely to be an effect of the sample of responding schools than a reflection of changes in school policies over the past year. Allowing all pupils to choose to take MFL is in line with Welsh Government policy, but MFL fares badly where there are so few slots available and so much competition from other subjects.



A number of respondents to this year's survey provide evidence of clashes in option blocks, which can sometimes prevent pupils from choosing to study a language:

*'Every year students complain about "clashes" in the option columns. Spanish loses boys, and some girls to PE, for example. This year we are in the same column as triple science, which is extremely popular in our school.'*

*'Pupils who wish to study French are often prevented from doing so by the lack of options and a clash of interest in the option blocks.'*

Others report that, in spite of the policy that everyone can study a language who wishes to, many pupils who are deemed unable to achieve a C grade at GCSE are encouraged or 'steered' to take a different, easier subject:

*'MFL department policy is that all who are interested can and will be accommodated. Official school policy is that all pupils can study the subjects that they want to. However, some pupils have reported instances where they have been told by the SLT either that they would be better off choosing a different subject or that although MFL is offered, it is possible that the MFL courses will not have enough uptake to run, so perhaps the pupil should consider an alternative – and so a self-fulfilling prophecy emerges.'*

*'There isn't an accessible examination for weaker students who are keen to further their studies. Consequently, they are encouraged to do other subjects to ensure that they achieve passes – we/they have to consider their future.'*

*'In our school, pupils from lower sets who are unlikely to achieve a C or above are told to consider other choices very strongly. They therefore still get the choice but in the end they rarely choose it.'*

These comments highlight the low status which MFL has in many schools. Where this results in very low numbers choosing to study a language, there is then an issue of financial viability:

*'All students are allowed to pick any subject they want, but a class will only run if it has at least 10 students. As a result, some pupils have not been able to study their choice option when a class has not been able to run.'*

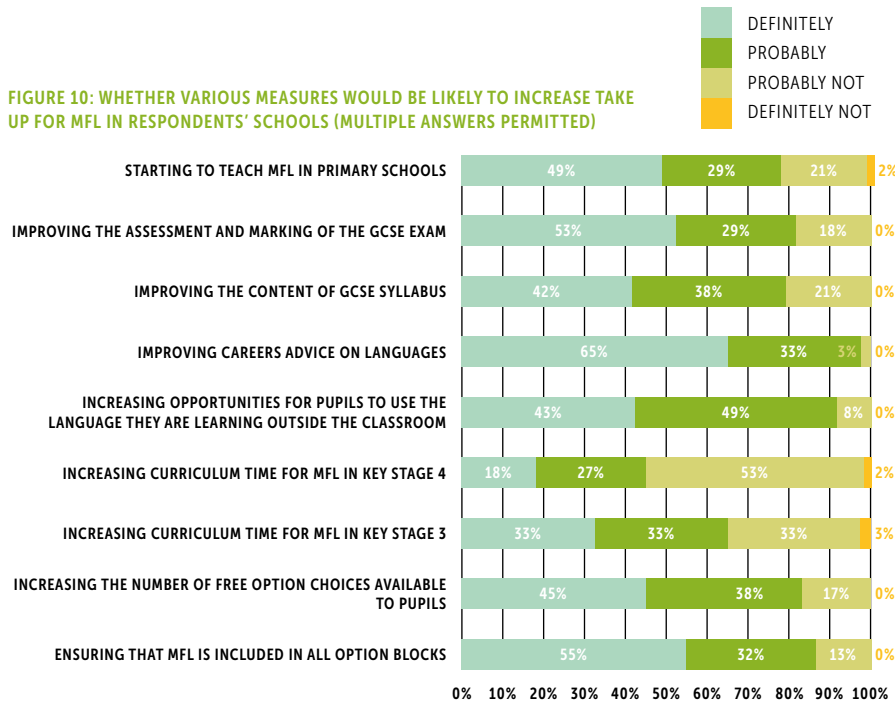
#### **What measures would be likely to increase take-up of MFL?**

This question has yielded some rich data. Almost all respondents (98 per cent) say that improving careers advice on languages would definitely or probably improve take-up in their school; two thirds say it would definitely have an impact. This measure has the strongest support from respondents (see Figure 10). More than half of respondents say that ensuring that MFL appears in all option blocks and improving the assessment and marking of the GCSE exam would *definitely* improve take-up, with approximately another third saying these measures would probably have an impact. The vast majority of respondents (80/83 per cent) also think that improving the content of the GCSE exam or increasing the number of free option choices would have a beneficial impact on take-up. Almost all respondents (92 per cent) favour increasing opportunities for pupils to use the language they are learning outside the classroom (for example, through trips abroad or the use of Foreign Language Assistants, FLAs), but fewer than half say that this would have a *definite* impact – more say it *probably* would. The measure that respondents favour least is increasing curriculum time for languages in Key Stage 4 (18 per cent think this would definitely improve take-up, and 27 per cent think it probably would). This is logical, since pupils make their choices before starting Key Stage 4. However, two thirds of respondents (66 per cent) think that increasing time for languages in Key Stage 3 would have a beneficial impact on take-up. These are equally split between those who believe it would *definitely* improve take-up, and those who think it would *probably* be effective.

Around half of respondents (49 per cent) think that introducing MFL teaching into primary schools would *definitely* increase take-up in secondary, and almost another third (29 per cent) say it *probably* would.

More than half of respondents say that ensuring that MFL appears in all option blocks and improving the assessment and marking of the GCSE exam would *definitely* improve take-up

FIGURE 10: WHETHER VARIOUS MEASURES WOULD BE LIKELY TO INCREASE TAKE UP FOR MFL IN RESPONDENTS' SCHOOLS (MULTIPLE ANSWERS PERMITTED)



Free comments provided by respondents in answer to this question offer further insights into the issues which combine to produce low take-up of MFL at GCSE in Welsh schools:

*'Pupils do not feel confident enough in the foreign language after only three years of study (one year in German) and feel that they will better succeed in other subjects, therefore learning a language at an earlier stage, i.e. primary school, would benefit them greatly.'*

*'The lack of awareness amongst staff, careers advisors within school, pupils and parents regarding the importance of languages to future career opportunities and university entrance is shocking.'*

*'The current trends (new GCSE, new A level, the unfair difficulty of the exams and the unrealistic expectations placed on our students, the priority given to STEM subjects, reduced (slashed!) curriculum allocation for Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) purposes, etc.) are all working towards the destruction of MFL. And I do mean destruction.'*

*'Over 60 per cent of pupils would opt for French if they weren't so restricted with the options due to the Welsh Baccalaureate which doesn't require so much curriculum time. There is no GCSE course to suit low achievers. Career guidance is critical.'*

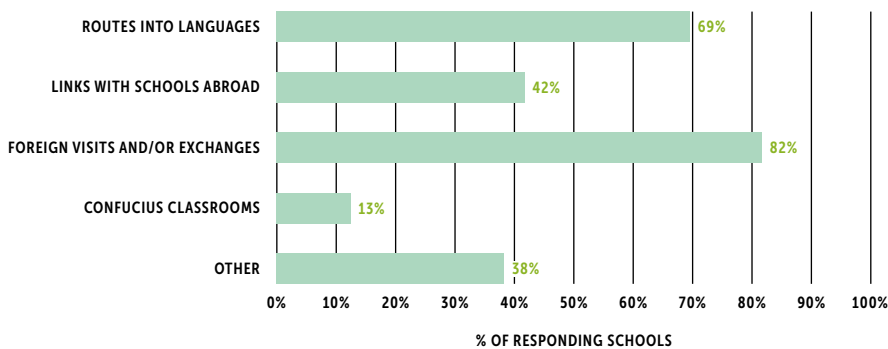
The responses to this question show a high level of engagement with initiatives to promote the learning of MFL

**What initiatives have schools been involved in to promote the learning of MFL?**

The responses to this question show a high level of engagement with initiatives to promote the learning of MFL, and demonstrate the success of the Routes into Languages collaborative project in reaching large numbers of schools (see Figure 11). The vast majority of responding schools (82 per cent) have foreign

visits or exchanges in place, and over two thirds (69 per cent) have been involved with Routes into Languages with Welsh universities. As many as 13 per cent of responding schools are linked to Confucius Classrooms.

FIGURE 11: SCHOOLS INVOLVED WITH VARIOUS INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE THE LEARNING OF MFL



Respondents to the survey provided a wealth of qualitative evidence about the specific initiatives they are involved in to promote an interest in languages in their school and to engage/motivate their pupils. The following comments highlight the 'Other' initiatives involving 38 per cent of responding schools, and demonstrate the extensive efforts schools have already made to improve take-up in MFL:

*'Also had workshops involving STEM, CILT Cymru, Education Achievement Service (EAS) and Cardiff University Modern Languages Faculty.'*

*'We have links with schools in France and Italy and we organise exchange visits to these two countries. We have also had Bangor University Student Ambassadors in to talk to Year 9 and Year 10 students, Tim Penn (business champion) and established the PLA scheme at our school.'*

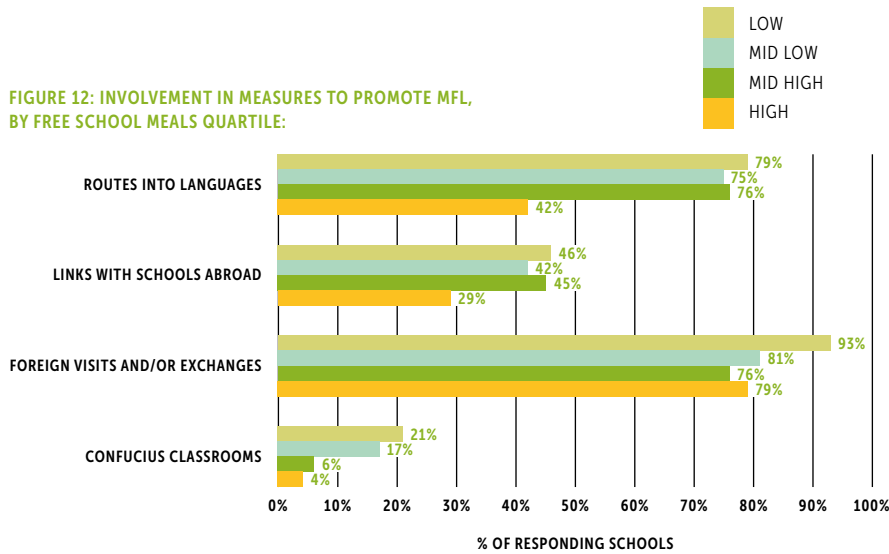
*'Careers Wales – business men/women have come into school to talk to people about the advantages of having an MFL qualification. This has been very successful and has increased uptake this year and last year.'*

*'A Mandarin teacher through the British Council.'*

Schools working in more socio-economically deprived circumstances (with higher proportions of pupils eligible for FSM), are less likely to have been involved in initiatives to promote the learning of MFL. Figure 12 shows that schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for FSM are much less likely to have been involved with Routes into Languages or Confucius Classrooms, and are less likely to have links with schools abroad, although their likelihood of involvement in foreign visits and exchanges is not much lower than the average across all schools.

Schools working in more socio-economically deprived circumstances... are less likely to have been involved in initiatives to promote the learning of MFL

FIGURE 12: INVOLVEMENT IN MEASURES TO PROMOTE MFL, BY FREE SCHOOL MEALS QUARTILE:



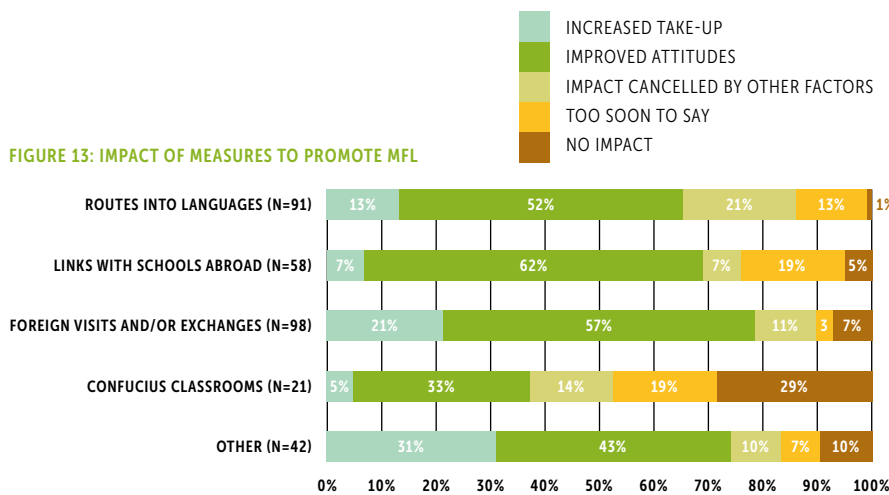
**What has been the impact of these measures?**

All the above initiatives have had a greater impact on attitudes than on actual take-up. In particular, links with schools abroad and foreign visits and exchanges are seen by responding teachers to have had a notably positive impact on attitudes, and more than half of schools involved in the Routes into Languages initiative say it has had a beneficial impact on attitudes towards MFL.

However, only a very small number of schools report that the measures have had an impact on take-up. In particular, one in five schools involved in the Routes into Languages project say that its impact has been cancelled out by other factors; only one school says it has had no impact at all. Of the 42 schools which said they have been involved in 'Other' initiatives to promote MFL (as described in the free comments above), 13 say that these have resulted in increased take-up, and 18 that they have improved attitudes. Although the Confucius Classrooms initiative has involved only a small number of schools to date, it appears to be the least effective of the measures taken to promote MFL, with nearly a third of schools involved saying that it has had no impact.

Only a very small number of schools report that the measures have had an impact on take-up

FIGURE 13: IMPACT OF MEASURES TO PROMOTE MFL



Among the initiatives which respondents say have worked well are speakers from business and STEM-MFL ambassadors:

*'The uptake for next year has improved dramatically. We have made a concerted effort to promote languages by having speakers from business and industry in. Tim Penn was very influential.'*

*'Pupils have commented that what influenced their choice was information from the world of work, careers and access to business people.'*

*'The STEM-MFL ambassador has improved take-up in current Year 10, particularly by pupils who thought science and languages were not compatible.'*

However, there were also expressions of frustration that concerted efforts do not always bring the expected results:

*'Up until now I have felt that they have had a positive impact, but having just received the numbers of next September's GCSE classes, I feel that more fundamental change needs to take place in Wales in particular.'*

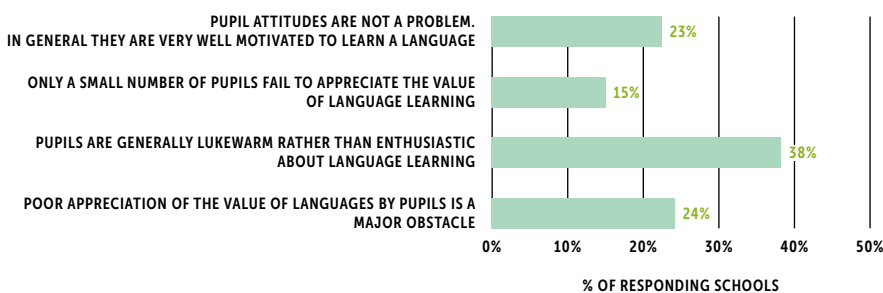
*'The bottom line is that pupils tend to hate studying hard for a foreign language when they can get a similar grade in an "easier subject". The whole system of choice and options is limiting the general knowledge of pupils in Britain. A system like France or Germany should be adopted or we will continue to see MFL deserted. The new GCSE, with its very high demand, will drive the rest away from languages.'*

#### How do teachers describe pupil attitudes towards MFL in their school?

Respondents were asked to rate pupil attitudes towards MFL on a four-point scale. Just under a quarter of respondents place their pupils' attitudes in the highest and lowest categories in terms of attitudes, while the largest number of respondents (38 per cent) place their pupils' attitudes in the second-lowest category, saying that they are 'lukewarm' rather than enthusiastic towards language learning.

The largest number of respondents say that they are 'lukewarm' rather than enthusiastic towards language learning

FIGURE 14: CHARACTERISATION OF PUPIL ATTITUDES TOWARDS MFL



The qualitative evidence provided by respondents sheds light on some of the reasons which colour pupils' attitudes towards languages. These fall broadly into three categories. The first group enjoy learning a language but find the amount of work required compared to other subjects too onerous:





*'It is not particularly pupils' attitudes but the difficulty and the amount of work at Key Stage 4 compared to other options.'*

*'Pupils don't generally dislike languages but find them difficult. They say we work hard and have to think a lot and memorise lots of new words. Many are put off by the workload. They think they are not good enough.'*

*'Pupils are usually keen and enthusiastic, but they know that they will need to work ten times harder in MFL compared with some other subjects to get a (most likely) lower grade – and that is what puts most of them off. Welsh sometimes gets in the way too, but mainly it is the disproportionate importance given to Welsh Baccalaureate and the STEM subjects (combined with the reduced number of option columns) which stops them from opting for languages.'*

The second group represents pupils whose attitudes towards languages are generally positive, but the competition with Welsh and the constraints of option columns can cause them to drop languages:

*'Pupils enjoy their language lessons at Key Stage 3 but feel their choice of options is too restrictive for them to choose to carry on with their language studies.'*

*'Generally attitudes are fairly positive. An issue for us is that we are competing with Welsh and Welsh Bacc, and we have lost lots of hours to the increased emphasis on numeracy and literacy.'*

*'My pupils enjoy learning languages at Key Stage 3 and are positive about their lessons (on the whole) but find languages difficult and other subjects 'easier' – so they choose these over languages in their options. It also doesn't help that they "have" to do Welsh, so some consider that they're already doing a language, or that studying two languages is too much pressure.'*

The third group, described by a number of respondents, is those whose immediate environment makes it difficult for them to see languages as relevant:

*'The majority of pupils see little value in learning a language. They often have very low aspirations and fail to see that language learning is an important communication skill that can broaden their horizons. Likewise, it is obvious from speaking to our pupils that their parents/carers do not value MFLs and feed their negativity.'*

*'Pupils think, generally, that English is universal and will only need a foreign language occasionally if they go abroad. They also think that learning Welsh is more important for their future job prospects than a foreign language.'*

*'Students see no reason to study a language as many have never left the country. They do not understand how learning a language can help job prospects until we tell them or they listen to outside speakers. Many enjoy the lesson but feel that they will never use a language in the future.'*

*'The school catchment has a high proportion of FSM compared with local authority and national averages: for most pupils the idea of travelling outside the immediate area seems totally unrealistic; many pupils cannot afford to participate in school trips even locally, let alone consider a trip abroad. MFL*

The second group represents pupils whose attitudes towards languages are generally positive, but the competition with Welsh and the constraints of option columns can cause them to drop languages

*study therefore seems irrelevant. Pupils and parents do not realise/understand the value of being able to use another language even if only within a local context.'*

However, not everyone is negative and some teachers report that their pupils have a positive attitude towards languages as a result of the initiatives and projects developed by very proactive staff in the Languages department:

*'MFL has a good reputation in school as it is easy to get involved in lots of exciting opportunities outside the classroom. We use lots of ICT which helps to motivate boys, too.'*

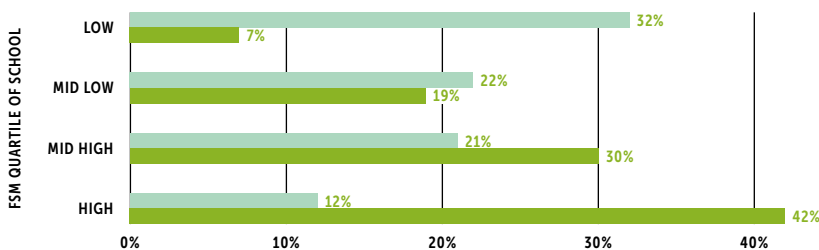
*'We are fortunate to have a middle-class catchment area and a lot of the pupils travel a lot to France and Spain and so see the benefits of speaking a language.'*

Low appreciation of the value of language learning is more commonly reported in schools with high levels of socio-economic deprivation

There is a clear correlation between socio-economic circumstances and pupil attitudes to MFL, as reported by teachers. Figure 15 shows that while motivation to study languages, correlates with more advantaged circumstances, low appreciation of the value of language learning is more commonly reported in schools with high levels of socio-economic deprivation.

■ PUPIL ATTITUDES ARE NOT A PROBLEM. IN GENERAL THEY ARE VERY WELL MOTIVATED TO LEARN A LANGUAGE  
■ POOR APPRECIATION OF THE VALUE OF LANGUAGES BY PUPILS IS A MAJOR OBSTACLE

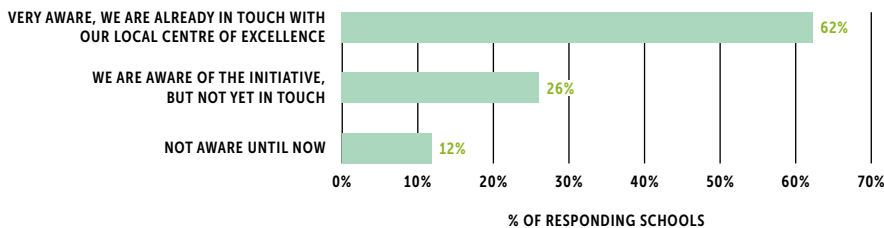
FIGURE 15: PUPIL MOTIVATION TO LEARN A LANGUAGE BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATOR



**To what extent are schools aware of the newly created Centres of Excellence supporting improvements in the teaching and learning of MFL?**

The responses to this question show a high level of awareness of the Welsh Government’s new initiative (88 per cent), with nearly two thirds of respondents already in touch with their local Centre of Excellence.

FIGURE 16: AWARENESS OF CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE



### What do respondents hope to gain from their local Centre of Excellence in terms of improving the teaching and learning of MFL?

Many respondents are enthusiastic about the new centres and hope they will be able to provide a wide range of services including support in developing teaching materials in line with the specifications of the new GCSE/A levels, resources, the opportunity to share good practice and meet challenges together, and strategies for convincing senior management of the value of languages. A small number of respondents also hope that the Centres of Excellence will be able to help raise the profile of languages in general and change public attitudes:

*'Creating a Wales-wide programme to increase the importance of languages in the press and advertisements.'*

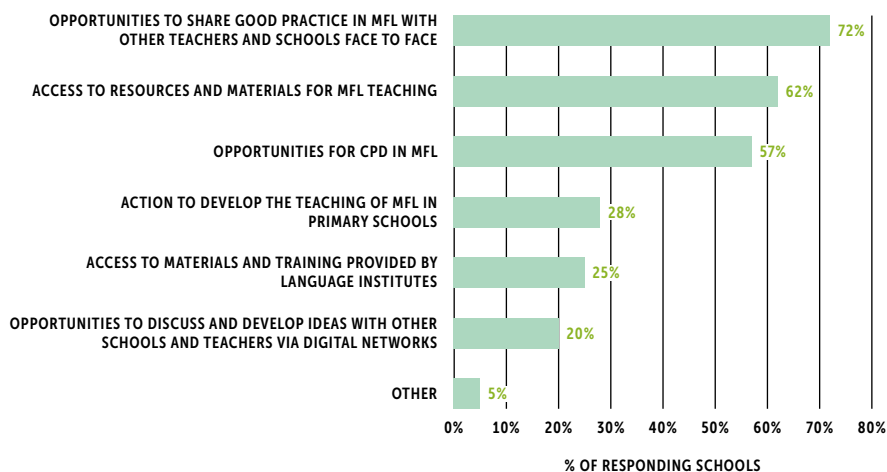
*'Convincing the country, parents and children of the importance of languages – raising them to be on a par with core subjects.'*

### Which types of support would schools welcome most from the Centres of Excellence?

More than half of the responding teachers highlighted a desire for face-to-face networking in order to share good practice with other teachers, access to resources and materials, and opportunities for CPD in MFL teaching. Respondents were less interested in supporting the teaching of languages in primary schools or accessing support from language institutes; only one in five expressed interest in taking part in digital networks.

More than half of the responding teachers highlighted a desire for face-to-face networking

FIGURE 17: TYPES OF SUPPORT SCHOOLS WOULD WELCOME FROM THE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (MULTIPLE ANSWERS PERMITTED)



Some teachers also hope the Centres of Excellence will provide more support in promoting their subject to pupils as well as to parents and colleagues:

*'Help with suggestions on how to make everyone more aware of the importance of language learning.'*

Others also express the hope that the centres will play a more strategic role on their behalf, for example by lobbying the government and exam boards:

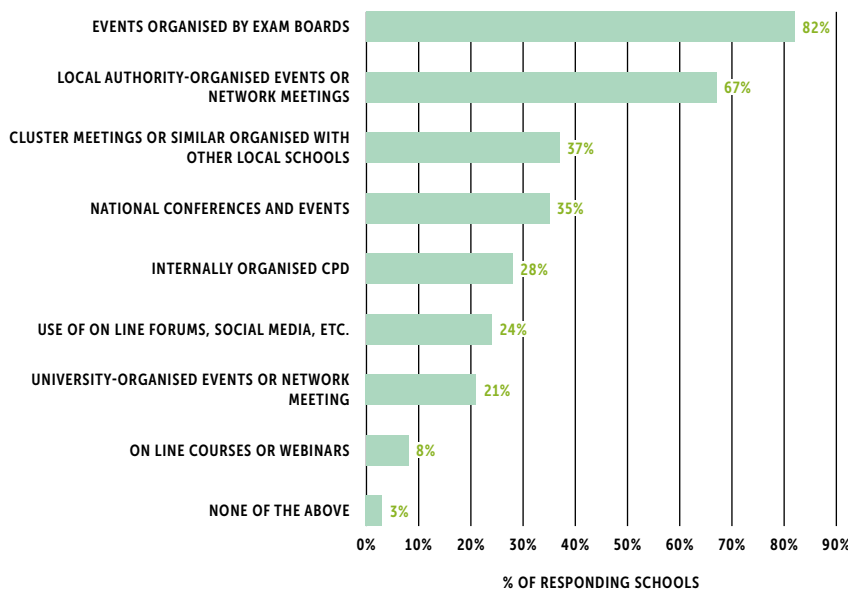
*'To pressure heads/schools/local education authorities to support MFL. Either more hours to teach pupils and high-level exams or fewer hours and low-ability ONLY exams. Let GCSE exams reflect the amount of teaching hours rather than being elitist!'*

**Which types of CPD have MFL teachers attended in the past year?**

Figure 18 shows a high level of participation in the training provided by exam boards: 82 per cent of responding schools had taken part in this type of event in the last year – up from the 61 per cent reported in the 2014/15 survey. This increase may be related to the introduction of the new GCSEs. As many as 67 per cent had taken part in local authority-organised meetings or network events, up from 50 per cent last year. Participation in other types of CPD is much lower, with just over one third of schools taking part in national conferences or events for languages, and cluster meetings with other schools. Less than one quarter of schools access CPD for languages by taking part in online forums and social media in relation to CPD, and internally organised CPD specifically for languages is less common at 28 per cent. These figures are broadly comparable to those from the 2014/15 survey. Three schools in the sample reported that they had not taken part in any of these types of CPD for languages in the past year.

There is a high level of participation in the training provided by exam boards

**FIGURE 18: PARTICIPATION IN VARIOUS FORMS OF CPD FOR LANGUAGES**



Although the majority of schools had participated in training provided by the exam boards, opinions about the training received vary considerably:

*'The recent WJEC CPD regarding proposed changes to the GCSE from 2016 was very frustrating. The proposed changes have not yet been passed and there is very little material available. I didn't feel that I was able to offer potential GCSE students much information at the option evening at school.'*

*'WJEC GCSE inset – useful for finding out more about the draft specification.'*

*'The courses provided by the WJEC are usually useless, as the chief examiner is never present and no one can ever answer queries. Recently, training courses were held for the new GCSE and A level specifications although those specs have not received accreditation yet and are therefore likely to change.'*

*'The exam board meetings were useful as a means of communicating the new specifications. However, as the specification is still not approved the course had its limitations.'*

Respondents particularly praised the opportunity to participate in training or networking meetings arranged locally/regionally such as those by the South East German Teachers Network and, in the past, CILT Cymru. Another teacher sums up the value of CPD opportunities, particularly networking events, as follows:

*'Networking meetings have been a good opportunity for MFL teachers to share good practice, and as a Centre of Excellence, provided us with a starting point for future support and events. We see cluster groups/working groups in subject areas as being essential in helping staff to cope with challenges of the new specifications at GCSE and AS in September.'*

However, not all teachers are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to participate in CPD, as the following comments demonstrate:

*'Any CPD is useful. However, we are generally discouraged from attending CPD events because of budgetary concerns.'*

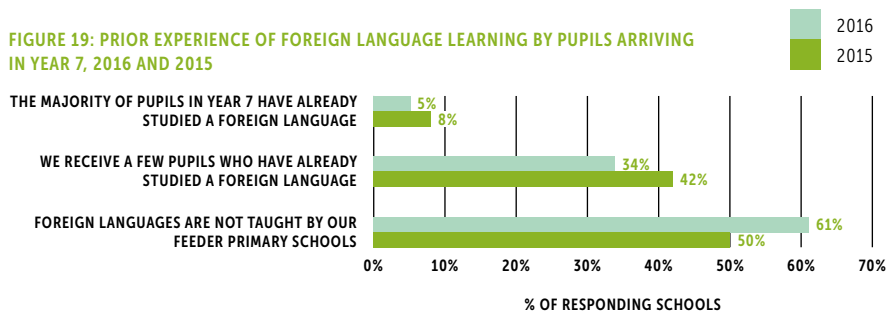
*'There is little money in schools for CPD. Also, my head teacher is reluctant to allow staff out of school to attend events.'*

*'We are only permitted to attend CPD if related to a new syllabus or exam review.'*

### Do secondary schools receive pupils who have learned a foreign language in primary school?

The majority of secondary schools in this year's survey (61 per cent) do not receive pupils from feeder primary schools which teach foreign languages; around one third (34 per cent) receive a few pupils who have already had some experience of learning languages other than English and Welsh, and a small number report that the majority of pupils they receive in Year 7 have already studied a third language (see Figure 19). Differences between the 2014/15 and 2015/2016 findings are likely to be due to the particular sample of responding schools, rather than any indication of trends. These findings are similar to those from the primary school survey, that around one quarter provide some exposure to MFL but less than 10 per cent provide any structured teaching.

The majority of secondary schools in this year's survey (61 per cent) do not receive pupils from feeder primary schools which teach foreign languages



Of the six schools which report that the majority of their Year 7 pupils have already studied a foreign language, four are in the lowest quartile for FSM, and none in the highest quartile, revealing another link between language learning and socio-economic status. There were no free comments from teachers whose schools do not receive pupils with any previous language learning. However, a number of respondents who have been involved in working with primary feeder schools on languages in the past lament the demise of the collaboration between their secondary school and primary feeders:

*'We started delivering French and German lessons to our primary schools a few years ago but had to stop the provision of this highly successful scheme due to curriculum and financial constraints. Our Primary Link teacher devised Schemes of Work, and packs of resources are at present not being used.'*

*'We used to do it but the pilot scheme stopped when the money ran out.'*

*'I used to go to our feeder schools on a weekly basis. This was a real success. All came to a halt when we amalgamated as the head master saw little value since it did not impact on take-up at Key Stage 4.'*

For the most part, responding schools that do receive pupils with some previous experience of language learning describe what the pupils have received in primary school as 'patchy', 'inconsistent', 'a smattering of phrases in German/French/Spanish but nothing of significance'. One respondent highlights the problems for secondary schools of building on MFL in Key Stage 2, and sums up the situation as follows:

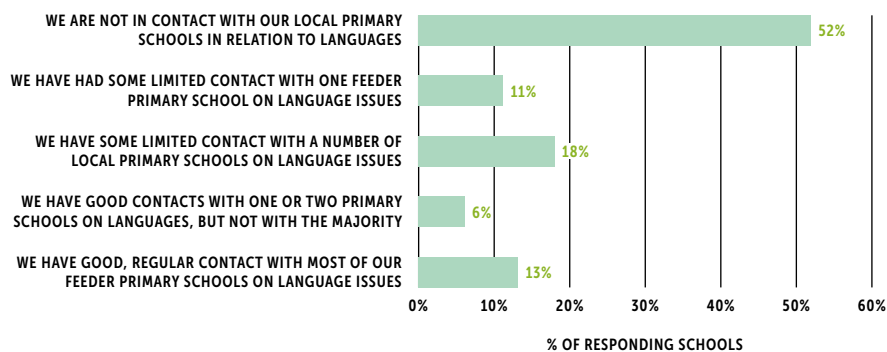
*'We have 40+ feeder schools so transition is a nightmare. We tend to start over and go as quickly as we can. Primary languages based on the skills needed to learn any language would be of great help.'*

**What contacts do secondary schools have with their feeder primary schools in relation to MFL?**

Given the limited extent to which primary schools currently teach MFL, it is interesting to note that a relatively high number – nearly half – of secondary schools have at least some contact in relation to MFL with one or more of their local primary schools (see Figure 20). As many as 13 per cent say that they have good, regular contact with most of their feeder primary schools on language issues; the rest have more limited contacts. This tallies with findings from primary schools about their contacts with secondary schools on MFL.

Nearly half – of secondary schools have at least some contact in relation to MFL with one or more of their local primary schools

**FIGURE 20: EXTENT OF CONTACT SECONDARY SCHOOLS HAVE WITH LOCAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS ON MFL**



A small number of respondents described ongoing successful collaboration between their school and local primary feeder schools:

*'I go to five of the six feeder primary schools once a fortnight for a 45-minute lesson which is very enjoyable and the Year 6 pupils are extremely motivated and always happy to have their French lesson.'*

*'Some of the feeder primaries offer a little French in a club setting at present. The demand for Key Stage 2 French is there. I have spoken to primary head teachers already. We have already organised Chinese at two feeder primaries. This is up and running and very well received. Our Latin teacher also runs two Latin clubs in the primary schools.'*

*'We hold an annual "Language Day" with all primary schools. All feeder schools attend on the same day and we host a series of carousel activities teaching languages through games. This has been a successful part of the school calendar for several years.'*

However, the majority of teachers cite budgetary constraints and pressures on curriculum time as reasons why they are not able to support primary schools with languages, for example:

*'We used to go into two of our feeder primary schools once a week to deliver Spanish lessons but this was stopped due to lack of money.'*

*'Contact was initiated in the past, and the primary schools that were interested were provided language lessons delivered by secondary school staff. Budgets do not allow language teachers to "tour" the feeder schools and the catchment area is too vast.'*

Those who are able to offer to some support to primary schools generally provide a short period of initial teaching of a foreign language to pupils in Year 6 as part of a transition programme, as the following comments show:

*'We have relaunched our Primary School Project this year which allows me to teach French to every Year 6 class in our catchment area for one lesson/fortnight. This has been a huge success.'*

*'We have run a Year 6 transition workshop with two feeder primaries over the last two years. No other contact takes place.'*

*'As part of transition activities in the autumn term, one MFL teacher visits all feeder primary schools teaching French for a session.'*

*'Three hours a fortnight. For the last four years the pupils in Year 9 have not had any French as Key Stage 3 has only been two years.'*

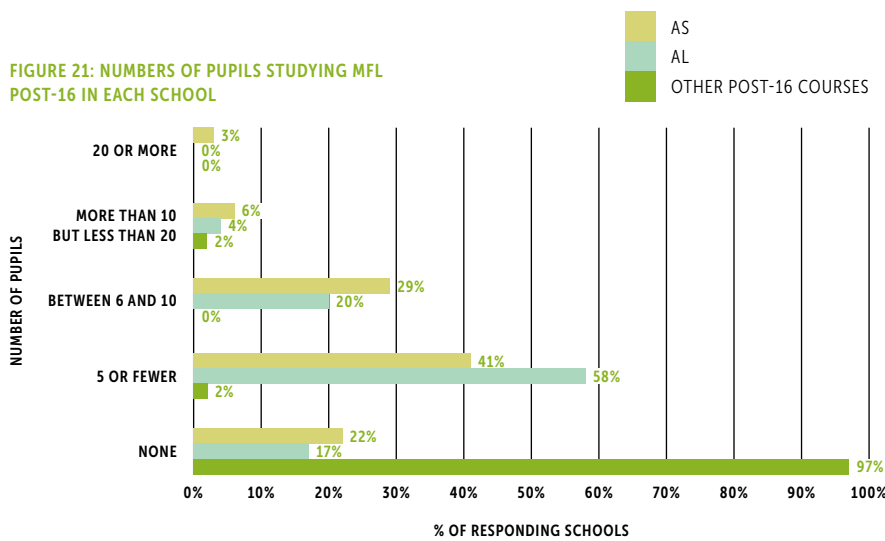
### **Post-16**

Of the 119 schools that responded to this section, 86 have post-16 pupils and 69 offer post-16 courses in languages other than English and Welsh. This indicates that a relatively high proportion – one in five (higher than last year) – of schools with post-16 provision do not run AS or AL courses in MFL.

The majority of teachers cite budgetary constraints and pressures on curriculum time as reasons why they are not able to support primary schools with languages

### How many pupils do schools have studying post-16 courses in MFL?

Responses to this question show that, in schools which offer post-16 courses in MFL, the numbers studying the subject tend to be low. The majority of schools (58 per cent) have five or fewer pupils at A2, and as many as 41 per cent have five or fewer at AS. The vast majority (90 per cent or more) have fewer than ten pupils studying MFL at AS or AL; this must mean that the groups for each language are very small indeed. Around one in five schools which offer post-16 courses in MFL currently have no pupils taking them. There are just two schools in this year's sample which have 20 or more pupils taking AS courses in MFL, and none with this number for A2 (see Figure 21).



With very small numbers of pupils choosing to study a language post-16, some schools have joined together to offer AS and A level courses on a single campus. However, this can also have an adverse effect on take-up, as the following comments show:

*'Pupils from two other schools were also sent to us for MFL – so there was no longer any incentive in either of these schools to encourage the post-16 study of languages. This has led to the situation of no one doing AS this year (compared with nine pupils last year).'*

*'Transporting pupils from other schools to be taught by a teacher they don't know has surely discouraged many pupils from taking A level French. It is a ridiculous policy that must cost more money in taxi fares than if they were taught in their original schools!'*

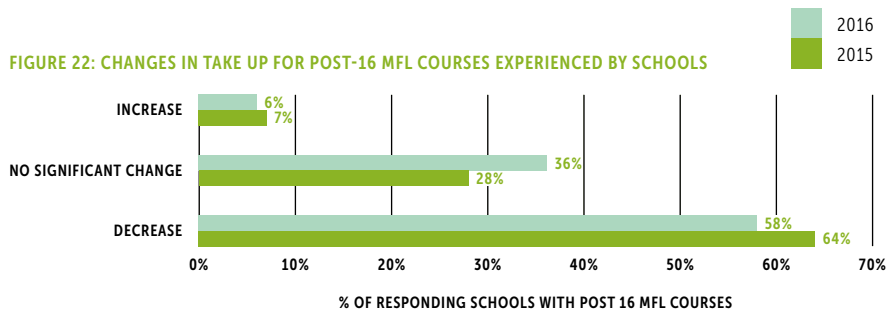
With very small numbers of pupils choosing to study a language post-16, some schools have joined together to offer AS and A level courses on a single campus



### Have numbers for post-16 courses increased or decreased over the last three years?

More than half (58 per cent) of schools have seen the numbers for post-16 MFL decrease over the last few years, although 6 per cent report increases (see Figure 22). The rest (36 per cent) report no significant change. In 2014/15, 68 per cent reported declines, 7 per cent increases and the rest no change. The small number of schools involved accounts for the difference between the 2014/15 and 2015/16 figures; it is unlikely to represent any national change.

More than half (58 per cent) of schools have seen the numbers for post-16 MFL decrease over the last few years



One respondent summed up the situation facing languages at post-16:

*'French has struggled to recruit sixth formers despite being the school's main language. Languages have the reputation of being hard and pupils opt for subjects in which they believe they can access the top grades more reliably. Top students opt more for maths, sciences, English.'*

When asked to comment on the reasons for the decline in numbers taking MFL post-16, respondents put forward the following factors:

*'The inaccessibility of exams compared to other subjects.'*

*'There are too many pupils studying sciences – even if they are not scientifically talented pupils.'*

*'Option boxes and lack of teaching time due to testing in Key Stage 3.'*

Respondents from schools which have experienced increases in the numbers taking MFL post-16 cite *'excellent GCSE results'*, *'teacher motivation'* and *'collaboration with another school'* as reasons for the improvements they have seen.

The 17 schools in this year's survey which have post-16 pupils but do not offer post-16 language courses were asked why. In most cases it is because the school has joined a consortium and another school is offering the A level language courses. The only other reason given by respondents is *'lack of take-up'*. If pupils at these schools wish to study MFL at post-16, they must travel to another educational establishment, such as a partner school, another school in a locally formed consortium or occasionally a local college. One respondent commented that in her case, this involves pupils travelling 20 miles – clearly a deterrent for them.

**What are the key issues of concern for teachers of MFL in secondary schools?**

This section gathers together issues raised by teachers in response to the open question 'Is there anything else you would like to tell us about languages in your school or nationally?'

A small minority of respondents are positive and/or hopeful for the future. One or two are particularly welcoming of the *Global Futures* initiative and what it might be able to achieve:

*'The faculty works tirelessly to promote language learning generally, and there is a very positive attitude towards language learning generally. All pupils learn Mandarin, French and German in Key Stage 3 with no exemptions for more than five years. Pupils have a 'can do' attitude. We offer the NVQ Business Languages qualification which has increased interest further. A student can elect to give up languages completely at the end of Key Stage 3, but we have retained a healthy 60 per cent plus average over the past three years. Pupils recognise the benefit of learning languages. We do a great deal to promote them to parents and pupils.'*

*'It feels like things are moving on at last nationally. There is much to be done and it remains to be seen what impact the new GCSE will have on teaching and interest.'*

*'In my school, languages are on the up – we have gone from mid-40s to nearly 70 for next year's Year 10. Global Futures is definitely having a very positive impact and the Welsh Government has acted with a degree of wisdom and finesse hitherto unknown in educational policy – bringing all stakeholders to the table and putting into place local structures which will address local problems. The future looks promising!'*

*'It's very exciting that the Global Futures plan is moving so quickly. MFL staff in my region are happy that we have a new focus. There are several hurdles as MFL departments are usually small, especially in an 11–16 school. Principle hurdles are: timetabling/staffing, new GCSE and A level specifications, and option blocks.'*

However, the majority of teachers expressed a sense of frustration and beleaguerment. Their comments cover a range of issues which they perceive as preventing the take-up of languages by pupils in their schools. The issues which are of most concern to the greatest number of responding teachers are given below, with a selection of comments from respondents in each case:

- **Competition from other subjects and the Welsh Baccalaureate**

*'I fear that making Welsh GCSE compulsory will mean the death of MFL take-up in Wales. I am very pro-Welsh but I can foresee a lot of pupils being reluctant to do two.'*

*'Compulsory full course Welsh will likely see the decimation of MFL at GCSE in schools where numbers are already precarious. The new GCSE in MFL will do nothing to encourage uptake – quite the opposite.'*

A small minority of respondents are positive and/or hopeful for the future

*'The Welsh Baccaulaureate, which is taking opportunities away from the children of Wales, must be halted. Instead of spending money on Centres of Excellence, Estyn needs to ask schools "what strategies have they in place to ensure that pupils are being encouraged to take languages?" That is all that needs to happen and every head teacher would be trying to ensure that there was a way for pupils to continue studying languages after that rather than preventing that happening as happens now – perhaps not deliberately but restricting choices and making the Welsh Baccaulaureate compulsory....'*

*'The Welsh Baccaulaureate has affected uptake of all foundation subjects where schools have gone down the route of losing an option column for the preservation of maths/English. The new specification will affect numbers further and will prevent less able pupils from being able to access the syllabus.'*

- **General attitudes towards languages/insularity**

*'The pupils in our school are VERY insular in general and come from non-aspirational backgrounds. They absolutely hate doing Welsh in general and find it very hard. Since this is compulsory at Key Stage 4 for many, it means that another MFL is just too much to cope with as they really do see Welsh as a foreign language. The Welsh Government's lofty aim to be "bilingual plus one" will NEVER be realised while Welsh as a compulsory LANGUAGE option (as opposed to perhaps Welsh Studies) remains. With the introduction of the full course it will be even worse. Our pupils have very low RA and literacy levels. Languages in our school are not really fully supported – we were cut from four to three hours in Key Stage 3 to give humanities more time as "they contribute more to literacy"!! It is ALL about the GCSE points and finding the subjects that the pupils can "pass".'*

*'Pupils need to be made aware that languages are an integral part of human nature. They need to be reminded that at least two foreign languages are taught everywhere in Europe, even in England, and that they will lose out in terms of career opportunities if they do not take up at least one foreign language throughout their school lives.'*

- **The exam system**

*'My school is just a mere reflection of what happens all over Wales in MFL in public education. It is becoming more and more ELITIST. The results with the new GCSE in 2018 will prove it. It is too difficult for the amount of teaching these children have received! The numbers speak again and again! The answer is simple: increase the statutory amount of MFL hours taught at Key Stage 3! Make it more than just a recommendation. Make it statutory for 2–3 hours per week and watch what happens!'*

*'I am very concerned that the new GCSE will put even more pupils off languages as it is 100 per cent exam. I would welcome a level 2 alternative for my less able pupils who love learning languages but wouldn't/can't cope with exams.'*

*'I am concerned about the marking of GCSE French (WJEC). Grade boundaries for writing and speaking are always changing. Pupils now require 14/20 for a*

*C in speaking and writing. In Welsh, my understanding is that pupils only need 9/20 for a C in speaking in what is a very similar exam. I do feel it has become an uphill battle. Pupils are demoralised by their grades. I have been teaching for 26 years and the marking/grade boundaries have become harsher. We used to consistently achieve around 80 per cent A\*-C and now it is more like 58 per cent. This naturally has an impact on uptake at A level. Between 12–18 pupils was the norm for A level. Now we struggle to get five.'*

- **Lack of systemic support and endorsement of the value of languages**

*'As we are becoming more and more league table driven and results dependent, I feel schools are pushing/promoting certain subjects, to improve our schools' performance in these. Due to smaller numbers we are an easy target during times of economic difficulty, when we suddenly become "financially not viable" unless we have a minimum of 10–12 pupils at A level/ GCSE. There is a definite lack of good-quality, up-to-date careers advice/guidance which promotes the importance of languages consistently throughout the school.'*

*'We are regularly told that we do not offer value for money as our classes are very small at Key Stage 4 and the results are not great by SLT. Pupils do not consider MFL relevant to their lives.'*

*'Teaching languages in a school where behaviour is often poor and the work ethic is equally poor is very demanding. I have strong, experienced and talented teachers in my department and we are all fed up with battling to plan engaging lessons which pupils do not appreciate. We lack resources due to budget cuts. The new GCSE course is very demanding compared to other, "softer", subjects, so once again we are penalised. Word of mouth will be enough to put pupils off opting for French when they know they can do half as much work in another subject and be guaranteed a high-grade pass. After 31 years teaching MFL, I am totally fed up and demoralised and plan to leave the profession very soon.'*

*'MFL are being eradicated by the Welsh Government. Too much political interference has created an insular outlook in Welsh educational policy. Low Pisa scores achieved by Welsh pupils in the last Pisa testing created a situation whereby an LNF was imposed on schools in Key Stage 3. Head teachers in our authority responded by reducing teaching time for MFL from four or five lessons per fortnight to three to accommodate the LNF. In September 2015 Year 10 option choices for foundation subjects were reduced in our school from four subjects to three to accommodate Welsh Government demands for an increase in A/A\* GCSE grades. Many pupils who would have opted for an MFL given the chance said they did not have enough option choices to choose a modern language. MFL are a very low priority for the current Welsh Government.'*

## Key points

- Only a short amount of time is being allocated to teaching MFL in Key Stage 3 – the only phase in which the subject is compulsory. About 40 per cent of schools offer less than the two hours per week minimum recommended by Estyn.
- In more than two-thirds of schools, take-up of MFL in Key Stage 4 is below 25 per cent, and 60 per cent of schools report declines.
- The Welsh Baccalaureate and the reduction of option slots are the main reasons for the most recent declines in take-up to GCSE.
- Teachers believe that improving careers advice, making changes to the assessment and marking of the GCSE exam, increasing the number of free choices and ensuring that MFL appears in all option blocks would be the best ways to improve take-up of MFL.
- There has been a high level of involvement in efforts to promote MFL: 69 per cent of responding schools have been involved with the Routes into Languages initiative. However, although these have had a beneficial impact on attitudes, they have not substantially improved take-up.
- There is a correlation between low take-up of MFL and schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for FSM. Schools working in more disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to report that their pupils do not appreciate the value of language learning, and less likely to have been involved in efforts to promote MFL to pupils.
- There is a high level of awareness of the new Centres of Excellence, and 62 per cent of responding schools are already involved with their local centre. Teachers hope they will provide opportunities to network, and share practice and teaching resources.
- There is a high level of participation in CPD provided by exam boards (82 per cent) and in networking events provided by local authorities (67 per cent).
- Although the vast majority of secondary schools do not receive intakes of pupils who have already studied a language in primary school, nearly half of secondary schools have at least some involvement with one or more of their local primary schools on MFL matters.
- Groups for MFL post-16 are very small and numbers are declining. As a result post-16 MFL is increasingly becoming financially unviable.
- MFL is losing out in the drive for Welsh, numeracy, STEM and a narrow view of literacy.

The Welsh Baccalaureate and the reduction of option slots are the main reasons for the most recent declines in take-up to GCSE

Chapter 5

# Case studies and interviews with pupils, teachers and headteachers



## Researchers interviewed members of schools' Senior Management Teams and Heads of Languages as well as conducting focus groups with pupils.

All schools visited had higher-than-average attainment results in MFL at the end of Key Stage 3, and all were higher attaining overall, based on the percentage of pupils gaining at least five good GCSEs at the end of Key Stage 4 including maths and either Welsh or English. These are the criteria for the 'Level 2 Threshold' used by the Welsh Government. All have lower-than-average numbers of pupils eligible for FSM and none have significant numbers of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL).<sup>21</sup>

The following pages provide four case studies followed by details of our interviews with pupils, teachers and headteachers.

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<sup>21</sup> Data are from [www.mylowalschool.wales.gov.uk](http://www.mylowalschool.wales.gov.uk). All figures are for 2015 unless otherwise stated.

## Case study 1: Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg, Barry

### Medium:

Welsh

### Number of pupils:

819 (mixed)

### Age range:

11–18

### % of pupils eligible for FSM:<sup>22</sup>

7.6%

### % of Key Stage 3 pupils reaching level 5 in MFL:<sup>23</sup>

96%

### % of Key Stage 4 pupils achieving the level 2 threshold in English/Welsh and maths:<sup>24</sup>

67.6%

### % EAL pupils:<sup>25</sup> n/a (3% minority ethnic)<sup>26</sup>

**Bro Morgannwg is a growing Welsh-medium school in Barry, expected to double in size in the next five years. There are currently 120 pupils in Year 9 and 180 in Year 7.**

Languages used to be taught in their primary feeder school but the funding ended for this. The first group that experienced this are now in the sixth form and the teacher says there is a noticeable difference in their results in languages, which are very good.

Now all Year 7s start French ab initio. They have three hours a fortnight in Years 7 and 8. In Year 9 they have two hours a fortnight of French and two hours a fortnight of Spanish. This enables all pupils to have a taster of Spanish and to decide which language to take, if any, for GCSE. There are currently 35 pupils taking French in Year 11, and 26 taking Spanish, around half the cohort. The head of languages describes persuading pupils to take languages as a 'battle' as they want to do subjects that are easier. She says it is also 'a fight against sciences'.

However, the school is proud of its retention rates from GCSE to A level. In Year 12 there are currently eight doing French and five doing Spanish. In Year 13 there are 15 doing French and another five doing Spanish. Next year's Year 12 looks healthy too. The head of department puts this success down to 'Rigour! They know we care and want them to do well.'

There are trips to France and Spain in Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, although this year's trip to Paris had to be cancelled because of the terrorist attacks there. The school would love to employ an FLA but there is no budget for this.

Although it is a Welsh-medium school, 95 per cent of pupils come from English-speaking backgrounds; the parents have chosen Welsh-medium education for their children from an early age, and are very open to other languages too. This is seen 'absolutely' to be an advantage, according to the head of languages, as learning

two languages from an early age enables children 'to think in two ways' and 'opens the mind'. Although parents are generally supportive, the catchment area is 'polarised' and bright children tend to have more support from their parents. The teacher feels that this gives languages an unfortunate 'elitist' image.

French and Spanish are taught through the medium of Welsh, and great stress is placed on 'triple literacy'. The school was a case study in the government-funded Triple Literacy project delivered by CILT Cymru. Children are encouraged to move between languages and see patterns rather than 'a pile of disconnected vocabulary'. The school uses an approach common with English in primary schools known as 'big writing', where sentences are built up focussing on structures.

<sup>22</sup> National average for Wales 17.5%

<sup>23</sup> National average for Wales 84.1%

<sup>24</sup> National average for Wales 57.9%

<sup>25</sup> National average for Wales 2.8%

<sup>26</sup> National average for Wales 8.4%



## Case study 2: Monmouth Comprehensive School, Monmouth

**Medium:**  
English

**Number of pupils:**  
1,638 (mixed)

**Age range:**  
11–18

**% of pupils eligible for FSM:<sup>27</sup>**  
7.8%

**% of Key Stage 3 pupils reaching level 5 in MFL:<sup>28</sup>**  
88%

**% of Key Stage 4 pupils achieving the level 2 threshold in English/Welsh and maths:<sup>29</sup>**  
68.4%

**% EAL pupils:<sup>30</sup>**  
0.5% (2014 figure)

**Monmouth Comprehensive School is a large English-medium school located in the centre of Monmouth. Some 26 per cent of pupils are from England and travel in each day, attracted by the school's excellent reputation. The school has eight main feeder primary schools and receive pupils from a further 30. It has very few EAL pupils. All pupils joining the school from primary schools in England begin Welsh tuition in Year 7, taking either the 'short' or 'full' GCSE course in Welsh.**

The large size of the school facilitates flexibility in the curriculum, which means that the needs of individual pupils can be met and also that small groups (fewer than five pupils at A level and fewer than 14 at GCSE) can still be accommodated. The school is very supportive of foreign languages and offers pupils the opportunity to learn French, Spanish and German though it is the more able pupils who tend to choose to study languages. The school is able to offer foreign languages at A level by using the extra-curricular period known as 'Period 6' for this purpose.

All pupils study French from Years 7 to 9 and have four lessons a fortnight, although these are not always distributed evenly and poor frequency can impact on the retention of language. Spanish and German are offered to pupils at Key Stage 4 following taster sessions at Key Stage 3 to introduce pupils to the new languages. Language classes in Year 7 are mixed ability. In Years 8 and 9 pupils are ability grouped according to their scores in both French and Welsh. This is so that pupils experiencing challenges in one language can be supported by both French and Welsh teachers working together as the difficulties they are experiencing may be evident in both languages.

Only one student is disapplied from languages. A few students at Key Stage 3, who have low cognition scores and find all language acquisition difficult for a number of reasons, study languages through a bespoke language programme that helps them develop the required skills.

In spite of the fact that just over a quarter of Year 7 pupils arrive from English primary schools where they have studied a foreign language at Key Stage 2, the school does not notice any difference in MFL competency between these pupils and their peers from Welsh schools who have not previously studied a foreign language. The school believes this may be to do with the fact that language teaching in primary schools is content rather than skills based.

In the past the school has had 40 per cent take-up of languages from Year 9 onwards and although this has slipped in recent years, efforts are being made to get take-up back to this level. For the current year (2015/16) the take-up of MFL across Key Stage 4 (approximately 250 pupils) is 82 pupils (33 per cent) in Year 9, 80 pupils (32 per cent) in Year 10 and 70 pupils (28 per cent) in Year 11.

The school considers the Welsh Baccalaureate a new opportunity that recognises the importance of studying the wider world and believes that the Welsh Government's 'bilingual +1' policy motivates and encourages the development of language skills. However, the challenge is in creating a diverse curriculum that meets the needs of all learners without narrowing to the key accountability measures – English, maths, science and Welsh.

Despite MFL having excellent, dedicated practitioners, the recruitment of good-quality MFL teachers is a challenge for the school. The head teacher believes that this situation needs to change in all schools if the country is to improve its performance in MFL. In this school's experience, there are insufficient men training to be MFL teachers, and teachers are leaving the profession because of a systemic increase in pressure and accountability, and because the emphasis on a specific examination scheme impedes their creativity.

<sup>27</sup> National average for Wales 17.5%

<sup>28</sup> National average for Wales 84.1%

<sup>29</sup> National average for Wales 57.9%

<sup>30</sup> National average for Wales 2.8%

## Case study 3: Alun School, Mold, Flintshire

**Medium:**  
English

**Number of pupils:**  
1,661 (mixed)

**Age range:**  
11–18

**% of pupils eligible for FSM:<sup>31</sup>**  
9.3%

**% of Key Stage 3 pupils reaching level 5 in MFL:<sup>32</sup>**  
91%

**% of Key Stage 4 pupils achieving the level 2 threshold in English/Welsh and maths:<sup>33</sup>**  
78.9%

**% EAL pupils:<sup>34</sup>**  
0.5

**Alun School is an English-medium coeducational comprehensive school which provides for pupils coming from a socio-economically varied catchment area comprising Mold and the surrounding villages. Its annual intake is 244 and pupils are divided into nine separate tutor groups.**

From Years 7 to 9 pupils learn either French or German (five groups are assigned to French and four to German). Throughout Key Stage 3, pupils receive two hours per week tuition in either French or German. In Year 9, the more able pupils also have the opportunity to begin the language they have not previously learned from scratch. There are very few dual linguists although it is possible for pupils to take two languages.

The school has regular exchanges with schools in France and Germany and also manages an active pen pal scheme. In 2014 the school won a prestigious award for its work in languages (German, in particular) from the British Academy and as a result saw an increase in the number of pupils opting to take a language at GCSE. In the past the school has had an annual GCSE cohort for foreign languages of around 90, but this has gone down to 60 since GCSE option lines were reduced from five to three. However, the efforts made by the SLT in support of MFL have had a positive effect in persuading more pupils to take a foreign language to GCSE. Any pupil wishing to take a language to GCSE can do so; however, a very small number of pupils may be encouraged to study other subjects instead if this means they are likely to be successful in the exams.

For the academic year 2015/16, there are eight pupils doing AS German and seven doing A2. For French the numbers are 15 at AS level and three at A2. Although the A level groups for languages are small and very often below the cohort size needed for the class to be financially viable, the head teacher and SLT are committed to languages and devote time to actively encourage pupils to opt for

languages at GCSE and A level. It is made clear to pupils that they will need to compete with English pupils for university places and it is important that they are not disadvantaged.

Alun School has the biggest A level centre in Wales, with 80 per cent of its pupils achieving an A to C at A level (this was 94 per cent with the pre-2009 specification). GCSE and A level results in general are above the national average for Wales. Numbers for languages are in decline, and teachers feel that MFL is becoming an increasingly elitist subject.

<sup>31</sup> National average for Wales 17.5%

<sup>32</sup> National average for Wales 84.1%

<sup>33</sup> National average for Wales 57.9%

<sup>34</sup> National average for Wales 2.8%



## Case study 4: Ysgol Bro Dinefwr, Llandeilo

**Medium:**  
Bilingual

**Number of pupils:**  
1,185 (mixed)

**Age range:**  
11–18

**% of pupils eligible for FSM:<sup>35</sup>**  
11.2%

**% of Key Stage 3 pupils reaching level 5 in MFL:<sup>36</sup>**  
87.8%

**% of Key Stage 4 pupils achieving the level 2 threshold in English/Welsh and maths:<sup>37</sup>**  
63.3%

**% EAL pupils:<sup>38</sup>**  
n/a minority ethnic 3.1%

**Ysgol Bro Dinefwr is a bilingual English/Welsh language comprehensive school which provides for pupils coming from both Welsh- and English-medium primary schools. Of the seven mainstream teaching groups for each year, two are English medium and five are Welsh medium or bilingual.**

All groups learn French in Key Stage 3 (two hours per week). This includes SEN pupils, who are only disapplied if they are statemented; these pupils have one hour of French per week. From Year 8, four of the seven groups (based on ability) are able to choose to do Spanish as well. The remaining three groups do additional work on literacy. In Year 8 pupils have three hours of tuition per fortnight of French and two hours per fortnight of Spanish. Both French and Spanish are taught through the medium of English or Welsh, depending on the group. The opportunity to learn Italian as an enrichment subject is offered to the top 25 per cent of Year 10.

In addition to the core subjects which all pupils take to GCSE, each pupil makes their option choices in Year 9 from a menu of 32 different subjects. In recent years the numbers choosing French have been decreasing, while Spanish has seen an increase. An all-time low was reached three years ago with only 10 per cent of the cohort opting for French and 16 per cent choosing Spanish. However, since there is a smaller pool of pupils who can choose Spanish, one would normally expect lower numbers for Spanish than for French.

Raising uptake has been a departmental priority and many initiatives have been put into practice. As a result, last year the number of pupils choosing French increased from 10 to 28 per cent. Spanish (and Italian) have remained stable. As many as 46 per cent of the current Year 10 cohort is taking a foreign language at GCSE compared to an overall 23 per cent of Year 11.

The school's GCSE results are generally above the national average for Wales for French and Spanish.

A good cohort could produce 75–80 per cent A\* to C grades for foreign languages, and this can be as high as 100 per cent for Spanish and Italian.

The head of languages has recently conducted a survey of all pupils who study a language in Year 10 with the aim of better understanding what motivates pupils to include a language in their GCSE course selection. The survey revealed that a major driver influencing pupils is the possibility of enhancing their future careers. Other factors include an enjoyment of languages and a desire to travel. Pupils also commented that the school activities which had had the greatest positive impact on them were the work unit on careers and trips to other countries where they could practice the language they were learning.

The school has appointed a number of pupil ambassadors for languages. The idea is an extension of the Routes into Languages project which worked with undergraduate students at university. Pupil ambassadors are responsible for promoting languages to younger pupils in the school and for organising a range of activities to give languages a higher profile within the school.

The conversion rate from GCSE to A level is very low. The sixth form comprises 120 pupils in Year 12 and 80 to 90 in Year 13. The school offers A levels in French, Spanish and Italian but has only three doing each foreign language to AS level, one each doing A2 French and Italian, and three doing A2 in Spanish. The head of department is of the opinion that, once they are in the sixth form, pupils become very focussed on the university courses they are working towards. At A level they are only likely to choose to study a language if they are planning to do it at university. The school believes that it is extremely important to offer languages at A level but the very small size of the groups is presenting a real financial challenge. Financial constraints also mean that the school is unable to employ an FLA anymore.

<sup>35</sup> National average for Wales 17.5%

<sup>36</sup> National average for Wales 84.1%

<sup>37</sup> National average for Wales 57.9%

<sup>38</sup> National average for Wales 2.8%

## Evidence from interviews and focus groups conducted as part of the case study visits to schools

The many interviews and focus groups carried out by the researchers in the course of the school visits provided the opportunity for in-depth discussions about the teaching and learning of foreign languages with school leaders and pupils as well as with teachers and even parents. The many views expressed add detail and further depth to the quantitative and qualitative evidence collected via the online survey to all schools.

### School leaders

The school leaders interviewed were overwhelmingly supportive of languages and clearly understand the value of the pupils in their school learning a foreign language. One head teacher summed up the many benefits of MFL as follows:

*'MFL is the best subject for training the brain – a verbal version of Sudoku. It provides memory training and recall, organisation, processing and deconstruction.'*

In spite of the challenges of a wide range of national initiatives, pupils' freedom to choose from a wide range of subjects, the requirements of the Welsh Baccalaureate and budgetary constraints, the school leaders interviewed expressed their commitment to finding ways to ensure that MFL remains a key part of their school's curriculum offer, particularly at A level where the numbers of pupils are generally very small:

*'We are determined to keep our A level language classes going even though they are very small. To try to make them more financially viable we have had to reduce contact time (currently five hours per week) for each of Year 12 and 13 by 20 per cent. We can do this by timetabling one hour per week when both year groups work together on some aspect of the course. This also encourages peer support and learning.'*

### Teachers

Without exception, teachers of MFL, in addition to teaching their specialist subject in the classroom, find themselves having to actively and energetically promote the benefits of languages to pupils who are often unconvinced about a subject which seems harder than other subjects on offer and which they don't see as relevant to their futures. Teachers comment as follows:

*'An obstacle to take-up is that pupils need to know more about the benefits of languages – not just from within the school but from outside too...'*

*'We have to work hard to promote languages to our pupils.'*

Many MFL teachers feel that languages are becoming an 'elite' subject aimed purely at high-ability pupils or those from more affluent backgrounds whose parents have travelled and may take regular holidays abroad. However, as one teacher put it:

*'I think everyone is capable of doing well in a language, but it's a question really of time and support.'*

Many MFL teachers feel that languages are becoming an 'elite' subject aimed purely at high-ability pupils or those from more affluent backgrounds

The opportunities and challenges of the new GCSEs was the topic most on teachers' minds during the case study visits. Many believe that the new exam will be more difficult than the current one and are grappling with the issue of how they will be able to stretch their pupils even further. However, the teachers interviewed are generally positive about the new specifications as the following comments show:

*'The new GCSEs will make it possible for pupils to study a subject at either higher or foundation levels. This will make languages accessible to more pupils.'*

*'Being realistic, the changes at GCSE are difficult – it's not a level playing field. The new exam is closer to AS level. The challenge we face is how to get pupils who could possibly achieve a C in the present exam even further. Languages are perceived as harder than other subjects already.'*

*'I don't like the current GCSE and I am glad that the controlled assessments are going but I think the new one might be a very big jump. I like the fact that it's all going to be final exam. Pupils will learn to take it seriously and step up. Pupils may find three writing exams a challenge. They seem to have a mental block about grammar – I'm not sure if that will change when the new exam comes in.'*

### **Pupils**

Focus groups were conducted in all the schools visited and comprised a wide selection of pupils from Years 7–10. Those in Key Stage 3 expressed some interesting points of view about language learning in general, with one pupil who is clearly fascinated by languages stating:

*'I like languages with a different alphabet because it is like a secret code.'*

Another said:

*'I like learning languages because they allow you to experience different cultures and to understand other countries better.'*

Many pupils were quick to articulate the benefits of being able to speak a language other than Welsh or English, but were realistic about the effort involved:

*'It takes a long time to learn a language like we learned Welsh (naturally) but I'd like to learn other languages in the same way.'*

*'Learning languages is very time consuming but definitely worth it. Languages are not harder than other subjects.'*

*'Others in my year didn't take a language because some found it intimidating and others didn't see it as relevant. The relevance of a language is not always obvious and some people think it is much harder than other subjects. It IS a challenge but also fun and a gateway to history and culture.'*

The majority of those pupils interviewed who have chosen to study a language in Key Stage 4 were also convinced of the long-term benefits of learning another language in addition to Welsh and English. Some regarded languages as useful for university as well as for life in general, for example:

Many pupils were quick to articulate the benefits of being able to speak a language other than Welsh or English, but were realistic about the effort involved

*'Languages allow you more opportunities to choose what you do with your life.'*

*'I was set on doing Drama at university but I think I might like to do French and have a year abroad. My cousin has done that and she had a great time.'*

*'I'm planning to do A level German because lots of universities like languages – speaking a language gives you an edge when you apply to university.'*

*'Having a language is definitely an advantage and I think that some of my peers wish they spoke other languages.'*

Others described the long-term advantages of language skills alongside other specialisms, as the following comment shows:

*'I want to be a physicist but I want to keep a foreign language as well as it will be really useful for me, for example, if I have the chance to work at Cern with other scientists.'*

However, one pupil who clearly enjoyed learning German and who was expected to do well in her GCSE, felt that specialising in other subjects meant she could not continue with the language:

*'I don't think I will study German after GCSE because I want to study Medicine and I need to choose other subjects at A level. I would like to keep improving my German but I feel I have to choose.'*

The researchers also interviewed a number of pupils who had opted NOT to study a foreign language once they had the opportunity to choose not to. As some of the comments from these pupils show, one of the main reasons for not continuing with a language is that they find languages difficult, for example:

*'I find it hard to learn languages. It won't stick in my head. I need more time.'*

*'I think I've got it but then it goes in exams.'*

*'I've chosen to do Textiles/Computer Science and Health and Social Care. I'm not good at Welsh so I don't want to learn another language on top. I need to focus on Welsh.'*

*'I would come back to French if I were better at Welsh.'*

However, for some pupils languages are simply not enjoyable as the following comments from two of the pupils interviewed shows:

*'I don't like the way I have to pronounce words. It's not just French – I've done them all (French/German/Spanish and Welsh) – I don't like any of them. I wouldn't like Chinese either because I couldn't even write stuff down.'*

*'I don't like it. I think it's because we do Welsh as well. It's confusing. There are too many languages and I forget it after the lesson. I just can't remember the words.'*

### Parents

Parents can exert considerable influence on their children's decisions about whether to continue studying a language after Key Stage 3. One pupil who was very keen to continue his study of a foreign language stated:

One of the main reasons for not continuing with a language is that they find languages difficult

*'I'd really like to do a degree with a language. Doing Erasmus+ would make me more fluent. That's what my Dad did – a year in Mexico.'*

Many teachers also express the view that affluent parents are more likely to be supportive of their children learning languages than those who are from more challenging socio-economic circumstances. As one teacher put it:

*'Middle-class families get it, but it is a battle against insularity.'*

However, one parent from less-affluent socio-economic circumstances made the following statement that revealed a strong commitment to his children learning languages at school:

*'Both my children learn French and Welsh which I am very pleased about because it is important for them to be able to speak other languages and will help them to get better jobs. We live in England but I would have moved here so that my children could go to this school.'*

## Key points

- The role of the head teacher and senior managers is crucial for creating a language-friendly environment where MFL has a valued place alongside English and Welsh.
- The experience of learning Welsh has not, in many cases, created confident language learners who can easily embrace a third language. Many pupils, especially those of lower academic ability, find language learning hard and see it only as 'remembering words'.
- Whilst teachers and head teachers believe that pupils of all abilities benefit from learning a foreign language, the pressure on options is tending to exacerbate the sense that taking MFL to GCSE or above is only for high-achieving pupils.
- Even dedicated and talented MFL teachers who invest a huge amount of time and energy into promoting the benefits of their subject are finding it an immense challenge to stem the decline in take-up.
- Previous pilots of MFL in Key Stage 2 and Triple Literacy funded by the Welsh Government provide models of good practice and are still producing positive results.
- There are opportunities within the Welsh Baccalaureate and the development of the new curriculum to reconceptualise MFL within a single area of language and literacy, and thus overcome the perception that MFL is in conflict with the drive for higher standards in English and Welsh.

The experience of learning Welsh has not, in many cases, created confident language learners who can easily embrace a third language





Chapter 6

# Findings from the survey of primary schools

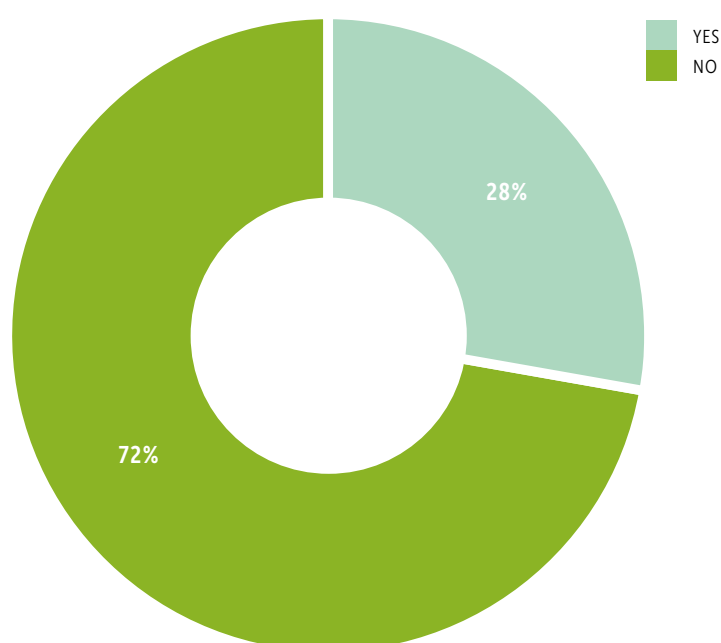


## The findings from this first survey of MFL in Welsh primary schools are based on responses from 190 schools.

### Do primary schools already offer foreign-language teaching to pupils?

More than a quarter of responding primary schools (28 per cent, or 53 out of 190) report that they provide teaching in languages other than English and Welsh (see Figure 23).

FIGURE 23: SCHOOLS OFFERING TEACHING IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH AND WELSH



Schools which teach languages at primary level are most likely to offer French, followed by Spanish

### Which languages and year groups does this involve?

Schools which teach languages at primary level are most likely to offer French, followed by Spanish (see Table 3). Whichever language they offer, they are more likely to do so towards the end of primary school, although a small number of schools also provide teaching in Key Stage 1.

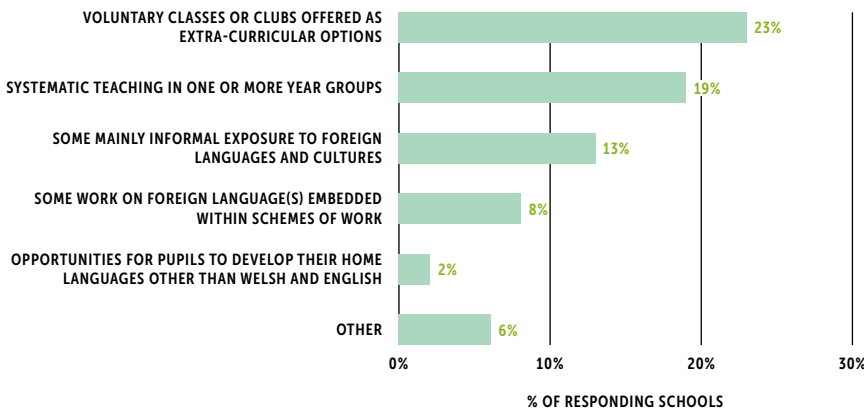
TABLE 3: LANGUAGES TAUGHT TO DIFFERENT GROUPS (BASE = 53)

Language	Key stage 1	Years 3 and/or 4	Years 5 and/or 6
French	11	16	42
German	0	0	2
Spanish	2	5	10
Other	0	4	7

### How systematic is the teaching offered?

Schools were asked to pick, from a series of options, the statement which best described their language teaching provision (see Figure 24).

FIGURE 24: TYPES OF LANGUAGE PROVISION WHICH SCHOOLS OFFER  
(BASE = 53, MULTIPLE RESPONSES PERMITTED)



The most common form of language teaching offered, by 23 of the 53 schools which provide language teaching, is voluntary classes run as extra-curricular options. Around one third of these schools (19) offer systematic teaching in one or more year groups, teaching French, Spanish, German or Mandarin. If this proportion were representative of all primary schools in Wales, it would equate to 10 per cent. However, it is very likely that schools which teach a language were more likely to complete this survey, and therefore the proportion across the country is likely to be less than this.

Only two schools in the sample offer the opportunity for pupils to develop home languages other than English or Welsh. Other schools offer more informal introductions to languages, either embedded in Schemes of Work or as part of transition work with secondary schools. Comments from the six schools which selected 'Other' are provided below:

*'French teacher from the local high school comes to give lessons to Year 6 once every two weeks.'*

*'Transition project with secondary feeder school.'*

*'Year 6 French lessons weekly with secondary transition teacher. Private French lessons based in school half an hour every week.'*

*'Annual language workshops involving parents and pupils teaching European Languages. All classes celebrate European Languages Day by learning the language and culture of a chosen country. This is repeated in One World Week to include non-European languages and cultures.'*

*'Our Year 6 class have an eight-week (one hour a week) block of French lessons prior to a six-day visit to Normandy where they spend three days in school with their penfriends. They communicate with their penfriends from Years 3 to 6 with some interaction in simple French throughout.'*

The most common form of language teaching offered is voluntary classes run as extra-curricular options

### Who provides language teaching?

The most common way in which schools provide language teaching is through a class teacher or teachers with language skills. Six schools have specialist foreign-language teachers based at the school, and another five draw on peripatetic specialists. Ten draw on links with local secondary schools. Schools also use FLAs, teachers provided by foreign cultural institutes (the Italian Consulate, the Goethe-Institut and Confucius Classrooms were mentioned in this and a number of other contexts in this survey), or volunteer parents and governors.

The most common way in which schools provide language teaching is through a class teacher or teachers with language skills

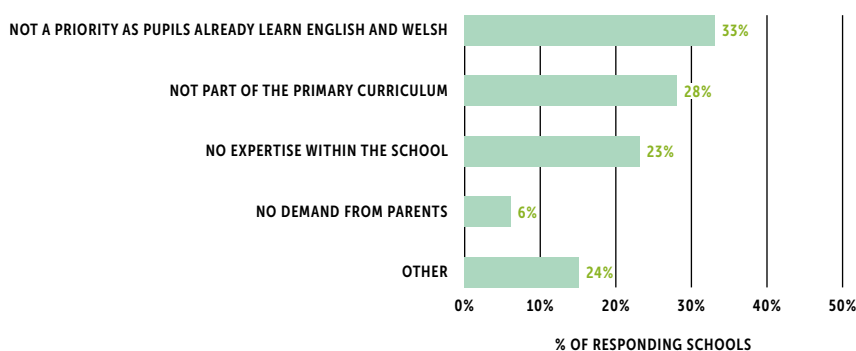
TABLE 4: WHO PROVIDES LANGUAGE TEACHING AT THE SCHOOL? (BASE = 52)

	Mainly	Occasionally
Specialist teacher based at the school	6	2
Peripatetic specialist teacher	5	1
Class teacher(s)	16	1
Teacher(s) from local secondary school	10	4
Foreign language assistant	2	1
Teacher provided by foreign cultural institute	2	3
Volunteer parent or governor	5	3
Other	4	0

### If schools do not provide foreign language teaching, why is this?

Respondents that do not provide language teaching were asked to select from a menu of options the main reason for not doing so (see Figure 25). A third of these (44 out of 135) reported that foreign-language teaching is not a priority as pupils already learn Welsh and English. Nearly as many (38, or 28 per cent) say that they did not do so because a foreign language is not part of the primary curriculum in Wales, while nearly a quarter (31 or 23 per cent) say it is because they have no expertise within the school. Only two schools responded that it is because there is no demand from parents.

FIGURE 25: MAIN REASONS WHY PRIMARY SCHOOLS DO NOT OFFER FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING (BASE = 135)



Respondents were also asked to comment in their own words on the reason why their school does not offer pupils the opportunity to learn a foreign language. These can be grouped as follows:

Respondents were asked to comment in their own words on the reason why their school does not offer pupils the opportunity to learn a foreign language

- Pupils have enough to contend with in learning both English and Welsh to a high standard

*'Some second-language pupils find it hard learning Welsh to an appropriate standard, and a third language would confuse them more. Likewise, we have first-language Welsh pupils who need to improve their English skills.'*

*'There is so much emphasis on developing Welsh and English skills in a disadvantaged area that raising the standards of these languages guides the programme unfortunately.'*

- The primary curriculum is already overcrowded, there is no room for MFL, and the link between languages and literacy is not made evident in the curriculum

*'The curriculum is already full to the brim. As a primary school we would prefer to use curriculum time to ensure that pupils have the necessary literacy, numeracy and IT skills to access learning successfully in Key Stages 3 and 4. A taster of other languages would be beneficial. However, we need to get right it with Welsh and English first at primary school before moving onto other languages.'*

*'We do not have the skills, budget or time. I attended a conference a few weeks ago and agree that it would be "very nice" to be able to offer this, but the curriculum is more than full at the moment.'*

*'It is difficult enough teaching two languages well and teaching a full curriculum within the teaching time.'*

- The school has no expertise in MFL on which it could draw

*'Lack of time to coordinate and lack of quality teachers to teach.'*

*'It would benefit the pupils to learn a foreign language, but unfortunately there is neither time within the curriculum nor expertise available among the staff.'*

*'Lack of skills and expertise amongst staff would be an issue. Curriculum is already very weighty.'*

- Primary schools are already overburdened with centrally imposed initiatives and changes

*'Unfortunately, the curriculum is overcrowded already and there are far too many other calls on time – Eco council, School council, healthy schools, and so on and so forth.'*

*'Lack of time – it's a struggle to fit the required curriculum in each week without another initiative to put on more pressure.'*

*'Before introducing yet more curriculum demands in an overloaded primary environment, the initial focus surely has to be on sorting out what we already have – which, it is agreed, is not fit for purpose. There have been too many changes introduced with insufficient attention to the bigger picture. A more strategic approach needs to be adopted by the Welsh Government.'*

- Pressures on school budgets

*'During the previous two years we shared a teacher with our cluster schools from our feeder comprehensive school who provided our Year 6 pupils with a French lesson every fortnight. Unfortunately, the funding for this ended.'*

One respondent succinctly sums up the situation on behalf of many of his/her teaching colleagues as follows:

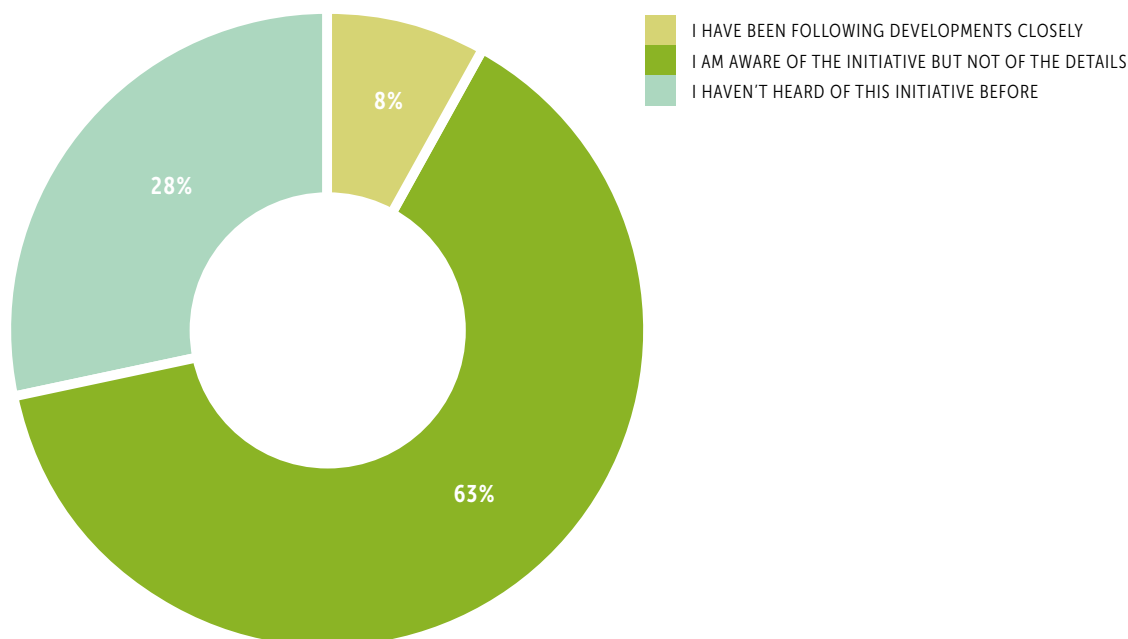
*'There are a number of reasons: 1. The curriculum is already congested. 2. Focus on literacy and numeracy leaves little time for anything else. 3. No expertise within the school. 4. Pressure to meet targets means a foreign language is not a priority.'*

### Are primary schools aware of the *Global Futures* plan?

More than two thirds of responding schools (133 = 71 per cent) are aware of the Welsh Government's *Global Futures* plan and the aspiration to make Wales 'bilingual plus one'. However, of these only 15 (8 per cent of the total) are following developments closely (see Figure 26). The majority are aware of the initiative but not of the details, and just over a quarter of responding schools have not heard of the initiative at all.

More than two thirds of responding schools are aware of the Welsh Government's *Global Futures* plan

FIGURE 26: AWARENESS OF GLOBAL FUTURES



However, despite the high level of awareness, almost all respondents who provided comments in response to this question were critical of the initiative, as the following sample reveals:

*'At present, there are so many initiatives, it's difficult to keep up with them all in much detail. Can be overwhelming.'*

*'I'm not bothered about knowing. The Welsh Government have let MFL die after cutting back on support agencies like CILT Cymru. Once we had an effective programme across our schools cluster. The government have no real interest – the emphasis is not on speaking a language and we are miles behind the rest of Europe. MFL courses in secondary education are more about set exams and are nothing to do with using the languages in real contexts.'*

*'As usual the Welsh Government have lofty ideals. However, they are so busy giving us more and more things to do with less and less funding that teachers are already at breaking point and this is likely to be yet another "stick" to beat them with.'*

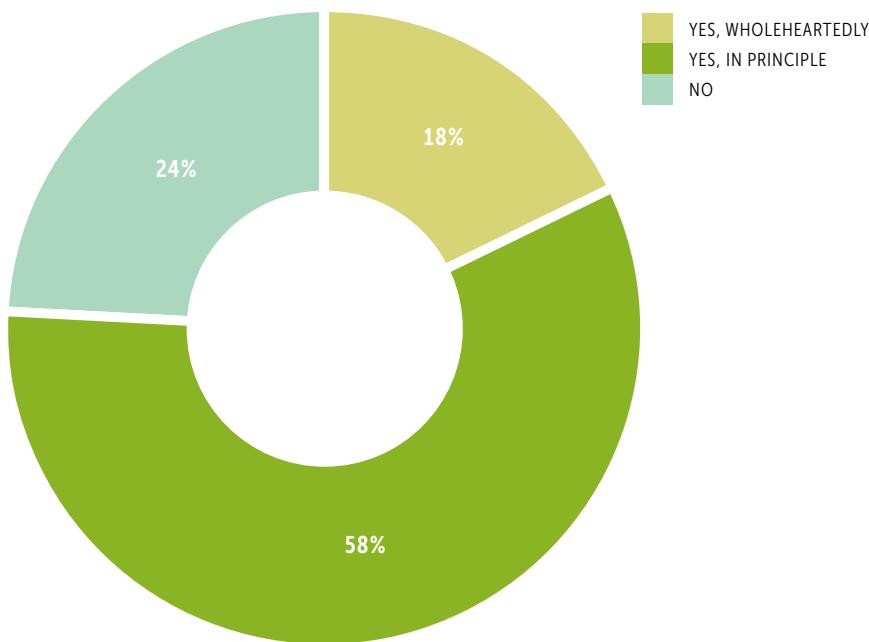
*'It is an aspiration that will either prove impossible due to the massive overload within the primary curriculum or result in further strain on a workforce that cannot take much more pressure from politicians.'*

**Would primary schools welcome moves to support the introduction of MFL teaching in primary schools?**

More than three quarters of responding primary schools (76 per cent) would welcome the introduction of MFL teaching (see Figure 27). However, only a small proportion would do so wholeheartedly, the majority only in principle. Just under a quarter of schools in the sample (24 per cent) would not welcome MFL teaching at all. These findings are likely to be biased in favour of those who are more supportive of MFL teaching, since they would have had more interest in completing the survey. Nonetheless, they show widespread, though qualified, support for the proposal.

They show widespread, though qualified, support for the proposal

**FIGURE 27: WHETHER PRIMARY SCHOOLS WOULD WELCOME THE INTRODUCTION OF MFL TEACHING**





When these responses are analysed according to whether schools already teach a language, a higher proportion of those already teaching a language would welcome it, and a higher proportion of those not already teaching a language would not welcome it (see Table 5). However, this finding has no statistical validity because of the small number of schools involved.

**TABLE 5: WHETHER PRIMARY SCHOOLS WOULD WELCOME THE INTRODUCTION OF MFL TEACHING, BY WHETHER THEY ALREADY OFFER MFL TEACHING**

Offering MFL	Yes, wholeheartedly	Yes, in principle	No
Yes	12	35	5
No	22	73	39

### What resources could schools draw upon to develop provision in MFL teaching?

In responding to this question, schools were able to tick as many responses as applied to them. The majority of schools (143 out of 184 replying to this question, or 78 per cent) answered that they would be able to draw on connections with local secondary schools in order to develop MFL teaching (see Figure 28). A large number of schools, though fewer than half (42 per cent), reported that they have staff able and willing to be trained to teach a foreign language, while nearly as many (38 per cent) responded that they already have one or more members of staff with competence in a foreign language. A smaller number of schools have existing links with schools abroad, or parents/governors with language competence.

The majority of schools answered that they would be able to draw on connections with local secondary schools in order to develop MFL teaching

**FIGURE 28: RESOURCES PRIMARY SCHOOLS WOULD BE ABLE TO DRAW ON TO DEVELOP PROVISION FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING (MULTIPLE ANSWERS PERMITTED)**

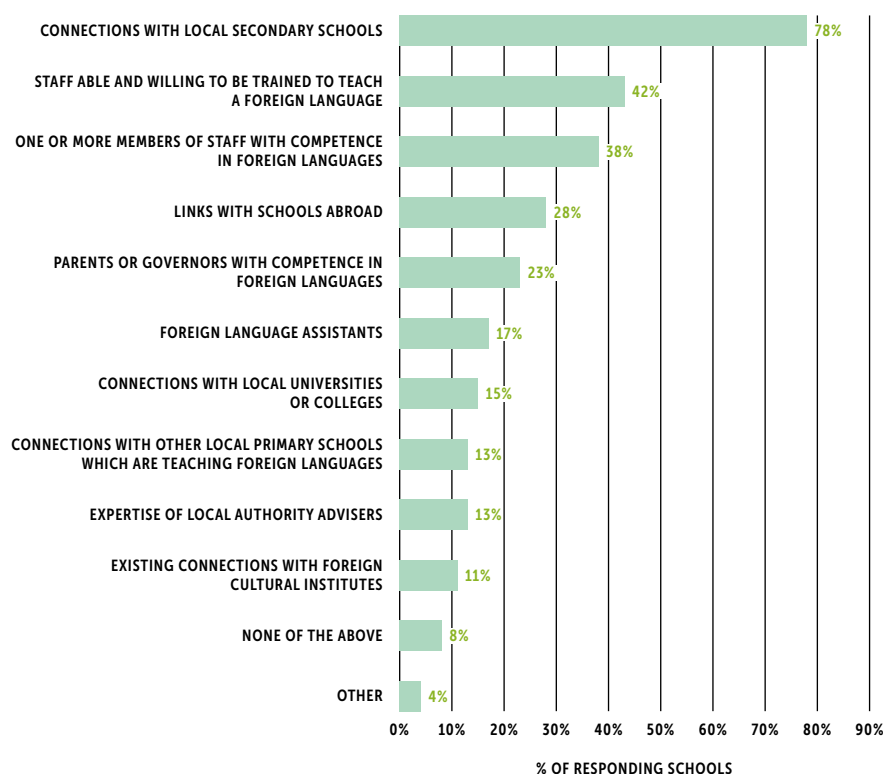


Table 6 demonstrates that when responses to this question are analysed according to whether schools already teach MFL, those not doing so are:

- Less likely to have staff with competence in MFL
- Less likely to say they would be able to rely on connections with local secondary schools
- Less likely to say they would rely on Foreign Language Assistants
- Less likely to say they would be able to draw on links with schools abroad
- More likely to say they would rely on staff willing and able to be trained to teach a foreign language
- More likely to say that there are no resources that they would be able to draw on

**TABLE 6: RESOURCES PRIMARY SCHOOLS COULD DRAW UPON TO DEVELOP PROVISION FOR MFL TEACHING, BY WHETHER THEY ALREADY TEACH MFL (MULTIPLE ANSWERS PERMITTED)**

	Already teaching MFL	Not already
One or more members of staff with competence in foreign languages	30	40
Connections with local secondary schools	40	103
Connections with local universities or colleges	6	21
Parents or governors with competence in foreign languages	13	30
Foreign language assistants	13	18
Expertise of local authority advisers	5	19
Existing connections with foreign cultural institutes	8	12
Connections with other local primary schools which are teaching foreign languages	6	18
Links with schools abroad	17	34
Staff able and willing to be trained to teach a foreign language	18	59
Other	3	4
None of the above	2	12

Teachers providing qualitative evidence in response to this question commented only on the challenge of trying to include a new subject in an already overcrowded curriculum and on the problem of further overburdening primary school teachers. The following comment sets out very clearly what one respondent feels is needed if MFL were to be introduced into primary schools:

*'To be able to embrace a foreign language the following would be required: 1. The school would need teachers from external providers. 2. There would need to be a shift in Welsh Government and Estyn focus from data and targets to accepting that a broad, balanced curriculum cannot always be data driven.'*

Teachers providing qualitative evidence in response to this question commented only on the challenge of trying to include a new subject in an already overcrowded curriculum

**What else does the survey say about the prospects for MFL in primary schools?**

In addition to providing quantitative and qualitative answers to a range of specific questions, respondents were also given the opportunity to comment freely on any topic related to the teaching of MFL in primary schools. The responses fell broadly into four broad themes:

1. The benefits of teaching MFL to children of primary school age
2. The importance of ensuring that Welsh is learned first, and to a high standard
3. The danger of overburdening an already overcrowded curriculum
4. The need for additional funding and expertise if MFL were to be introduced into primary schools

A selection of comments on each of these themes is provided below:

Respondents were also given the opportunity to comment freely on any topic related to the teaching of MFL in primary schools

- The benefits of teaching MFL to children of primary school age

*'The school has benefitted from the introduction of MFL across Key Stage 2. An excellent use of PPA time – it provides a breadth of provision and has many advantages outside of just simply learning a new language.'*

*'I think learning an MFL in primary school gives children a head start in further developing learning a language as they transfer to secondary school and working abroad later in life.'*

*'A good idea and I welcome it to some extent. But as a head teacher who is trying to fulfil ALL the demands that are made on these young children, the reality is that there is so much curricular pressure to get the standards of the children so high at primary level. There are so many extra things – e.g. developing the children into business people through Entrepreneurship, Healthy School, Green School – and there is not enough time in the day! One must remember sometimes that they are primary children who want to be children!'*

- The importance of ensuring that Welsh is learned first, and to a high standard

*'It's essential to ensure that the Welsh language receives prominent attention in all our schools as well as foreign languages.'*

*'I believe an exceptional challenge faces the primary schools of Wales to ensure that the pupils are completely bilingual by the end of Year 6. As a Welsh-medium school, we have to work hard to ensure that the pupils are bilingual and to a high standard. I believe that the money/energy for this project would be better channelled in order to ensure support for English-medium primary schools to raise their standards of Welsh.'*

*'I am worried that there's a big push to ensure that more pupils have a good grasp of Welsh – i.e. to become truly bilingual – and this will not happen if another language becomes mandatory. We need to sort out English and Welsh first.'*

*'Children who are learning Welsh need to have a good grasp of the language before attempting a third.'*

However, not all respondents feel that parents support an emphasis on Welsh at the expense of MFL:

*'The question of whether Welsh is the second language that many parents would choose also needs to be addressed with a global perspective in mind. Welsh is a language we must foster and encourage and never let die. It is, however, and will remain a minority language and the more it is forced onto people the less support it will receive. If I was to question parents in my school the vast majority would chose French as a second language and not Welsh.'*

- The danger of overburdening an already overcrowded curriculum

*'I think that introducing MFL in primary schools would only work if Welsh were made optional. The curriculum is already packed to bursting point.'*

*'The curriculum is extremely weighted, and although it would be great in principle to teach another language it would be really difficult to include it and maintain standards in other areas.'*

*'The curriculum is already overloaded and we cannot deliver all of the statutory work required in numeracy/literacy. Whilst we welcome the idea of teaching foreign languages, we cannot do any more.'*

- The need for additional funding and expertise if MFL were to be introduced into primary schools

*'Schools need to be fully supported and the initiative well and thoroughly thought through before introduction to avoid any hiccups normally associated with new initiatives.'*

*'We need to be clear what our educational priorities are and allow schools time to grow and develop. There is not enough expertise in the primary sector to teach an MFL properly.'*

*'Clearly, the expertise to deliver a foreign language in primary would need to be addressed. This would have implications for teacher training, CPD, etc.'*

*'Be mindful of an overloaded curriculum and be mindful of the training implications for teachers if we are serious about providing excellent provision.'*

One respondent also commented on the lack of value given to MFL in Wales:

*'My son has had offers from five universities – not one recognises or is interested that he has an MFL alongside his science subjects. MFL is a waste of time in the UK.'*

## Key points

- Just over a quarter of responding schools already provide some language teaching, though this is more frequently extra-curricular or informal than systematically structured teaching.
- French is the most frequently taught language in primary schools in Wales, followed by Spanish.
- Languages are more often taught to older primary pupils, although a small number of schools offer French or Spanish in Key Stage 1.
- Schools which teach languages tend to draw on existing members of staff with the necessary skills.
- Primary schools look mainly to their local secondary schools as a potential source of support for MFL teaching.
- Although more than three quarters of primary schools surveyed are supportive, at least in principle, of the introduction of MFL teaching, respondents stressed the need for additional funding and training. Many primary heads already feel overburdened by a crowded curriculum and see MFL as potentially competing with priorities for improving the teaching of Welsh.

Although more than three quarters of primary schools surveyed are supportive of the introduction of MFL teaching, respondents stressed the need for additional funding and training

Chapter 7

# Conclusions



## The principal conclusions of the 2015/16 research exercise are set out below, along with a proposal for action that will help strengthen the place of MFL in schools and ensure the success of the *Global Futures* plan announced last year.

Language Trends Wales 2015/16 is the result of a second annual research exercise charting the health of MFL teaching in secondary schools across Wales. Primary schools in Wales were also surveyed for the first time this year in order to gauge the extent to which foreign languages are being taught to young children in addition to Welsh and English, and to what extent primary schools in Wales would welcome the opportunity to teach their pupils a foreign language if it were introduced nationally – as it was in England in 2014.

There are currently a plethora of policy changes affecting education in schools in Wales, including changes to GCSE and A level examinations, the development of a new curriculum following the Donaldson report, the creation of regional Centres of Excellence for foreign-language teaching as part of the government's five-year *Global Futures* plan and the further development of the Welsh Baccalaureate. This year's Language Trends research builds on last year's research and explores the impact of recent policy changes and national initiatives on MFL teaching in schools in Wales. The rich quantitative and qualitative evidence obtained from teachers' responses provides a valuable basis for debate and discussion for educators, policy-makers and academics.

A focus on pupil attitudes alone will be insufficient to improve take-up, as long as MFL remains one choice among many – and a choice that is perceived as difficult at that

### Secondary

It is clear that many secondary schools are working very hard to try to change their pupils' attitudes towards MFL in order to increase take-up at Key Stage 4, but that even dedicated and talented teachers are finding this a huge challenge. There are many examples of active school exchanges, celebrations of languages and diverse cultures, student ambassador schemes, competitions and career talks which highlight the benefits of languages, and the Routes into Languages initiative has clearly been welcomed in many schools. However, while there is evidence that these initiatives are effective at improving pupils' attitudes towards languages, they are having little impact on take-up when it comes to option choices. The introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate and an increased focus on core subjects mean that pupils have fewer option slots to fill, and MFL has been an unfortunate casualty of this change. The first conclusion at the secondary level, therefore, is that a focus on pupil attitudes alone will be insufficient to improve take-up, as long as MFL remains one choice among many – and a choice that is perceived as difficult at that.

One reason why pupils, particularly lower-ability pupils, may be reluctant to choose MFL as a GCSE subject is their often rather perfunctory experience of the subject in Key Stage 3. Estyn has stated that two hours of MFL tuition per week is the very minimum for pupils to make successful progress, yet as many as 40 per cent of schools set aside less time than this for MFL. In England, where there are also concerns about the time available for languages, the majority of schools set aside between 2.5 and 3 hours per week. A contributory factor to the low take-up of MFL at GCSE may therefore be that many pupils are simply not sufficiently prepared to begin a GCSE course and do not feel confident that they can be successful.

Last year's Language Trends survey found that opportunities were being missed to build on pupils' experience of bilingualism to improve the teaching of MFL. It found that the teaching of Welsh and MFL are only rarely brought together in secondary schools so that learning in one language can support new learning in the other.

This year's survey has found further evidence that in both primary and secondary schools, there are perceptions that MFL and Welsh are competing with – rather than complementing – one another, and that a poor pupil experience of Welsh as a second language negatively affects their subsequent experience of MFL. Although the Language Trends research did not focus specifically on provision for Welsh, the issues have been well documented elsewhere.<sup>39</sup>

The testimonies of many teachers and pupils provide further evidence that the acquisition of Welsh in school is not, in many cases, providing pupils with a generic understanding about how language works, or equipping them with language-learning skills which they can transfer to other languages. Children who have been exposed extensively to two languages at an early stage in their education should find the acquisition of a third language to be a straightforward experience because they already have the basic building blocks of language they need. However, in this research, both schools and pupils report that this is not the case.

For many pupils, the lack of generic language-learning skills is often also compounded by one of two further factors. First, a poor experience of learning Welsh in primary school can put pupils off wanting to learn another language. Second, pupils may believe that they already have a second language (i.e. either Welsh or English), so there is no need for them to consider a third.

The Language Trends research in both Wales and England has shown that school leadership is a critical factor in driving an increase in the take-up of MFL, as are reinforcing messages from policy-makers, universities and other influential sources. Where schools have been successful in raising take-up, there has been a whole-school approach involving concerted efforts and a raft of measures as well as incentives.

However, it is unlikely that the majority of school leaders will be motivated to follow those who have shown that they can make a difference unless the government finds a way to raise the stakes and hold them to account for improving Welsh children's learning in this neglected curriculum area. Particular attention should be given to schools working in more challenging socio-economic circumstances, whose pupils are least likely to recognise the value of language learning, and least likely to be involved with existing initiatives to promote MFL.

There are perceptions that MFL and Welsh are competing with – rather than complementing – one another, and that a poor pupil experience of Welsh as a second language negatively affects their subsequent experience of MFL.

<sup>39</sup> Welsh Government (2013)



## Primary

This first survey of MFL teaching in Welsh primary schools provides a picture of the current position as the Welsh Government's *Global Futures* plan gets underway, and assesses the degree to which schools are in a position to begin 'to deliver MFL effectively from Year 5 onwards' as the *Global Futures* aspires to do.

This research has shown that around one quarter of Welsh primary schools already provide at least some access to MFL teaching, albeit in many cases of a very limited nature. The teaching provided is generally to pupils in Year 6 and as part of a wider transition programme to secondary school. Such teaching is rarely structured systematically, and relies on the skills of existing teachers or the occasional support of local secondary schools.

This level of provision is roughly equivalent to the baseline identified in England in 2000, before the launch of a decade of concerted training and development designed to provide an 'entitlement' for all pupils to learn a language throughout primary school.<sup>40</sup>

Similar initiatives in Scotland and elsewhere in the world have likewise required a significant injection of resources over a realistic time frame.<sup>41</sup> It is clear, therefore, that the introduction of systematic foreign-language teaching in Welsh primary schools would need to have a clear vision and implementation plan including budget, training, and support with prioritisation and resources.

The Language Trends survey reveals that there is widespread support from primary school respondents, at least in principle, for introducing foreign-language teaching into primary schools in Wales. However, this support is conditional: many stress the need for additional training and resources, or believe that Welsh should take priority in the primary phase.

Primary schools look to secondaries for the support they would need to teach foreign languages, but the survey findings suggest that many secondary schools would not be in a position to act as the backbone of a major national initiative.

Yet secondary respondents to the Language Trends survey support the idea of introducing MFL teaching at Key Stage 2: almost 80 per cent believe that starting to teach a foreign language in primary school would 'definitely' or 'probably' improve take-up when pupils choose their options in Year 9.

This view is backed up by evidence from one secondary school featured as a case study in this research because of its relative strengths in MFL. The school took part in the Welsh Government-funded pilot programme of MFL in Key Stage 2, the impact of which is still being felt as pupils who took part in primary school make their A level choices. The same school also took part in the government-funded Triple Literacy project, and attributes some of its success in MFL to this initiative. Therefore it is important to remember that the Welsh Government already has models of good practice on which to build, having previously invested in a significant programme of pilot projects.

The introduction of systematic foreign-language teaching in Welsh primary schools would need to have a clear vision and implementation plan including budget, training, and support with prioritisation and resources

<sup>40</sup> Nuffield Foundation (2000), p. 40 <sup>41</sup> Between 2001 and 2006, the Scottish Executive distributed £18.6 million to local authorities to implement its 'Citizens of a Multilingual World' plan (Royal Society of Edinburgh 2006)

## Looking to the future

Primary schools teachers are concerned about what they see as an overloaded curriculum and would not necessarily welcome the imposition of MFL as another curriculum subject, particularly without adequate additional funding and resources. However, the development of a new curriculum with Welsh, English and MFL positioned in a common area of learning, as recommended by Professor Donaldson, provides a unique and vital opportunity to overcome these concerns in a way which benefits multiple literacy and language competences.

Therefore the government should reconceptualise what it means to learn a foreign language in Wales by developing a triple literacy approach for primary schools which builds on existing experiences and recommendations arising from previous projects. Redesigning the teaching of Welsh (and English) in primary schools to provide children with more explicit knowledge about generic language and language-learning skills, and combining this with an introduction to foreign languages and cultures, would give pupils a more solid foundation for rapid progress in MFL in Key Stage 3. Such an approach should also, where relevant, draw on pupils' existing knowledge of other languages spoken in their homes and communities.

Further development work on such an approach would be needed, as well as training for primary teachers, but this would be less onerous than the level of training and development which would be required to introduce MFL teaching as a distinct additional subject in the curriculum.

At the secondary level, combining MFL, Welsh and English teaching into one curriculum area should create more opportunities for interventions which benefit all language subjects, as demonstrated in the case studies, and decrease the sense of competition between the languages. At the same time, the Welsh Government must ensure that sufficient teaching/learning time for MFL is available in Key Stage 3, and that there are additional incentives in favour of MFL for both schools and pupils in Key Stage 4. Integrating MFL into a triple literacy approach at both the primary and secondary levels would provide much-needed messages from the government and other influential national bodies about the value of all languages. This, in turn, would help the subject to be taken more seriously when pupils make their option choices in Year 9.

A new curriculum with Welsh, English and MFL positioned in a common area of learning, as recommended by Professor Donaldson, provides a unique and vital opportunity



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## Appendix 1: Response profiles, secondary schools

The target population was all schools with Key Stage 4 aged pupils, including:

Age range	Total	(%)	Responses	(%)
Middle schools (ages 3–16)	2	0.9%	0	0.0%
Middle schools (ages 3–19)	4	1.9%	2	1.6%
Middle schools (ages 4–19)	1	0.5%	1	0.8%
Secondary (ages 11–16)	56	26.4%	33	26.6%
Secondary (ages 11–19)	149	70.3%	88	71.0%

### RESPONSE RATES

	Base	Responses	Rate (%)
Secondary	212	124	58.5%

Education consortia	Total	(%)	Responses	(%)
North Wales	55	25.9%	30	24.2%
South West and Mid Wales	64	30.2%	55	44.4%
Central South Wales	57	26.9%	25	20.2%
South East Wales	36	17.0%	14	11.3%

School type	Total	(%)	Responses	(%)
Community	183	86.3%	108	87.1%
Voluntary Aided	19	9.0%	10	8.1%
Voluntary Controlled	2	0.9%	2	1.6%
Foundation	8	3.8%	4	3.2%

Language	Total	(%)	Responses	(%)
Welsh medium – Welsh	25	11.8%	15	12.1%
Welsh medium – Bilingual (Type A)	8	3.8%	4	3.2%
Welsh medium – Bilingual (Type B)	15	7.1%	10	8.1%
Welsh medium – Bilingual (Type C)	3	1.4%	3	2.4%
Welsh medium – Bilingual (Type Ch)	3	1.4%	2	1.6%
English medium – English medium	149	70.3%	81	65.3%
English medium – English with significant Welsh	9	4.2%	9	7.3%

## Appendix 2: Response profiles, primary schools

The target population was all schools with junior-aged pupils, including:

Age range	Total	(%)	Responses	(%)
Primary schools – nursery, infants & juniors	1,057	82.7%	162	85.3%
Primary schools – infants & juniors	180	14.1%	22	11.6%
Primary schools – juniors	34	2.7%	5	2.6%
Middle schools (ages 3–16)	2	0.2%	1	0.5%
Middle schools (ages 3–19)	4	0.3%	0	0.0%
Middle schools (ages 4–19)	1	0.1%	0	0.0%

### RESPONSE RATES

	Base	Responses	Rate (%)
Primary	1,278	190	14.9%

Education consortia	Total	(%)	Responses	(%)
North Wales	359	28.1%	69	36.3%
South West and Mid Wales	421	32.9%	53	27.9%
Central South Wales	307	24.0%	40	21.1%
South East Wales	191	14.9%	28	14.7%

School type	Total	(%)	Responses	(%)
Community	1,059	82.9%	150	78.9%
Voluntary Aided	135	10.6%	26	13.7%
Voluntary Controlled	80	6.3%	13	6.8%
Foundation	4	0.3%	1	0.5%

Language	Total	(%)	Responses	(%)
Welsh medium – Welsh	386	30.2%	66	34.7%
Welsh medium – Dual stream	34	2.7%	11	5.8%
Welsh medium – Transitional	6	0.5%	1	0.5%
Welsh medium – Bilingual (Type B)	3	0.2%	1	0.5%
English medium – English medium	814	63.7%	107	56.3%
English medium – English with significant Welsh	35	2.7%	4	2.1%

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We changed our name from CfBT Education Trust in January 2016. Our aim is to transform lives by improving education around the world and to help achieve this, we work in different ways in many locations.

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