

# Language Trends Wales 2018

The state of language  
learning in secondary  
schools in Wales



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## About the author

**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 and Welsh 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 2017.



**Teresa Tinsley**

## Acknowledgements

We would 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.

# Executive summary



This report presents findings from the fourth annual survey of modern foreign languages (MFL) in schools in Wales, designed to gather information from schools on the current state of MFL teaching and views on potential future development. The research charts the impact of government policies in schools and at the same time reflects the views and experiences of MFL teachers in relation to three key areas:

- The long-standing decline in the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages (MFL) in schools in Wales, which the Welsh Government is seeking to address through its *Global Futures* plan.
- The development of the new curriculum for Wales which is designed to strengthen Languages, Literacy and Communication within a single Area of Learning and Experience and aspires to introduce the teaching of 'international languages' into the primary school curriculum.
- Connected to this, the potential for synergy between the teaching of Welsh, English and international languages offered by the creation of a new curriculum which conceptualises all language subjects as integrated.

The report also takes into account the changes under way as a result of the Brexit process and a recent report on needs of business and commerce in Wales in this context, concluding that there is the need to encourage far greater study of MFL if Wales is to thrive as an international trading nation.<sup>1</sup>

There is the need to encourage far greater study of MFL if Wales is to thrive as an international trading nation.

### Latest schools examination data

Since 2002, GCSE entries for modern foreign languages in Wales have declined by 57%: French has declined by two-thirds and German by 71%. The most recent figures for 2018 show that the decline in German has been halted, and that the decline in French is less steep than in previous years; however, Spanish has seen a very large drop in entries of 23% between 2017 and 2018.

At A level, entries for modern foreign languages have halved since 2001, with French, German and Spanish all badly affected. Over one third of entries for A level modern languages are now in 'other languages' which are not generally taught in Welsh schools. The 2018 figures continue these trends, with very significant falls in German (-33% between 2017 and 2018) and Spanish (-12%). Entry figures for AS offer little hope that the situation will improve in 2019.

<sup>1</sup>Daniel Roberts, *Mind Your Language. A short report by Gorwel into Wales, Brexit and the study of Modern Foreign Languages, 2018.*

At both GCSE and A level, the decline in entries for MFL is associated with an increasing bias towards female candidates: At GCSE, 63% of entries are from female candidates, and at A level this rises to 67%.

## Key findings

The survey on which this report is based was completed online during the period January to March 2018, with email invitations sent to all secondary state schools in Wales, addressed to the Head of Modern Languages. Responses were received from 135 of the 208 schools, a response rate of 65%.

Key findings were as follows:

### Take up for languages in Key Stage 4

- Participation in MFL at GCSE continues to fall across Wales as a whole. However, some schools have increased numbers.
- The proportion of schools where only one in ten pupils or fewer study a language beyond the age of 14 has increased from 24% to 43% in two years.
- Welsh medium schools, and schools with higher proportions of pupils eligible for Free School Meals, are more likely to have low take up.
- In 50% of schools, option blocks prevent pupils from taking MFL if they choose certain other subjects.
- Only a small number of senior school managers and careers staff are providing positive messages about the study of MFL.

### Impact of *Global Futures*

- *Global Futures* has increased its reach since last year's survey, and its activities are being judged positively. Actions to help raise pupil numbers have been particularly appreciated.
- The Regional Consortia are reaching a large proportion of schools with their CPD offer – 44% of schools 'regularly' take part, and 51% do so 'occasionally'.
- Relatively few secondary schools have taken part in activities to promote MFL in primary schools and rate this activity as less useful than other activities organised through *Global Futures*.
- Respondents express a view that change is needed beyond the scope of *Global Futures* in order to halt the decline in MFL.

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### MFL post-16

- There has been a perceptible decline, over just one year, in the learning of modern foreign languages post-16. Over a third of schools with post-16 provision now have no pupils for MFL. The proportion of schools where no MFL sixth form groups run has increased to 29% and the number of schools where more than 6 pupils take an MFL post-16 has decreased.
- Low numbers for MFL at GCSE mean that the pool of pupils for post-16 is too small to produce sufficient numbers wishing to continue.



- The perception that MFL is more difficult than other subjects, the low value given to MFL compared to STEM subjects, and the reduction in subject choices to make room for the Welsh Bacallaureate are all factors contributing to the decline.

## Contacts with primary schools

- Around half (48%) of secondary schools have some form of contact with their main feeder primary school in relation to MFL, although this tends to be limited in nature.
- Around one third consider that their main feeder primary school currently provides no preparation for learning MFL.
- Respondents favour the development of approaches at Key Stage 2 which focus specifically on MFL rather than on generic language-learning skills through English and/or Welsh.

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## MFL and the teaching of Welsh

- There is a great variety of practice as regards the degree and types of collaboration among colleagues responsible for the new curriculum area of Languages, Literacy and Communication, with some good examples of close working.
- There are moves towards greater collaboration in some schools, in preparation for the new curriculum for Wales.
- Pressure of time is the greatest barrier to further collaboration.

## International engagement and the impact of Brexit

- Pupils attending schools with higher levels of economic disadvantage are less likely to be offered opportunities to take part in school trips abroad.
- Relatively few schools organise pupil exchanges abroad and very few offer work experience in a foreign country.
- More than one third of schools (37%) report that the Brexit process is having a negative effect on attitudes towards the study of MFL.
- This effect is most significant among schools in South East Wales.

## Issues of concern raised by respondents

- The introduction of new GCSE and A level courses has reinforced the perception that MFL is a difficult subject only suitable for the most able.
- Many MFL teachers feel that they are working at the margins of the curriculum and efforts to promote the subject are unsupported by senior management.
- Global Futures is seen by some as undermined by more fundamental policy changes in education.

## Conclusions

The regional consortia have been successful in reaching the vast majority of schools which took part in this research. Many schools are now engaged in multiple activities to raise the profile and status of MFL and some have undoubtedly been successful in boosting numbers taking a GCSE. However, the national picture for MFL across Wales as a whole is still worsening. The introduction of the Welsh Baccaalaureate, which has entailed a reduction in slots for free option choices, and new examination specifications which teachers say are tougher for pupils, have outweighed the many efforts to encourage pupils to take a modern language. The impact of financial stringencies, especially at post-16 and, in some schools, an increase in negative attitudes towards language learning in the aftermath of the Brexit vote, are additional factors in the continuing decline.

In a context where schools are increasingly being treated as autonomous, senior school leaders have the power to overcome some of these barriers, through timetabling, time-allocation, design of options columns – even, perhaps, compulsion for some pupils – and by establishing an internationalist and language-friendly school ethos. However, only 17% of respondents to this survey say that their school management team currently provides positive messages about MFL.

There are signs that some schools are already starting to create structures which will help integrate Welsh, English and ‘international languages’ in response to the new curriculum. However, there is no sense of urgency or movement towards a positive vision of what the new curriculum could offer, but rather a perception that MFL teachers will still be the ‘poor relations’. Although time is seen as the key barrier to more collaborative working, effective leadership will be necessary too.

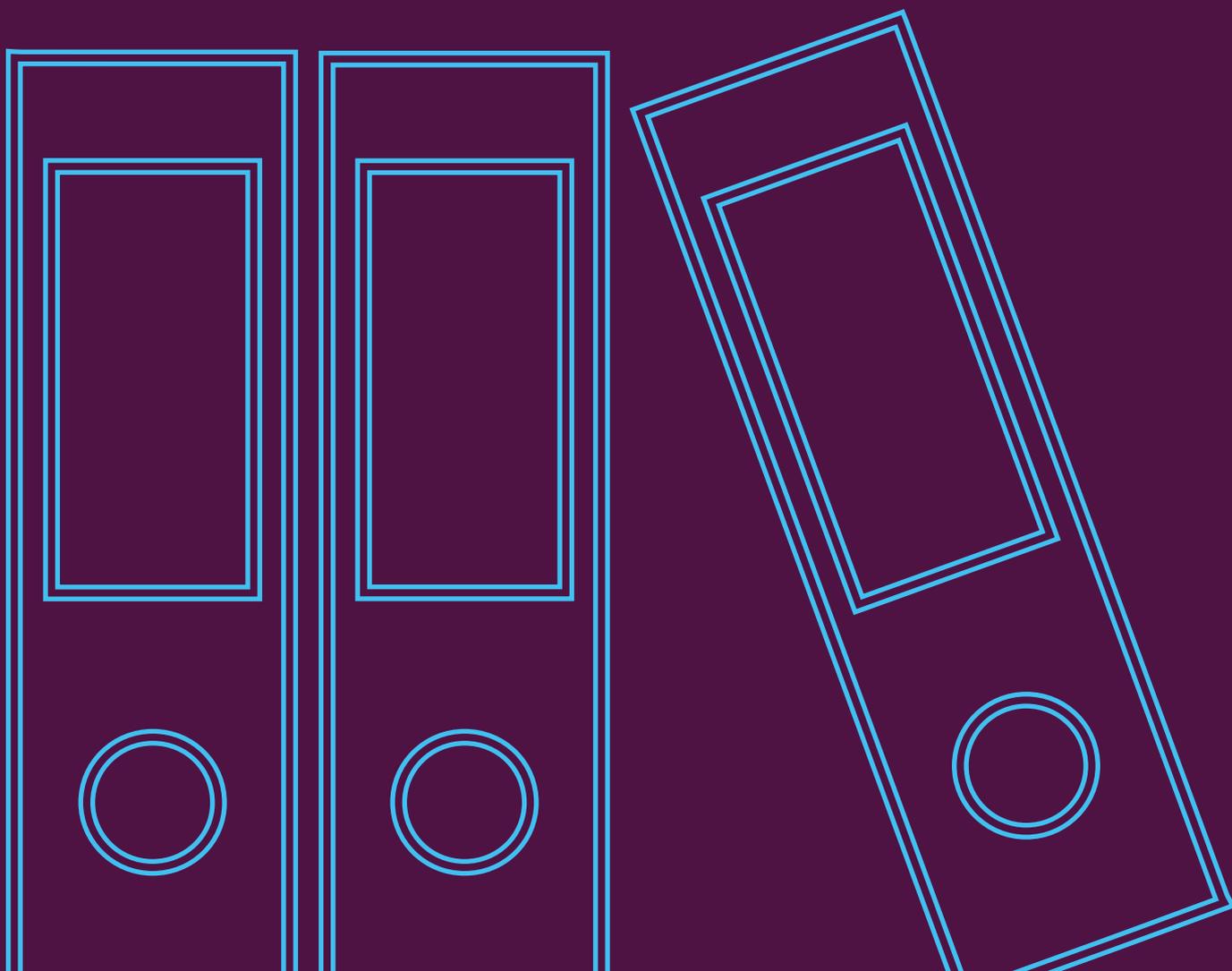
The responses to questions relating to primary schools indicate that much development work will be needed – with the inevitable time and resource implications – for ‘international languages’ to be introduced in the primary phase in any meaningful way. If effectively implemented, the new curriculum and an earlier start to the learning of a new language could indeed improve the situation for MFL in secondary schools, but this will take a decade or more to bear fruit.

The overall conclusion of this research is that the ongoing collapse of MFL at GCSE and post-16 demands urgent action beyond the scope of *Global Futures*. Despite the range of initiatives it has encouraged, the unintended consequences of other educational reforms, and a conjunction of factors in the external context, have created a tipping point which threatens to wipe out some languages, or languages in some phases, within a very short space of time.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction



This report presents findings from the fourth annual survey of modern foreign languages (MFL) in schools in Wales, undertaken in a context in which significant change is under way: for the country as a whole as a result of the Brexit process, and for schools in Wales in particular through the development of a new curriculum.

### The policy context

Both the Brexit process and the development of a curriculum designed to strengthen Languages, Literacy and Communication within a single Area of Learning and Experience,<sup>2</sup> together with Wales' ambition to create one million Welsh speakers by 2050,<sup>3</sup> link closely to questions of multilingualism, Welsh identity and the projection of Wales in the wider world.<sup>4</sup> A recent report by the think-tank Gorwel, which looked into needs of business and commerce in Wales in the context of Brexit, concluded that encouraging far greater study of MFL is central to Wales thriving as an international trading nation.<sup>5</sup>

Three key issues dominate the policy context in which this year's report was produced:

- Firstly, the long-standing decline in the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages (MFL) in schools in Wales, which the Welsh Government is seeking to address through its *Global Futures plan*. The year 2018 sits at the mid-point of the five-year plan which runs from 2015 to 2020. It 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 where the formal teaching of an MFL will begin at Year 5; and to maintain and improve on the attainment levels presently being achieved in MFL.
- Secondly, an aspiration articulated in the new curriculum, as well as in *Global Futures*, to introduce the teaching of 'international languages' (using the terminology of the new curriculum) into the primary school curriculum.
- Thirdly, the vast potential for synergy between the teaching of Welsh, English and international languages offered by the creation of a new curriculum which conceptualises all language subjects as integrated.

A recent report by the think-tank Gorwel, which looked into needs of business and commerce in Wales in the context of Brexit, concluded that encouraging far greater study of MFL is central to Wales thriving as an international trading nation.

<sup>2</sup>Welsh Government, *Successful futures*, Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales, Professor Graham Donaldson, 2015.

<sup>3</sup>Welsh Government, *Cymraeg 2050*, 2017.

<sup>4</sup>British Council, *Wales Soft Power Barometer*, 2018: <https://wales.britishcouncil.org/en/wales-soft-power-barometer-2018>.

<sup>5</sup>Daniel Roberts, *Mind Your Language. A short report by Gorwel into Wales, Brexit and the study of Modern Foreign Languages*, 2018.

These three issues provide the main themes of this year's report. The survey also explores the impact of the new 'made in Wales' GCSE, AS and A level syllabuses for Modern Languages which were introduced in September 2016. These are distinctively Welsh in terms of content and have been designed to meet the requirements of the Welsh Baccalaureate, which is now compulsory for all pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form.

## Language Trends Wales, 2014-2018

This report presents the findings of the fourth edition of the Language Trends survey of schools in Wales, designed to gather information from schools on the current state of MFL teaching and views on potential future development. The annual survey reports chart the impact of government policies in schools and at the same time reflects the views and experiences of MFL teachers as they adapt to changing contexts for foreign language teaching in schools. The 2015/16 edition of the research exercise targeted both primary and secondary schools; however, the primary survey is not repeated annually and the focus of the 2018 survey was MFL departments in secondary schools. Like previous Language Trends surveys, it focuses on the following themes:

Between 2002 (the earliest date for which statistics are available) and 2017, the number of candidates taking MFL as a GCSE in Wales fell by more than 54%

## Take up of MFL at Key Stage 4

Between 2002 (the earliest date for which statistics are available) and 2017, the number of candidates taking MFL as a GCSE in Wales fell by more than 54%, and the proportion of MFL entries out of the total number of entries for all subjects dropped from 4.9% to 2.3%.<sup>6</sup> The *Global Futures* plan was developed as a direct response to this situation. Previous Language Trends surveys identified a number of factors contributing to the decline, including:

- the predominance of compulsory subjects;
- the decision to remove a modern foreign language from the reformed Welsh Baccalaureate for 14-19 year olds in 2015, and the consequences of its introduction, which reduced the number of free option slots available to pupils;
- insufficient time being dedicated to MFL in Key Stage 3, leaving many pupils inadequately prepared to begin a GCSE course and not confident that they would be successful;
- the perceived difficulty of MFL GCSE content and examinations in comparison to other subjects.

Previous surveys have found that many schools have been involved in significant efforts to promote MFL but although these had a beneficial impact on attitudes, they had not substantially improved take up. The 2017 survey found take up of MFL at Key Stage 4 continuing to fall, in both Years 10 and 11 and, in more than a third of schools, fewer than ten per cent of Year 10 pupils taking the subject. The 2018 survey again investigated this issue, and sought signs of a revival as a result of the many promotional activities under way in schools.

<sup>6</sup>Figures from [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk)

## Global Futures

Past surveys found a generally high level of awareness about, and participation in, the Welsh Government's initiative in favour of MFL. In 2017, 72 per cent of respondents had participated in its programme of activities. The 2018 survey tracked schools' engagement with the programme and asked which activities have been most useful and what further measures they would like to see developed.

## Take up of MFL post-16

The 2016 survey found that A and AS level groups were very small and that, with declining numbers, post-16 MFL was increasingly becoming financially unviable. The 2017 survey found the situation for MFL post-16 even more fragile. Some 44 per cent of schools had fewer than five pupils for AS courses, and 61 per cent had fewer than five pupils for A2. The perceived difficulty of both the AS and A level examinations, competition from other subjects and a diminishing pool of GCSE pupils to draw on were given as reasons for the declining numbers for modern languages at this level. The 2018 survey gathered information about the latest situation for MFL post-16 and the reasons behind further declines or increases.

## Teaching staff

In 2017, nearly two thirds of MFL departments (64 per cent) had just one or two full time teachers and more than a third (36 per cent) have just one full time teacher. There was considerable reliance on non-British EU nationals for MFL teaching: as many as 34 per cent of schools employ language teachers from other member states on either a part-time or full-time basis. The 2018 survey asked how easy it is for schools to recruit and retain high quality teachers of MFL, and explored the extent to which MFL teachers receive CPD in their subject.

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## Modern foreign languages in primary schools

With the introduction of a modern foreign language in Year 5 one of the goals of *Global Futures*, and the creation of a single curriculum area for Languages, Literacy and Communication from age 3 an aim of *Successful Futures*, the 2016 Language Trends research incorporated a survey targeted specifically at primary schools in Wales. This found that:

- Just over a quarter of responding primary schools were already providing some access to foreign language teaching, though this is more frequently extra-curricular or informal than systematically structured teaching.
- French was the most frequently-taught language in primary schools, followed by Spanish.
- Languages were more often taught to older pupils in the primary school, although a small number of schools were offering French or Spanish in Key Stage 1.
- Schools were tending to draw on existing members of staff with the necessary skills.



- Primary schools were looking mainly to their local secondary schools as a potential source of support for MFL teaching.
- Although more than three quarters of primary schools surveyed were supportive, in principle, of the introduction of MFL teaching, respondents stressed the need for additional funding and training.

In 2017, around one third of secondary foreign language teachers were of the opinion that the teaching of Welsh and English in primary schools provides pupils with reasonable preparation for learning a foreign language starting in year 7. However, the majority (over 60 per cent) did not see that the teaching of either language in Key Stage 2 was currently supporting the subsequent acquisition of a third language. Although this year's research did not gather evidence directly from primary schools, it asked secondary schools about their contacts with their local feeder school(s) and the preparation Key Stage 2 pupils receive for MFL learning in Key Stage 3.

## Modern foreign languages and Welsh

A key finding of the 2016 survey was that, instead of complementing each other as language subjects, MFL and Welsh were competing for curriculum time and in some cases poor pupil experiences of Welsh in the primary school was having a negative effect on attitudes towards MFL. In the light of the development of the new curriculum area of Languages, Literacy and Communication, the 2018 survey asked to what extent MFL departments work collaboratively with colleagues who teach Welsh and/or English and whether there are any particular barriers to closer working.

## International engagement and Brexit

In 2017, four out of five schools (82 per cent) reported that they organise trips abroad for their pupils. However, there was also evidence that pupil exchanges were being adversely affected by an increasing disinclination on the part of parents and pupils to stay in other people's homes and, in some cases, because of concerns about security risks and uncertain political situations.

In the 2017 survey, a third of MFL teachers reported that the EU referendum vote and the Brexit process were having an impact on the teaching of their subject, almost all negative. They reported adverse effects on pupil motivation, concerns about the future status of teaching staff from other EU countries. The 2018 survey explored these themes once again, in order to track developments.

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## Other concerns raised

Each year, the Language Trends surveys provide an opportunity for respondents to raise other issues of concern to them for inclusion in the survey report. In the last two years, these have included changes to the options system, new GCSE and A level specifications, the introduction of the Welsh BaccaLaureate and the reduction in teaching hours for MFL. They have also called for more support for their subject from school-based leaders and the government.

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Chapter 2

# Research design and data collection



As in previous years, we have prefaced the results of the survey with an analysis of the latest GCSE and A level examinations entries, highlighting trends in take up since 2002/2003.

### 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 languages in secondary schools. The findings of the survey have therefore been prefaced by a presentation of examination data relating to languages, thus setting the responses of schools within a broader context and enabling a more insightful interpretation. The data, provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), comprises entries from learners of all ages and from all types of institution including schools, further education (FE) colleges and adult centres.

### Development of the questionnaires

The questionnaire was developed during autumn 2017 by the researchers in consultation with an advisory group comprising representatives from British Council Wales as the commissioning organisation, Estyn, and the University of Cardiff/Routes into Languages Cymru. Consultations were also held with the Welsh Government. The questions were uploaded bilingually on to the online survey platform Survey Monkey and trialed in early January 2018.

The questionnaire sought to combine similar questions as in previous years, in order to track trends over time, with a focus on some new areas to shed light on issues that had not previously been explored. New questions in 2018 explore questions relevant to the development of the new curriculum, such as the extent of joint working between English, Welsh and MFL departments, how well secondary schools think their feeder primaries are currently preparing pupils for learning MFL in secondary, and how they might do so in future.

The questionnaire sought to combine similar questions as in previous years, in order to track trends over time, with a focus on some new areas to shed light on issues that had not previously been explored.

## Data collection

In January 2018, an email invitation to complete the online questionnaire was sent out in English and Welsh to all 208 secondary schools from the Director of British Council Wales, addressed to the head of languages.

A number of reminder emails were sent to non-responding schools, with a deadline of the end of the spring term for responses. Non-responding schools were then telephoned by bilingual staff who were able to explain the purposes and importance of the survey.

A total of 135 secondary schools yielded a response rate of 65 per cent, higher than the 56 per cent rate achieved in 2017 and broadly representative of the national profile of secondary schools in Wales.

Comparisons of the achieved sample with the national population of schools were carried out, showing that the responding schools are a good match with schools nationally in terms of regional distribution, age range of pupils and school type. In terms of medium of instruction, Welsh medium schools are slightly over-represented - see Appendix for full details.

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## Analysis of the data

One of the key findings of the Gorwel study was that those living in the least prosperous Welsh communities, and those most in need of boosting economic activity through international trade, are also those least likely to undertake MFL education.<sup>7</sup>

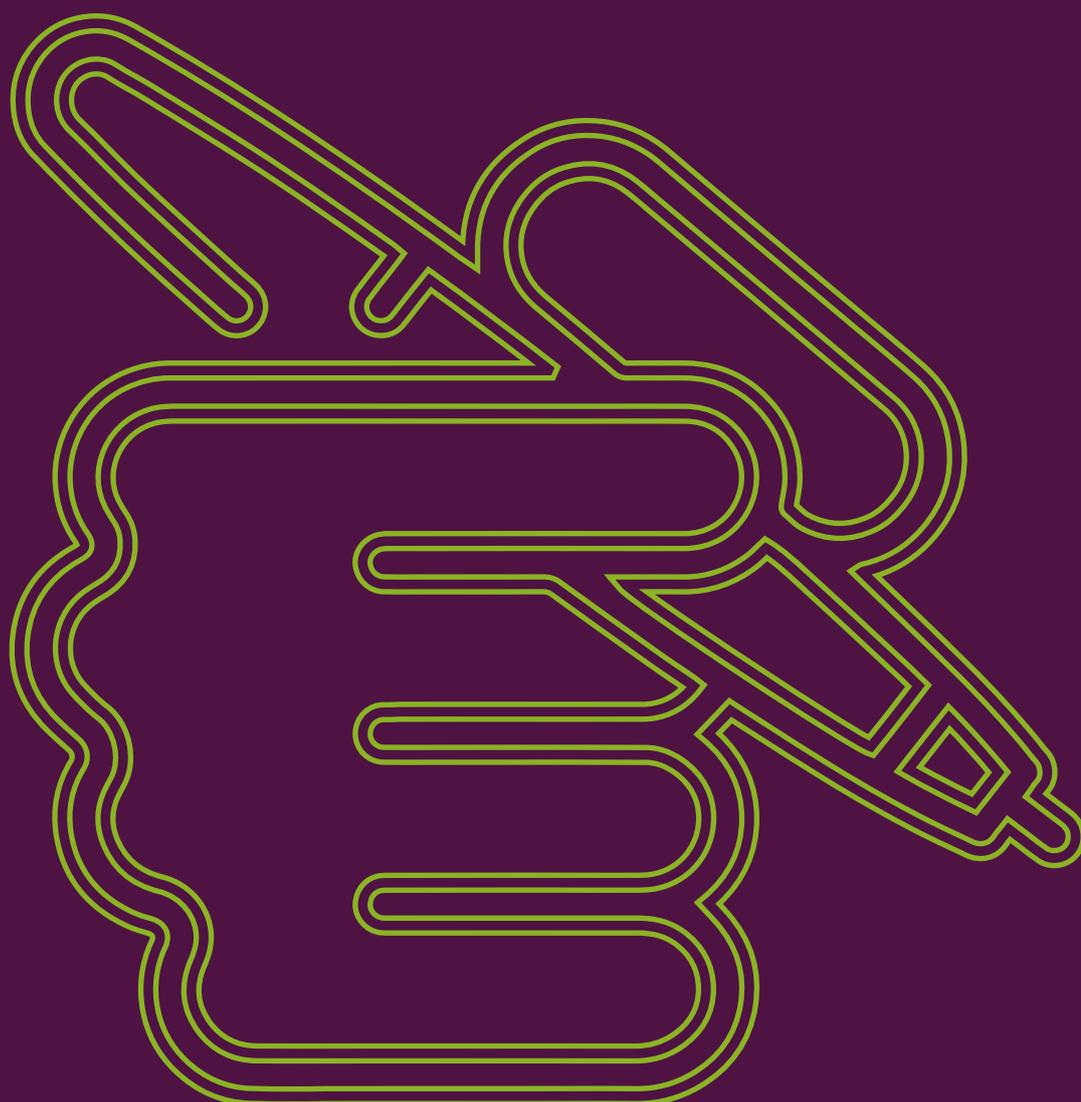
Our analysis explores this issue further by examining any patterns in the responses to the survey by different school characteristics including a socio-economic indicator (based on the proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), region, school type and medium of instruction.<sup>8</sup>) The relatively small sample means that when broken down further, the numbers of schools in each sub-sample are too small to provide firm data on response variance between types of school within some questions. Nonetheless, the responses to a number of questions have been analysed in this way, and commentary included within the text where any pattern can be detected from a large enough sample.

<sup>7</sup>Roberts, *Mind Your Language*.

<sup>8</sup>We were not able to explore possible correlations with overall school attainment data, since national school level data was not available to us.

Chapter 3

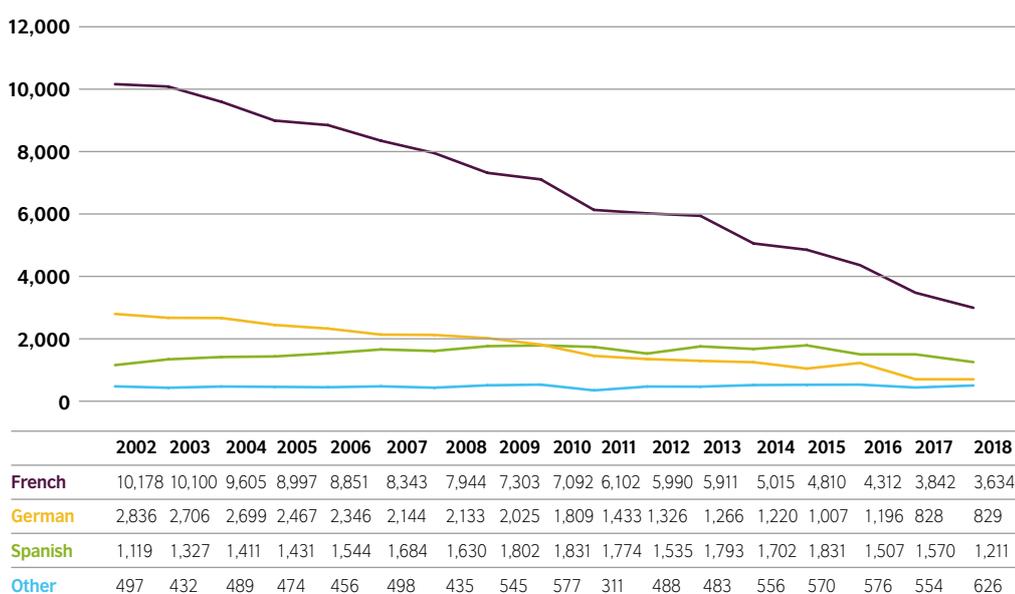
# Schools examination data in Wales



The figures shown below are taken from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) entry statistics published in August each year and cover all GCSE and A level entries for Wales in each year, including those from further, adult and voluntary education providers. The earliest figures available are for 2001, in the case of A level, and 2002, in the case of GCSE, while the latest figures available are those for summer 2018.

## GCSE

FIGURE 1: GCSE MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENTRIES FOR WALES, 2002-2018



Since 2002, entries for modern foreign languages in Wales have declined by 57%, although this figure needs to be understood in context of an overall decline of 10% in GCSE entries in Wales, across all subjects.

The decline has affected German and French, with entries for German now at just 29% of the 2002 level, and entries for French at 36% of the number of candidates in 2002. Spanish has increased by 8%, since 2002, and entries for other languages by 26%, both from a much smaller base than French and German.

The decline in French entries between 2017 and 2018 is not so steep as in the previous two years (only 5% compared with 11% from 2016-2017 and 10% between 2015 and 2016), and the decline in German has been halted, at least for this year, with one extra candidate compared to 2017.

This may be an indication that some of the efforts being made to improve take-up have had some effect. However, in contrast, Spanish, has seen a 23% drop in entries between 2017 and 2018.

### 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 numbers are very small. It is likely that many of the entries in the 'Other Languages' category come from the further (FE), adult or voluntary sectors since the results of Language Trends surveys show that there is very little teaching of languages other than French, Spanish and German in Welsh schools.

### Data from Statistics Wales

Statistics Wales does not publish data on the proportion of the age 15 cohort taking different subjects. However, they do publish raw numbers, and this enables a comparison between the numbers taking MFL and other subjects, as follows:

**FIGURE 2: NUMBERS OF CANDIDATES FOR SELECTED SUBJECTS AT GCSE, 2015-2017**

Subject	Number of age 15 candidates, 2015	2016	2017	Difference 2015-2017
French	4,793	4,124	3,558	-26%
German	1,024	1,072	717	-30%
Spanish	1,745	1,252	1,351	-23%
Other Modern Foreign languages	394	443	447	-13%
All MFL	7,956	6,891	6,073	-24%
History	11,667	10,820	9,395	-19%
Additional Science	11,927	11,885	15,300	+28%
Mathematics	34,871	33,301	31,259	-10%

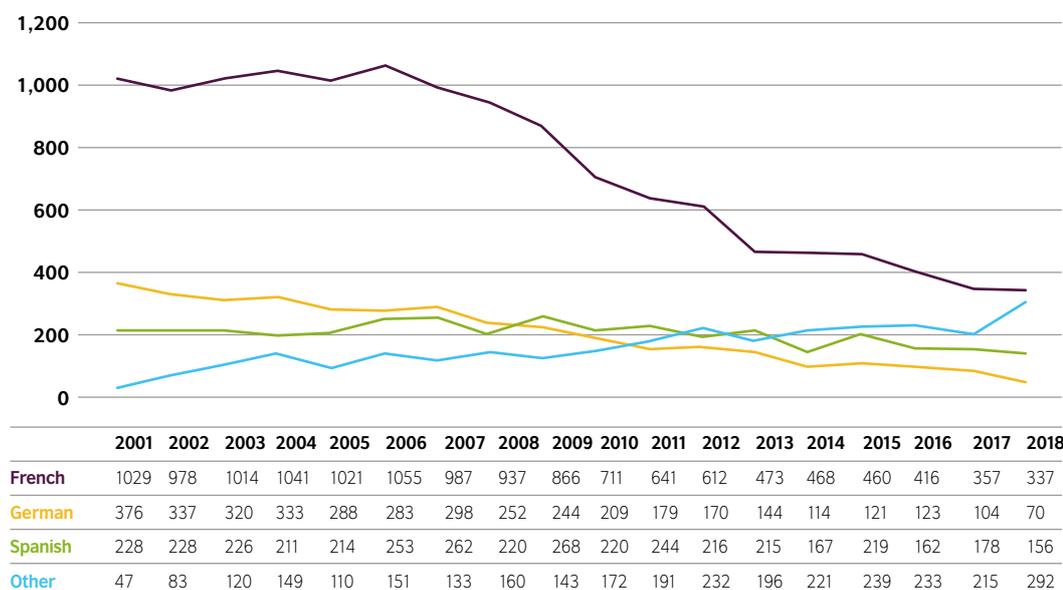
<https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Key-Stage-4/gcseentriesandresultspupilsaged15only-by-subjectgroup>

These data reveal how, from year to year, MFL is becoming increasingly marginalised as a GCSE subject. The total number of 15-year olds taking MFL subjects (including 'Other Languages') in 2017 is now only 19 per cent of the number taking Mathematics (down from 23% in 2015), 40% of the number taking Additional Science (a huge fall from 67% in 2015), and less than two thirds of the number taking History (64 per cent – previously 68%). While the numbers taking Maths and History have also fallen over the two-year period, the rates of decline have been much less

These data reveal how, from year to year, MFL is becoming increasingly marginalised as a GCSE subject.

## A level

FIGURE 3: A LEVEL MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENTRIES WALES, 2001-2018



than the 24% decrease in numbers taking MFL meaning that the disparities between MFL and other subjects are becoming more pronounced.

Since 2001, A level entries for modern foreign language subjects in Wales have halved. Entries for French in 2018 are at 33% of those achieved in 2001, and German has seen a drop of 81% over the same period. Spanish too has declined by about a third and only entries in other language subjects – those not generally taught in Welsh schools – have risen. Entries in other languages now account for 34% of all A level modern language entries in Wales, compared to just 3% in 2001.

The figures for the one year between 2017 and 2018 continued the trends of the previous periods. French was down 6%, German by 33% and Spanish by 12%. The very significant fall for German comes on top of a 15% fall between 2016 and 2017, whereas Spanish had increased by 10% between 2016 and 2017.

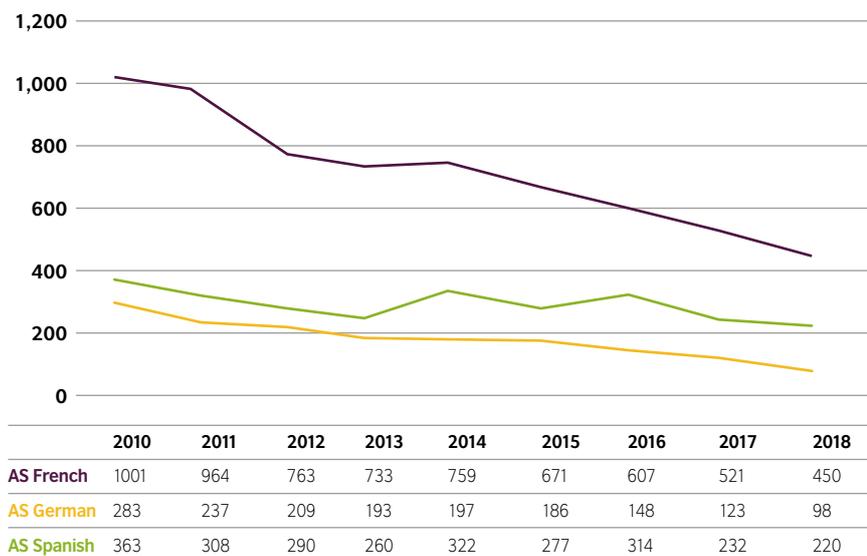
Since 2001, A level entries for modern foreign language subjects in Wales have halved.

### Other languages

As noted in previous Language Trends surveys, the 'Other languages' do not generally come from languages 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 does not provide a breakdown of these entries for Wales alone, except for specifying that there were no entries for Irish.

## Entries for AS

FIGURE 4: AS ENTRIES FOR FRENCH, GERMAN AND SPANISH, 2010-2018



Entries for AS in French, German and Spanish offer little hope that the situation for A2 will improve in 2019, with continued declines in all three languages.

However, the conversion rate from AS to A2 improved slightly between 2017 and 2018. A2 figures in French, German and Spanish combined represented 64% of the AS entries for these subjects the previous year, a rate not seen since 2012/13:

However, the conversion rate from AS to A2 improved slightly between 2017 and 2018

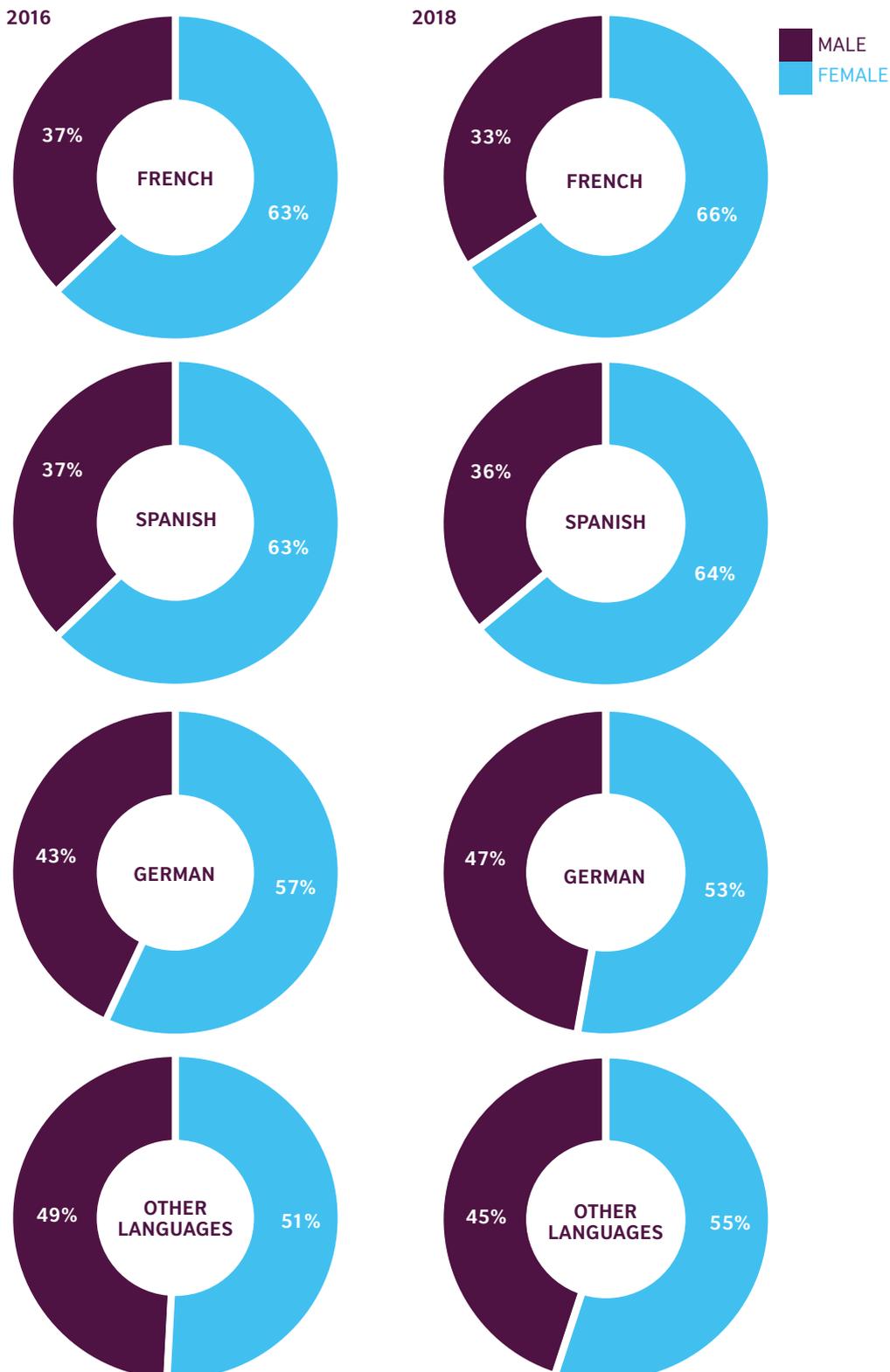
FIGURE 5: CONVERSION RATES FROM AS TO A2 IN FRENCH, GERMAN AND SPANISH

	AS	A2	
2010-11	1,647	1,064	65%
2011-12	1,509	998	66%
2012-13	1,262	832	66%
2013-14	1,186	749	63%
2014-15	1,278	800	63%
2015-16	1,134	701	62%
2016-17	1,069	639	60%
2017-18	876	563	64%

## GCSE

Figures show that the decline in MFL entries is linked to an increasing bias towards female entries in MFL subjects and especially French and Spanish. However, the opposite is happening in German, where the distribution of entries by gender is becoming more even:

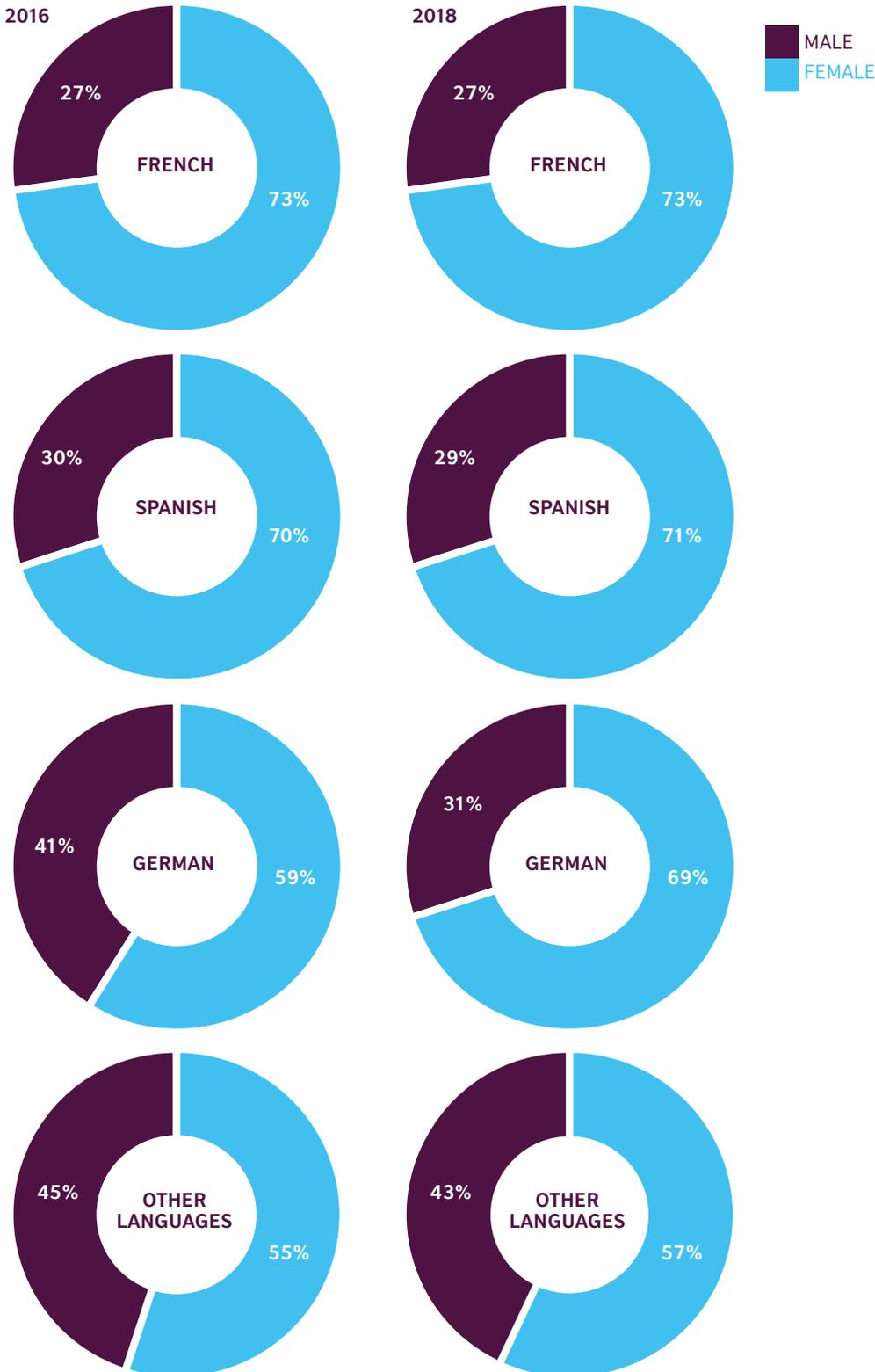
FIGURE 6: RATIO OF FEMALES TO MALES IN GCSE MFL ENTRIES, 2016 AND 2018



## A level

At A level, where the bias towards females has been even more pronounced, this too is increasing. There has been an increase in the bias towards females in all language subjects except French, where the very high differential of 73% has remained stable:

FIGURE 7: RATIO OF FEMALES TO MALES IN AL MFL ENTRIES, 2016 AND 2018



## Chapter 4

# Survey findings



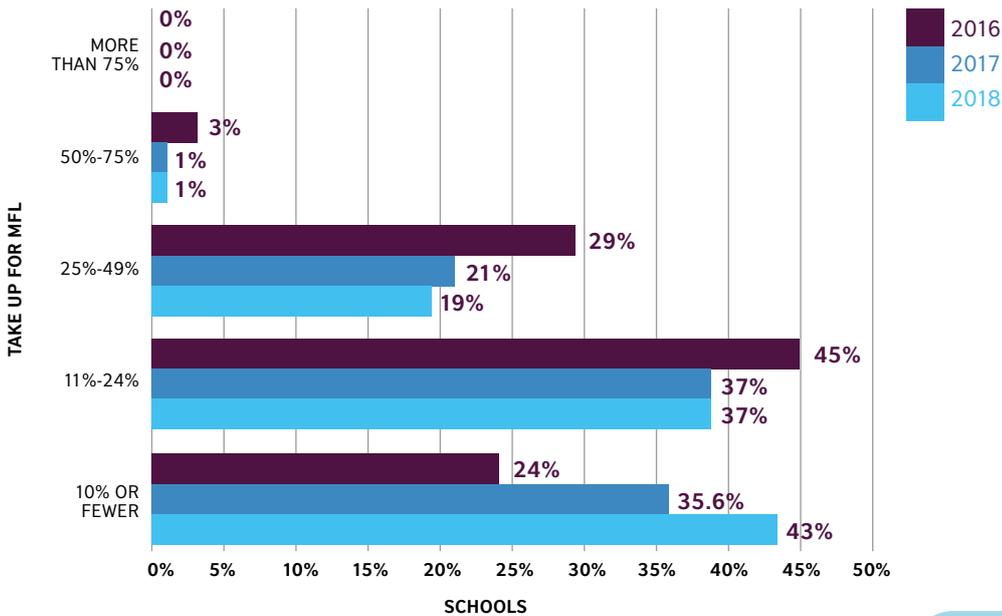
## Take up for MFL in Key Stage 4

### What proportion of pupils are currently studying a language in Key Stage 4?

The proportion of schools where less than 10% of pupils are taking a language in Year 10 has increased to 43%, clear evidence that the number of schools with very small numbers taking languages to GCSE is increasing rapidly.

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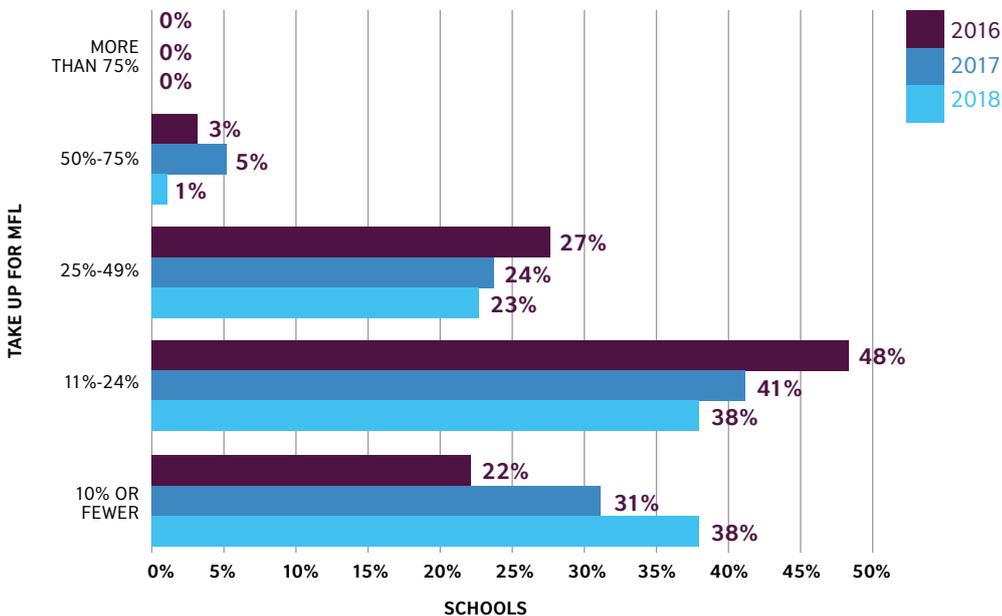
FIGURE 8: PARTICIPATION RATES IN MFL IN YEAR 10, 2016-2018



Looking at figures for Year 11, the downward trend is clear. Each year there are more schools in the lowest band for MFL participation in Year 10 than in Year 11. This indicates that GCSE figures for MFL are likely to continue to decline in 2019.

Looking at figures for Year 11, the downward trend is clear.

FIGURE 9: PARTICIPATION RATES IN MFL IN YEAR 11, 2016-2018

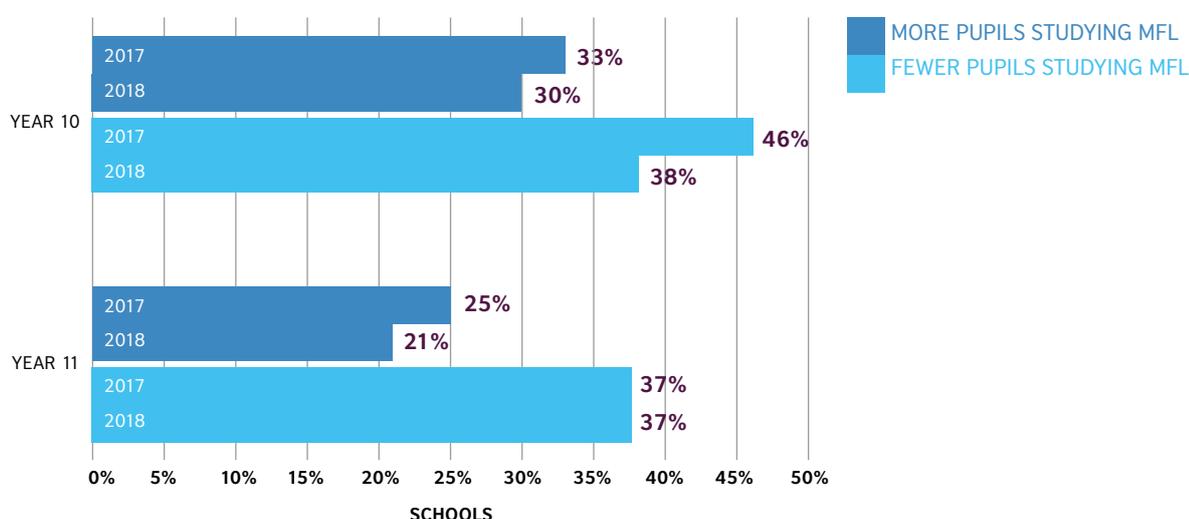


However, the figures do indicate that some schools are bucking the trend. One third of schools (33%) said that they currently had more pupils studying MFL in Year 10 than the previous year, and a quarter (25%) said this was the case in respect of Year 11. However, 46% of schools said that numbers had declined in Year 10 and 37% reported this was the case in Year 11 respectively.

The table below shows that, compared to 2017, more schools are reporting that numbers have increased, but with respect to Year 10, while in 2017 38% of schools said that numbers had declined, in this year's survey that figure has risen to 46%. We must conclude that, while some schools have been successful in increasing numbers, a greater number are still feeling downward pressure on take up for MFL.

We must conclude that, while some schools have been successful in increasing numbers, a greater number are still feeling downward pressure on take up for MFL.

**FIGURE 10: HOW DO NUMBERS FOR MFL COMPARE TO LAST YEAR?**



Schools which reported that more students in Key Stage 4 are studying MFL in comparison to last year are statistically more likely to have lower levels of FSM eligibility amongst their student population.

### Characteristics of schools with low levels of participation in MFL at GCSE

Analysis of the data by FSM eligibility levels confirms the findings of the Gorwel report that there is a correlation at local authority level between economic factors and uptake for MFL at GCSE.<sup>9</sup> Schools with a higher proportion of their students eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) are more likely overall to have low levels of MFL participation in Key Stage 4.

Schools with fewer than one in ten pupils studying MFL in Year 10 are also statistically more likely to be Welsh medium schools.

Schools with a higher proportion of their students eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) are more likely overall to have low levels of MFL participation in Key Stage 4.

<sup>9</sup>Roberts, *Mind Your Language*.

### Does this tendency affect boys and girls equally?

Over one third of schools (38%) reported that more girls are studying MFL in Key Stage 4, as opposed to just 3% of schools where more boys are represented. Over a third (37%) reported that genders are normally equally represented in MFL at Key Stage 4, whereas 6% reported that the gender split differs year to year, or by what language was being offered. Where numbers differed by which languages were being offered, the sample was too small to identify any particular trends as regards to which languages are more attractive to specific genders. Just over 10% of schools were not sure how gender interacted with MFL uptake trends in their school.

Over one third of schools (38%) reported that more girls are studying MFL in Key Stage 4, as opposed to just 3% of schools where more boys are represented.

**FIGURE 11: GENDER BIAS AT GCSE**

	Number of schools
More girls studying MFL	51
More boys studying MFL	4
Impacts by gender are normally equal	50
Gender patterns differ year to year or by language taught	8

### What approaches do schools take towards provision for MFL at Key Stage 4?

Respondents reported that, in the vast majority of schools (93%), MFL is optional for all pupils. In one school it is compulsory for some pupils. However, only 13% of respondents reported that their school encourages all pupils to take MFL and 18% said that some pupils are actively discouraged from taking the subject.

Exactly half of responding schools said that MFL is incompatible with some option choices, indicating that this is a significant issue. Less than one in five (17%) said that positive messages about MFL were being provided by careers staff and senior management and in the vast majority of cases (93%), MFL staff were those promoting take up in the subject.

Exactly half of responding schools said that MFL is incompatible with some option choices, indicating that this is a significant issue.

**FIGURE 12: APPROACHES TAKEN TOWARDS TAKE-UP OF MFL AT KEY STAGE 4 (MULTIPLE RESPONSES PERMITTED)**

MFL is optional for all pupils	93%
The MFL department promotes take up of MFL	93%
MFL is incompatible with some option choices	50%
Some pupils are discouraged from taking MFL	18%
Careers staff and senior management provide positive messages about studying MFL	17%
The school encourages all pupils to take MFL	13%
MFL is compulsory for some pupils	1%
MFL is compulsory for all pupils	0%



Schools which report that they encourage all students to take MFL are statistically more likely to have lower levels of FSM eligibility and more likely to be located in rural areas: 23% of rural schools 'encourage all', in contrast to only 8% of urban schools.

Welsh Medium schools were also statistically more likely to report that they 'encourage all' (30%) than non-Welsh Medium schools (7%). This is not necessarily a contradiction with the evidence quoted above that they are more likely to have very low levels of take up.

Schools with an 11-19 age range were statistically more likely to 'encourage all' (13%), in contrast to 11-16 schools (6%). This may suggest that having a Sixth Form benefits the status of language education in some way, perhaps because schools are more likely to promote MFL uptake at Key Stage 4 if they also have MFL courses to maintain at post-16.

### Key points

- Participation in MFL at GCSE continues to fall across Wales as a whole. However, some schools have increased numbers.
- The proportion of schools where only one in ten pupils or fewer study a language beyond the age of 14 has increased from 24% to 43% in two years.
- Welsh medium schools, and schools with higher proportions of pupils eligible for Free School Meals, are more likely to have low take up.
- In 50% of schools, option blocks prevent pupils from taking MFL if they choose certain other subjects.
- Only a small number of senior school managers and careers staff are providing positive messages about the study of MFL.

### Impact of *Global futures* and other initiatives

Around nine out of every ten schools (87%) answering the survey had engaged in some way with Global Futures. This is up from 72% in last year's survey.

#### Which types of activity have schools engaged with?

Out of the 121 schools which answered this question, around nine out of ten had taken part in CPD and/or had accessed materials and resources provided through Global Futures. The high proportion may reflect a skew in the sample: schools who are in close contact with their regional consortium may have been more likely to complete the survey. A large majority (79%) had taken part in activities to raise pupil numbers. However, less than a third had taken part in activities aimed at developing the teaching of MFL in primary schools. More than half said they had not been offered this, and another 19% said they had been offered it but had not taken part.

Schools which report that they encourage all students to take MFL are statistically more likely to have lower levels of FSM eligibility and more likely to be located in rural areas: 23% of rural schools 'encourage all', in contrast to only 8% of urban schools.

Around nine out of every ten schools (87%) answering the survey had engaged in some way with Global Futures. This is up from 72% in last year's survey.

FIGURE 13: PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL FUTURES ACTIVITIES

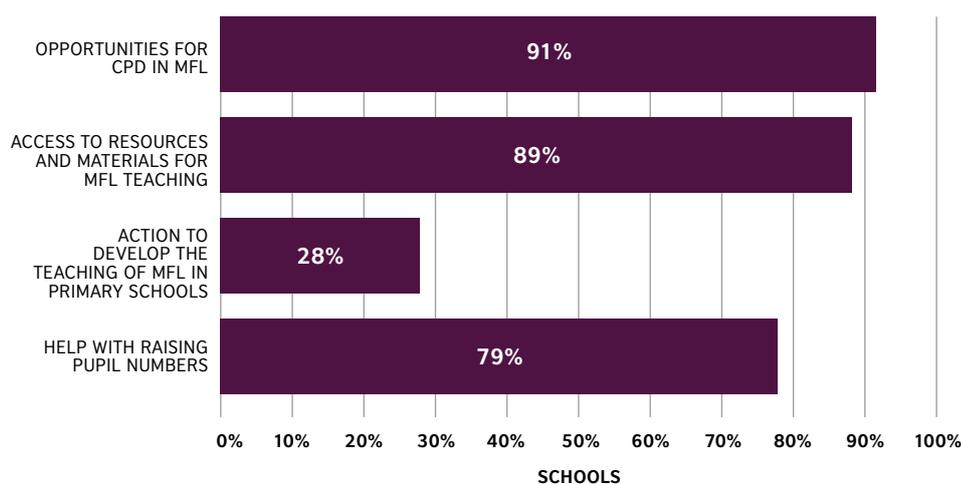
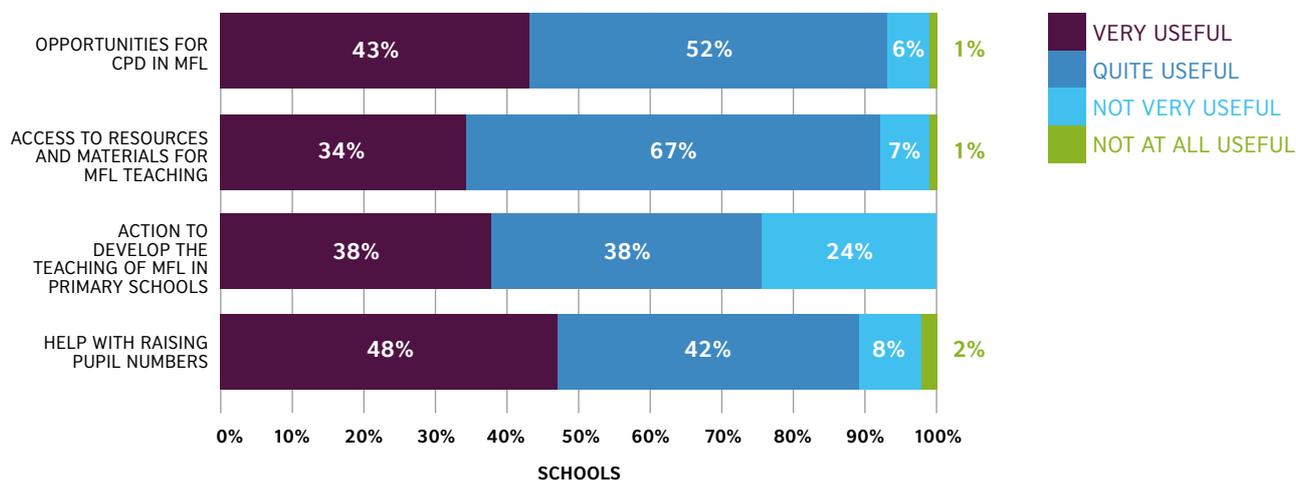


FIGURE 14: WHICH ACTIVITIES PROVIDED THROUGH GLOBAL FUTURES HAVE BEEN THE MOST USEFUL?



The overwhelming proportion of participants in each activity rated it positively, with only a few exceptions. Help with raising pupil numbers was given the most enthusiastic reception with 48% of participants rating it as 'very useful' and there was a further question (see below) to tease out which activities had been successful and what impact they had had.

Action to develop the teaching of MFL in primary schools was rated 'not very useful' by 24% of teachers who had taken part (equivalent to 8 individuals). This is perhaps because it is not an immediate priority for secondary schools. More participants rated the resources/materials and CPD provided through *Global Futures* as 'quite useful' than 'very useful', although in each case more than 90% of respondents rated them positively.<sup>10</sup>

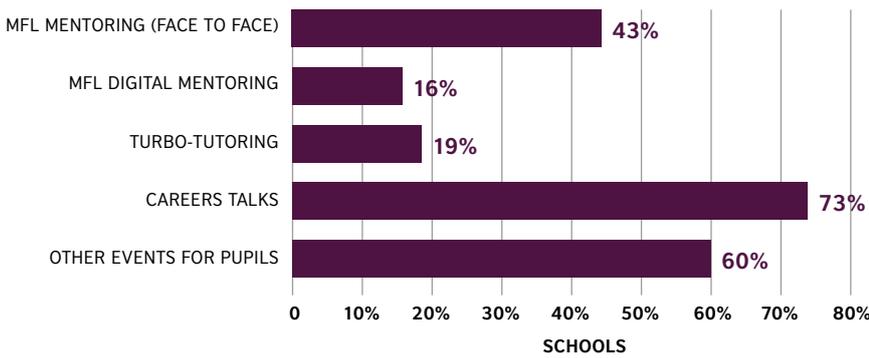
The overwhelming proportion of participants in each activity rated it positively, with only a few exceptions.

### Activities to promote take-up of MFL

One hundred schools responded to this question. Large numbers of schools had taken part in careers talks and other events. Other activities were organised by Cardiff University on a pilot basis and involved fewer schools.

<sup>10</sup>See also separate question on CPD, reported on page 42.

FIGURE 15: PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE TAKE-UP OF MFL

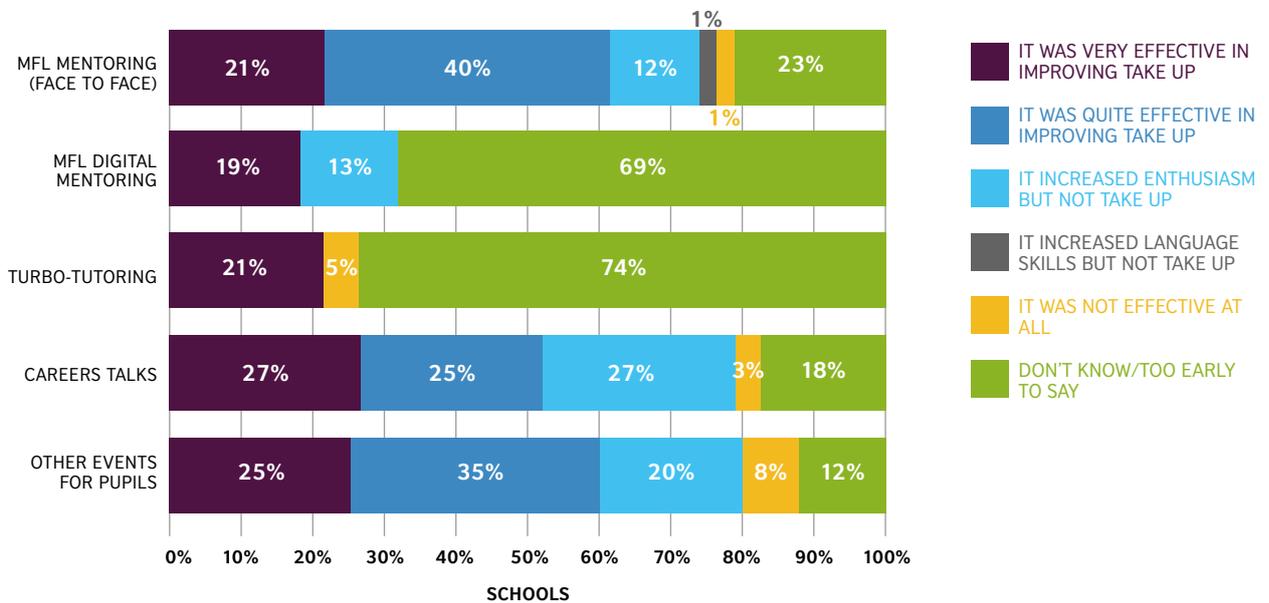


Most schools which had taken part in the Turbo-tutoring and Digital Mentoring projects were not able to comment on their effectiveness as it was too early to say. However, the MFL mentoring was rated effective in improving take up in 61% of cases – this tallies with the project’s own evaluation findings.<sup>11</sup> Around the same percentage of respondents also rated ‘other events’ (60%) as effective in improving take up. Careers talks were reported effective in improving take up in 52% of cases. These activities were also reported effective in increasing enthusiasm for MFL, taking their overall effectiveness up to 75-80% of schools in each case.

MFL mentoring was rated effective in improving take up in 61% of cases

However, there is no evidence that schools which have reported declines have low levels of engagement with the Regional Consortia.

FIGURE 16: RATING OF ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MFL (BASE: SCHOOLS TAKING PART)



<sup>11</sup>Alcantara Communications, *Raising the profile of MFL mentoring initiative. Evaluator’s final report*, July 2017.

## What further activities would schools like to see developed?

When asked about the next phase of the *Global Futures* programme, the top four activity suggestions for schools, in order of importance, were as follows:

1. Increased resources, resource sharing and CPD opportunities, in particular for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 (29 responses):  
*“More opportunities for CPD – especially for KS4 and KS5 with the new GCSE and A-level specifications. More resources for MFL teacher to use in the classroom.”*  
*“Developing more innovative KS3 Schemes of Work to prepare better for the new GCSE”*
2. Improved links and relationships with business and universities in order to emphasise the varied potential careers in MFL (17 responses):  
*“Links with local businesses + talks from Sutton Trust universities on the value of languages (from a range of different fields).”*  
*“Closer links with Universities and with students who study subjects other than MFL for their Degree but who feel learning an MFL has been beneficial to them.”*
3. Activities directly targeted at Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) to promote the importance of MFL, or activities that help MFL teachers engage their own SLT (16 responses):  
*“Get SLT/Welsh Government to understand the importance of MFL. Brexit has not helped as pupils feel it’s even less important and surely Welsh Government needs to put something in place to explain it’s more important than ever!!”*  
*“It is not so much a greater choice of activities that are needed but the time needed to put them in place (as all of the projects we run are on top of our normal teaching/assessing hours) and a change of attitudes towards languages in general (as most pupils/parents/Headteachers do not value them).”*
4. Promotional campaigns that stress the value of languages, within the country as a whole, and within schools to increase uptake and engagement (14 responses).  
*“Nationwide, high-level messages about the importance of languages post-Brexit. Messages to headteachers about the importance of enough curriculum time. Importance of pupils having the opportunity to learn MORE THAN ONE MFL as part of the curriculum. Importance of blending MFL with STEM subjects, because at the moment, STEM subjects are being prioritised at the detriment of MFL.”*

“It is not so much a greater choice of activities that are needed but the time needed to put them in place”

Twelve comments suggested that policy change beyond the scope of *Global Futures* activity was a higher priority than modifying *Global Futures* itself, for example:

*“Maybe the inclusion of an MFL qualification as part of the Welsh Bacc, as in the Ebacc.”*

The difficulty or unsuitability of GCSE and AS exams was frequently mentioned in this respect:

*“I think the main problem is the GCSE exam, in particular the WJEC version. Not sure what Global Futures can do to help.”*

*“It is very difficult to see how Global Futures can reach pupils when they are put off by an exam which is perceived (and is), considerably harder than many other subjects; we are teaching AS content and technique now at GCSE level. The other 2 factors relating to the overcrowding of KS4 timetable/lack of curriculum choice for option subjects once triple science, Welsh Bac and compulsory Welsh are in play.”*

*“The networking and CPD opportunities are brilliant, but when it comes to “saving” MFL take up, this will go nowhere as exams keep getting unrealistically and unfairly more difficult, and no real decision-makers (ministers, headteachers... etc...) are properly and actively involved.”*

*“We need to improve the content of the syllabus that WJEC offers. It’s quite easy to convince children that languages are important, but the content of the courses, especially AS, can be very heavy and boring. This leads to bright students dropping the subject.”*

Further themes emerging from this question revolve around the logistics of Global Futures activities in terms of geographic access:

*“More activities in northern Powys because Cardiff and Swansea are too far.”*

*“...more focus on providing activities in regions of Wales, it is impossible to get from north to south and back in a day!”*

### Key points

- Global Futures has increased its reach since last year’s survey, and its activities are being judged positively.
- Actions to help raise pupil numbers have been particularly appreciated.
- Some activities are still too new for schools to report impact.
- Relatively few secondary schools have taken part in activities to promote MFL in primary schools and rate this activity as less useful than other activities organised through Global Futures.
- Respondents express a view that change is needed beyond the scope of Global Futures in order to halt the decline in MFL.

*“We need to improve the content of the syllabus that WJEC offers. It’s quite easy to convince children that languages are important, but the content of the courses, especially AS, can be very heavy and boring. This leads to bright students dropping the subject.”*

## MFL post-16

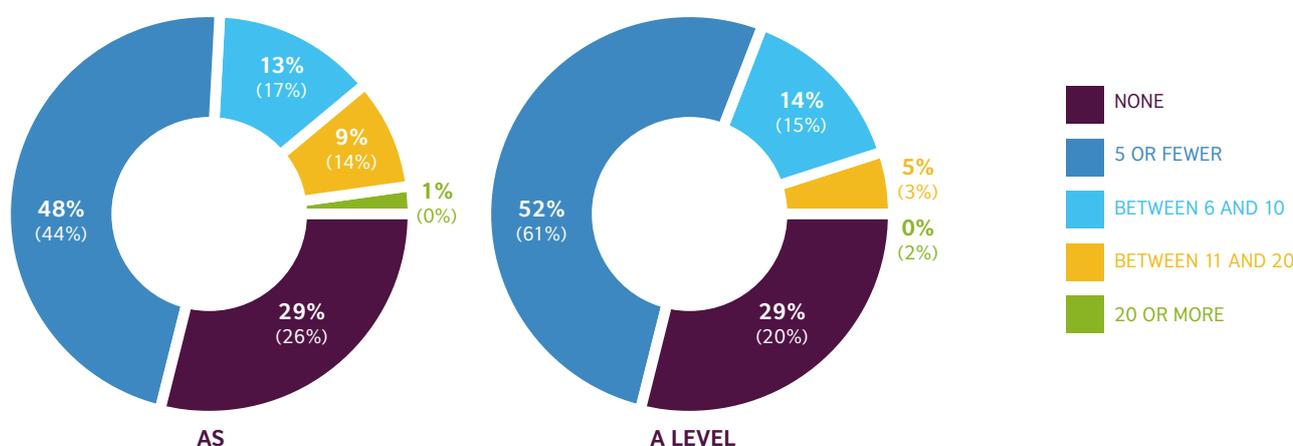
Ninety-two of the 133 responding schools (69%) cater for post-16 pupils. Of these, 65 (71%) offer in-house post-16 MFL courses and 21 (23%) offer courses run by collaborative agreement with another school or college. There are 6 schools (7%) with post-16 pupils where there are no opportunities to take an MFL course post 16 and 25 (29%) of the schools which do offer such opportunities have no pupils taking AS or A level in an MFL. This means that over a third of schools (34%) which have post-16 provision, have no pupils taking MFL subjects. The schools which no longer offer post-16 MFL courses all say this is because of insufficient uptake – in one school 15 pupils are required for a course to run. Low numbers for MFL at GCSE mean that the pool of pupils for post-16 is too small to produce sufficient numbers wishing to continue.

The chart below reveals that there has been further attrition to MFL post-16 in just one year. In 2017, 26% of schools which offered AS MFL courses had no students; this year that figure has risen to 29%. At A level, the increase in the proportion of schools with no students for MFL is greater: 29% in 2018 compared to 20% in 2017. In around half of responding schools, the cohort produces fewer than 6 pupils for MFL, often split between more than one language, meaning that actual group sizes may be even smaller:

*“1 pupil studies French and 3 study German”*

*“3 AS French and 3 A Level Spanish”*

**FIGURE 17: HOW MANY PUPILS FROM YOUR SCHOOL ARE CURRENTLY STUDYING POST 16 COURSES IN MFL? (2017 FIGURES IN BRACKETS)**



*NB. Percentages for both years are based on fewer than 100 responses and should be taken as indicative only.*

Respondents report that consortium or partnership arrangements often act as a disincentive for pupils:

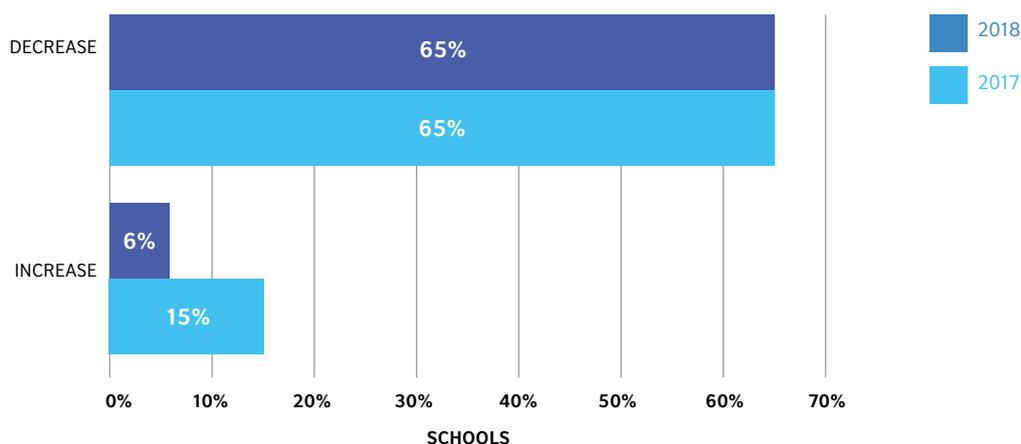
*“They have to travel about 20 miles, taxi one way, have to get bus back.”*

*“The school will not run courses for classes of fewer than 10. This means the half-dozen or so pupils who opt for German are forced to study elsewhere. A few take up this opportunity, while others simply change their option choices. From Sept 2018, the neighbouring school that has offered post-16 German will cease to do so.”*

Two thirds (56 = 65%) of this year’s respondents say that numbers for MFL post-16 have decreased in the last 3 years. This year, only 5 (6%) schools say that numbers have increased, compared to 15% in 2017. The remainder say that numbers have not changed significantly.

“The school will not run courses for classes of fewer than 10. This means the half-dozen or so pupils who opt for German are forced to study elsewhere.”

FIGURE 18: REPORTED CHANGES IN TAKE UP FOR MFL POST-16



**Reported reasons for declines in numbers post-16**

The main reasons schools give for the decline in numbers taking languages post-16 are, in order of importance:

1. The perceived difficulty of MFL, both at GCSE and at Key Stage 5 (22 comments):

*“Pupils perceive MFL as difficult, and they tend to know that grade boundaries are unfavourable compared to most of the other subjects. Also, course content at GCSE is now huge, and consequently pupils are deterred by the possibility of the same happening at post 16.”*

*“Difficulty of exams. Too many subjects to choose from. Don’t see the value in languages – everybody speaks English!!!”*

*“A level is too challenging – harder to get high grades, exam is marked too hard.”*

“Pupils perceive MFL as difficult, and they tend to know that grade boundaries are unfavourable compared to most of the other subjects.”

The new GCSE and A levels have done nothing to alter these perceptions:

*“Languages are perceived as being difficult and the new GCSE and A level courses reinforce this belief.”*

2. Low uptake at GCSE, meaning that the pool of applicants is too small to make classes viable (13 comments):

*“Not enough opting for GCSE in the first place.”*

*“Unable to run classes with fewer than 15 pupils so pupils opt for other subjects or go to college/other 6th form.”*

*“The stipulation that a course must have a minimum of 10 pupils. Our numbers in German at 16+ would be similar to the past three decades but have been reduced to zero by this stipulation.”*

Comments also point to issues lower down the school which do not cultivate the skills and dispositions needed for higher level language study:

*“Most of key stage 3 only have a 50-minute lesson per week, which is impossible to make any progress/gain interest/take up.”*

*“Poor behaviour. Pupils lack of tolerance towards other cultures. Poor*

*work ethic amongst many pupils.”*

*“In KS3 we have classes of 35+ due to budget constraints; some of these budget issues are governmental and some are school priorities. There is a huge input into English and Maths and Science which means that non-core subjects have very different teaching conditions and opportunities. This consequently sends out a message to pupils about which subjects are important and which have a better environment for learning – smaller class sizes, more than one teacher in the class, extra tutoring, teachers paid in core subjects to do extra marking for this subject, 18 staff members as opposed to 3 in other subjects so more support can be offered to pupils, the chance to re-sit in core subjects. A data-driven education system is damaging option subjects which are not KPIs.”*

3. A perception that languages are less important or valuable than STEM subjects (13 comments):

*“Pupils taking ‘science’ route. Perceived uselessness of the subject.”*

*“Learners believe that it is too much hard work and that they won’t need it in university or for their careers”*

Teachers comment that the Welsh Baccalaureate has exacerbated this situation:

*“In the past the pupils would choose languages as a 4th subject but with the work load of the Bac this does not happen anymore. There are lots of pupils who get the message that studying Maths and Science leads to a successful career and a good salary.”*

The five schools where numbers for MFL have increased over the last few years give different reasons for this. One has become a centre of excellence, another points to success at GCSE and a third reports that it is because they have stopped sending pupils to another school to study French. A fourth attributes the increase to a ‘stronger cohort’ while the fifth is not able to give any particular reason.

### Key points

- There has been a perceptible decline, over just one year, in the learning of modern foreign languages post-16. Over a third of schools with post-16 provision now have no pupils for MFL. The proportion of schools where no MFL sixth form groups run has increased to 29% and the number of schools where more than 6 pupils take an MFL post-16 has decreased.
- Low numbers for MFL at GCSE mean that the pool of pupils for post-16 is too small to produce sufficient numbers wishing to continue.
- The perception that MFL is more difficult than other subjects.
- The low value given to MFL compared to STEM subjects, and the reduction in subject choices to make room for the Welsh Baccalaureate are all factors contributing to the decline.

*“In the past the pupils would choose languages as a fourth subject but with the work load of the Bac this does not happen anymore. There are lots of pupils who get the message that studying Maths and Science leads to a successful career and a good salary.”*

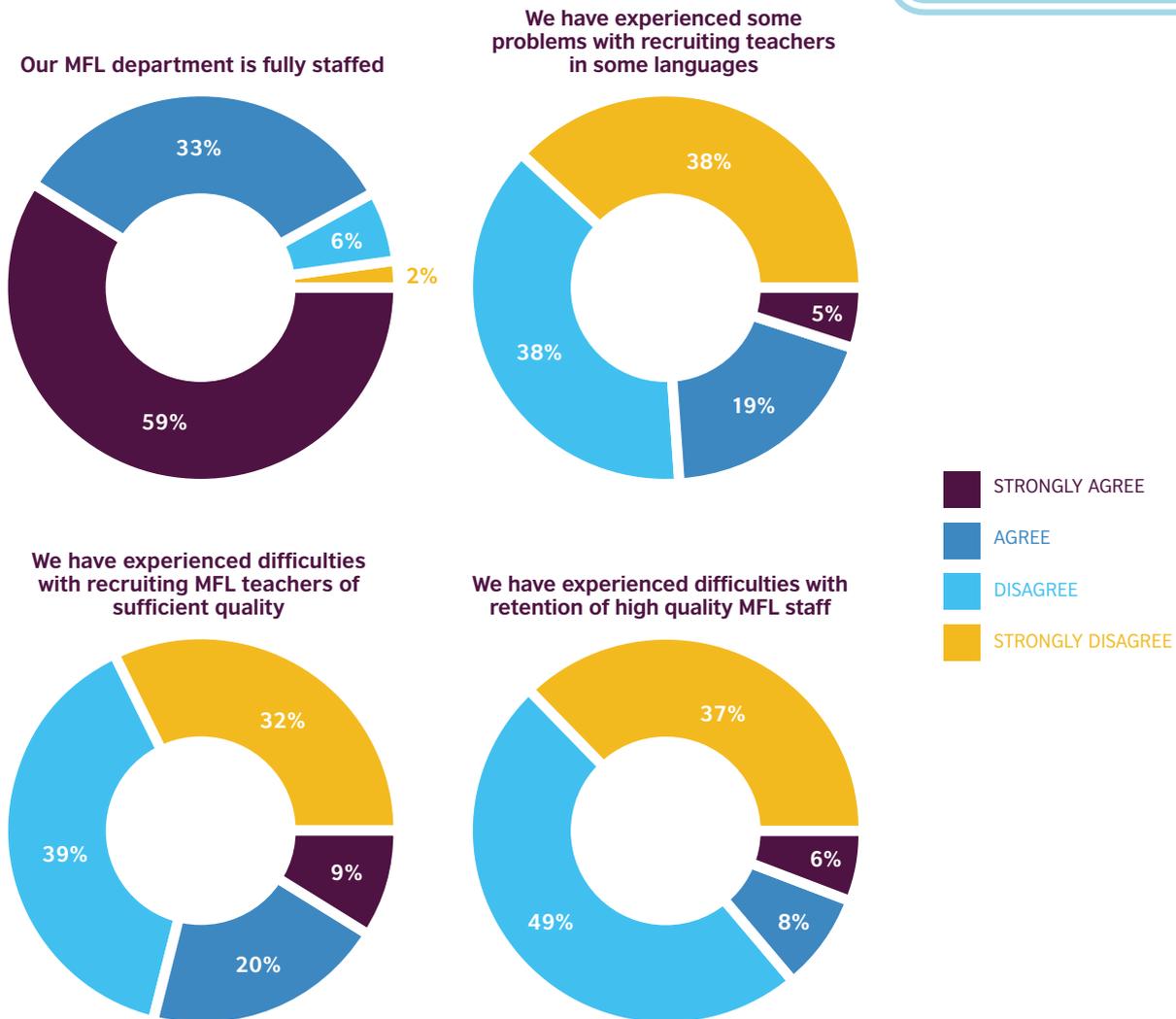
## Teaching staff

### How easy is it for schools to recruit and retain high quality teachers of MFL?

Around 8% of schools do not have a full complement of staff for MFL – a proportion roughly similar to 2017, although the question was previously phrased in a different way. Around a quarter of schools have experienced problems recruiting MFL teachers and around 14% say they have had difficulties retaining high quality staff.

Around a quarter of schools have experienced problems recruiting MFL teachers and around 14% say they have had difficulties retaining high quality staff.

**FIGURE 19: HOW EASY IS IT FOR SCHOOLS TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS OF MFL?**



In view of the shrinkage of numbers for MFL at GCSE and post-16, it is not surprising that, although some schools find it difficult to recruit MFL teachers, schools in Wales are experiencing less difficulties than those in England, where take up for languages is higher and expected to increase.<sup>12</sup>

There were no significant correlations with any school characteristics in terms of the schools most likely to be suffering from recruitment difficulties. The reported difficulties seem to affect all types of schools relatively equally.

<sup>12</sup>Teresa Tinsley and Neela Dolezal, *Language Trends 2018. Language teaching in primary and secondary schools in England*, British Council, 2018, p. 8: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research/language-trends-2018>

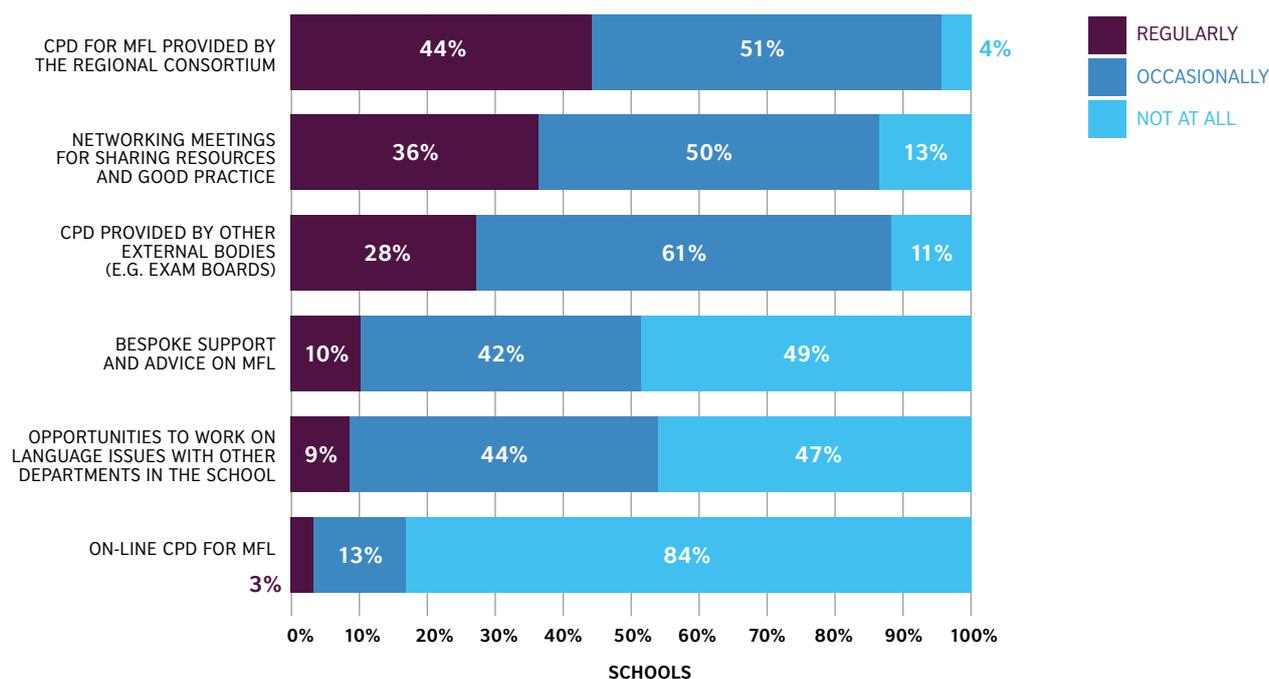
## To what extent are teachers participating in CPD for MFL?

The vast majority of responding schools (95%) participate in CPD for MFL provided by their Regional Consortium, and 44% report that they do so regularly. Again, the high proportion may reflect bias in those who responded to the survey. Participation in CPD provided by other bodies such as exam boards is also very high (89%), although this is more likely to be occasional rather than regular. Slightly more than half of schools (53%) have opportunities to work on language issues with other departments in the schools, albeit mainly only occasionally. A large proportion also take part in networking meetings with other schools (86%) and a similar proportion (87%) take part in non-subject-specific CPD organised by the school (not shown). Participation in online CPD for MFL is very low, as might be expected given the high reported level of participation in face-to-face activities.

Although the 2017 survey explored participation in CPD in a different way, so responses are not directly comparable, it appears that schools are more engaged in CPD activities than previously, as might be expected as the Regional Consortia develop their offer.

Slightly more than half of schools (53%) have opportunities to work on language issues with other departments in the schools, albeit mainly only occasionally.

FIGURE 20: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE TEACHERS PARTICIPATING IN CPD FOR MFL?



### Key points

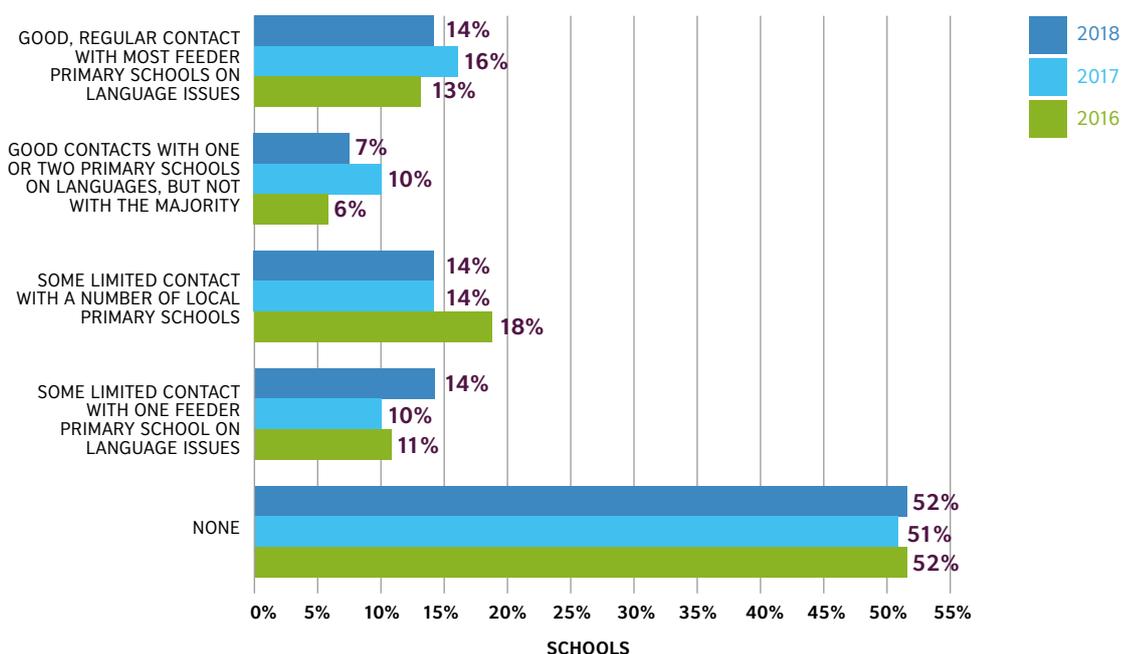
- The Regional Consortia are reaching a large proportion of schools with their CPD offer.
- Respondents report a relatively high level of participation in various forms of face-to-face CPD for MFL.

## Contacts with primary schools

### To what extent do secondary schools have contacts with local primary schools over the learning of new languages?

Around half (48%) of secondary schools report some contact with at least one local primary school over the learning of new languages. This proportion has not changed over the last three years the same question has been asked. However, only around one in five (21%) describe these contacts as 'good' or 'regular', while 28% say these contacts are 'limited'.

**FIGURE 21: TO WHAT EXTENT DO SECONDARY SCHOOLS HAVE CONTACTS WITH LOCAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS OVER THE LEARNING OF NEW LANGUAGES?**



### What sort of preparation for MFL learning in secondary do primary schools provide?

Just under two thirds of secondary schools consider that their main feeder primary school provides some preparation for the learning of MFL in secondary school. Aggregating responses, one third of schools (31%) report that their main feeder primary school offers some level of exposure to the modern foreign language and 20 per cent report preparation through Welsh or English. More than one third of secondary schools (36%) consider that their main feeder primary school provides no preparation at all for learning MFL.

Just under two thirds of secondary schools consider that their main feeder primary school provides some preparation for the learning of MFL in secondary school.

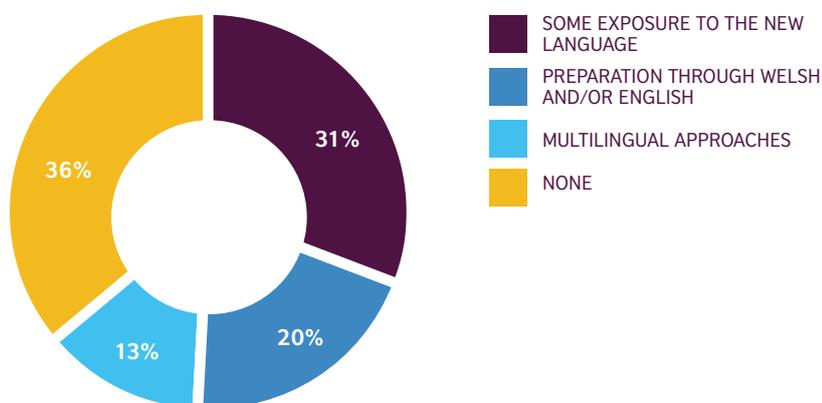


**Types of preparation for MFL provided by feeder primary schools** **Aggregate<sup>13</sup>**

Some exposure to the new language	By providing an introduction to the culture and sounds of the language through songs etc.	16%	31%
	Through a transition module delivered in conjunction with ourselves	15%	
	Some systematic teaching of a new language in the last years of primary	12%	
	By teaching a MFL from the beginning of primary school	4%	
Preparation through Welsh	By teaching language learning skills through Welsh/English	18%	20%
	By formal teaching of language structures in Welsh or English	11%	
Multilingual approaches	Through exposure to a range of languages and cultures	13%	
None	None of the above	36%	

These findings, shown graphically below, highlight some of the challenges of implementing the new curriculum area of Languages, Literacy and Communication and of achieving a consistent approach across Wales.

**FIGURE 22: TYPES OF PREPARATION FOR MFL LEARNING PROVIDED BY PRIMARY FEEDER SCHOOLS**



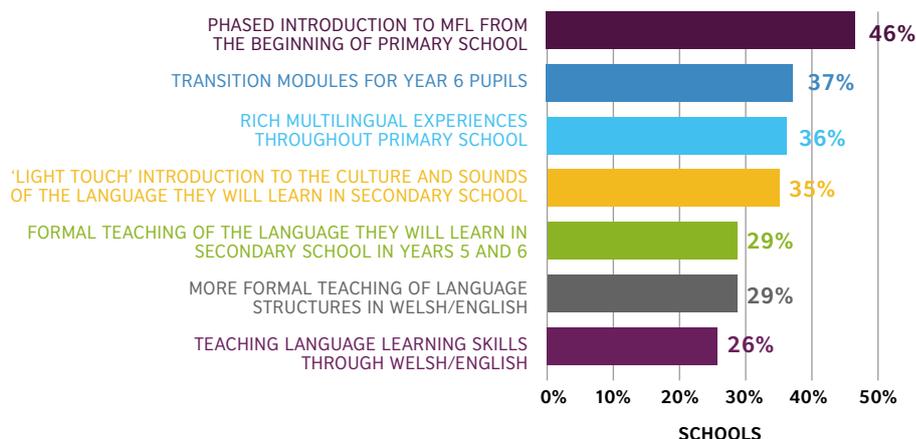
**How could this be best developed?**

When asked what developments would best prepare pupils for learning MFL in secondary school, respondents favoured measures which would focus specifically on MFL rather than the use of Welsh and English. Nearly half (46%) favoured the phased introduction of MFL from the beginning of primary schools and there was also support for the idea of transition modules and exposure to language through ‘light touch’ introductions and diverse multilingual experiences.

Nearly half (46%) favoured the phased introduction of MFL from the beginning of primary schools and there was also support for the idea of transition modules and exposure to language through ‘light touch’ introductions and diverse multilingual experiences.

<sup>13</sup>Discounting schools where more than one of these activities is provided.

**FIGURE 23: OPTIONS RESPONDENTS THINK COULD BE DEVELOPED FURTHER IN ORDER TO PROVIDE A BETTER PREPARATION FOR PUPILS FOR SECONDARY MFL LEARNING (MULTIPLE RESPONSES PERMITTED)**



Of the 12 comments with 'other' suggestions for this question, 6 referred to the importance of using qualified MFL teachers at primary schools. Some examples of these comments are as follows:

*"Transition modules made more systematic i.e. by funding secondary schools to release their MFL teachers to teach primary school pupils".*  
(This respondent commented that she/he teaches 3 lessons a fortnight to Year 6 through the good offices of the Head who allows this as part of her/his normal timetable.)

*"Primary teachers are not usually MFL specialists so it can be a hindrance if pronunciation is taught incorrectly etc. What is needed is a MFL teacher who goes into all the primaries once a week to provide lessons."*

*"If MFL are introduced in primary this has to be done by a specialist."*

### Key points

- Around half (48%) of secondary schools have some form of contact with their main feeder primary school in relation to MFL, although this tends to be limited in nature.
- Around one third consider that their main feeder primary school currently provides no preparation for learning MFL.
- Respondents favour the development of approaches at Key Stage 2 which focus specifically on MFL rather than on generic language-learning skills through English and/or Welsh.

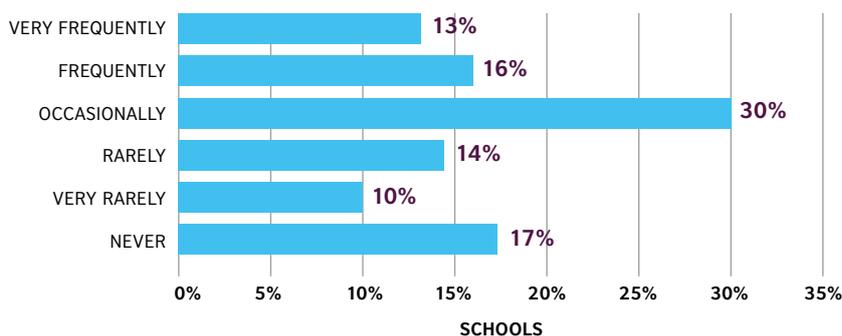
*"Primary teachers are not usually MFL specialists so it can be a hindrance if pronunciation is taught incorrectly etc. What is needed is a MFL teacher who goes into all the primaries once a week to provide lessons."*

## MFL and the teaching of Welsh

### To what extent do MFL departments work with colleagues teaching English and Welsh?

Between a quarter and a third (29%) of MFL departments work 'frequently' or 'very frequently' with colleagues teaching English and Welsh, a similar proportion (27%) do so 'very rarely' or never, and another 14% report doing so 'rarely'.

**FIGURE 24: FREQUENCY OF JOINT WORKING BETWEEN MFL DEPARTMENTS AND TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AND/OR WELSH**



Thirty-nine schools provided further details about how the MFL, Welsh and English departments collaborate with each other. The most popular form of collaboration (22 responses) was the sharing of good practice and resources, which includes examples of schools who collaborate on schemes of work (SOW) and pedagogical approaches:

*“We have tried to look at SoW to see how we can support/complement each other. I have developed Middle School (Y5 - Y8) “Fun with languages” booklets to support multilingual literacy.”*

*“As a Languages Faculty we work closely with the Welsh Department on all teaching, learning and assessment matters.”*

Twelve respondents reported that, in their school, MFL and Welsh operate jointly as one faculty. A further 4 schools mentioned that the MFL and Welsh departments are separate, but regularly hold joint departmental meetings (English Departments were not mentioned specifically within these comments). Some examples of how this works in practice were reported as follows:

*“Joint departmental meetings discussing issues such as incorporating LNF (Literacy and Numeracy Framework) and DCF (Digital Competence Framework) into our Schemes of Work at KS3.”*

*“All our meetings are run jointly as most members of the MFL department also teach Welsh as a second language. We have shared aims and work together on planning.”*

Respondents gave the following examples of benefits arising from collaboration between MFL, Welsh and English departments:

*“All language classrooms have a “GOLDMINE” display of key terms and words for pupils to include in writing and oracy exercises. This is now embedded across all language departments and has shown an improvement in levels of writing in French. I cannot say for Welsh or English.”*

*“We dovetail SOWs to avoid pupils studying the same topics concurrently.”*

*“Some pupils are able to see the links between English/Spanish/Welsh and can look for cognates”*

*“All language classrooms have a “GOLDMINE” display of key terms and words for pupils to include in writing and oracy exercises. This is now embedded across all language departments and has shown an improvement in levels of writing in French. I cannot say for Welsh or English.”*

*“A common strategy (mainly grammatical, but also including teaching strategies) between MFL and Welsh has had a non-negligible impact. The grammatical aspects that we MFL staff teach usually benefit pupils with their English, rather than the other way around. Despite recent developments, MFL staff still teach grammar far more, far more frequently, far more deeply than English teachers.”*

Schools with an 11-16 age range (although a much smaller sample) were statistically significantly more likely to report collaboration between their MFL department and colleagues teaching Welsh and/or English, in contrast to schools with an 11-19 age range. For example, only 9% of 11-16 schools reported that they ‘rarely’, ‘very rarely’ or ‘never’ collaborated, however this percentage rises to 52% in 11-19 schools. The reasons for this relationship are unclear, however it may be that the existence of a Sixth Form puts more pressure on individual departments to focus on their own subjects, or may simply reduce the amount of time available for collaboration.

### **What barriers are there for MFL teachers to greater collaboration in the area of Languages, Literacy and Communication?**

The greatest barrier respondents see to collaboration in developing the area of Languages, Literacy and Communication is pressure of time: ‘it is extremely difficult to get time off timetable to work together’, ‘have seen ideas but would mean A LOT of prep and teachers are too busy’, ‘I am the only French teacher at the school and work at 0.6 contract so there hasn’t really been an initiative or incentive to work with others’. Some respondents comment that MFL is a ‘poor relative’ compared to Welsh and English and that, although it would be beneficial for us to work more closely, ‘the fact that they are compulsory subjects when we are only optional would not lead to an improved uptake’.

Teachers are conscious that there are different priorities in different subject areas, e.g.:

*“we have developed excellent triple literacy materials and procedures – these are only used by MFL – other depts have negative attitude to grammar”.*

However, some schools indicate that there may be more scope for collaboration in future:

*“French is going to move into a faculty of English, Literacy and French next September so hopefully there will be more collaboration”*

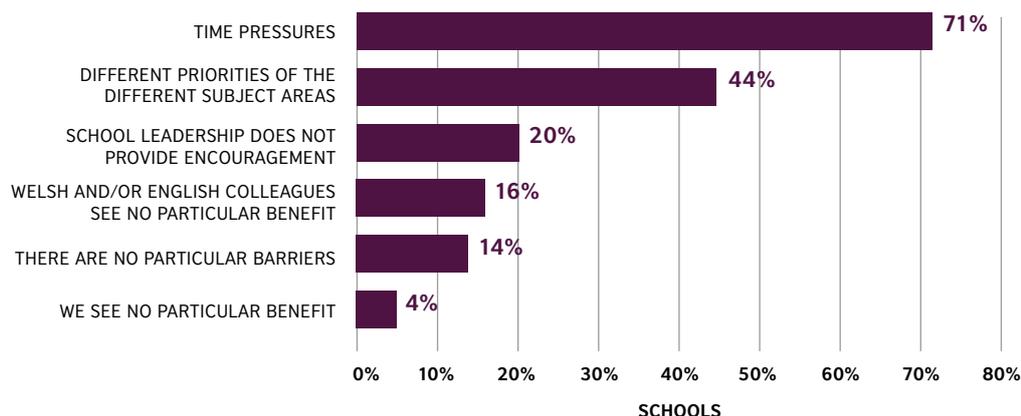
*“Our school is going over to the Donaldson Curriculum so there might be more scope then”*

*“We are rolling out a collaborative project for this summer term, but this is the first time we have worked together”.*

Schools with an 11-16 age range (although a much smaller sample) were statistically significantly more likely to report collaboration between their MFL department and colleagues teaching Welsh and/or English, in contrast to schools with an 11-19 age range.

“We have developed excellent triple literacy materials and procedures – these are only used by MFL – other depts have negative attitude to grammar.”

**FIGURE 25: BARRIERS TO JOINT WORKING BETWEEN MFL DEPARTMENTS AND TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AND/OR WELSH**



**Key points**

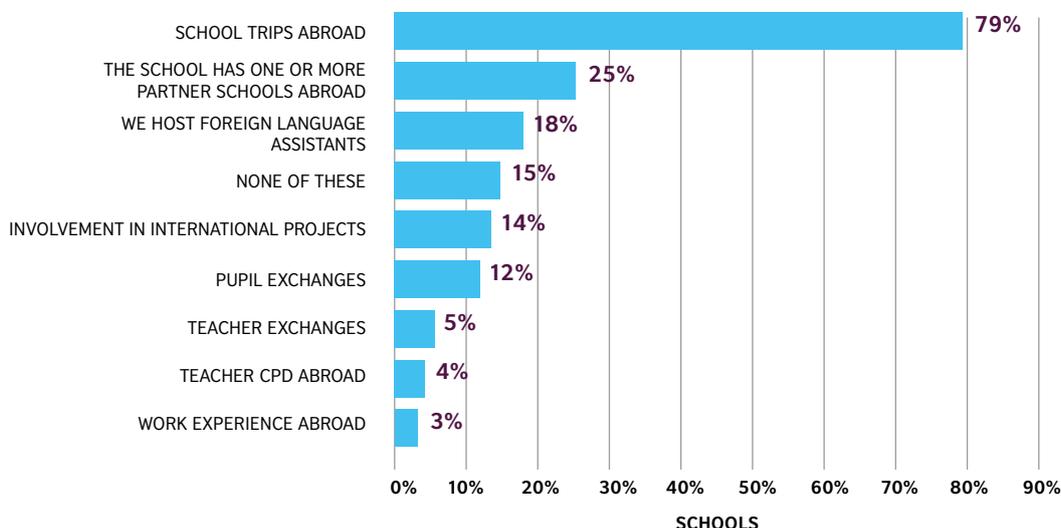
- There is a great variety of practice as regards the degree and types of collaboration among colleagues responsible for the new curriculum area of Languages, Literacy and Communication, with some good examples of close working.
- There are moves towards greater collaboration in some schools, in preparation for the new curriculum for Wales.
- Pressure of time is the greatest barrier to further collaboration.

Around four out of five schools (79%) run some sort of school trip abroad: this is by far and away the most common form of international experience offered, although teachers were not asked to say how many pupils are able to participate.

**International engagement**

Around four out of five schools (79%) run some sort of school trip abroad: this is by far and away the most common form of international experience offered, although teachers were not asked to say how many pupils are able to participate. A quarter of Welsh schools (25%) have a partner school abroad, 12% organise pupil exchanges, and a very small number, just 3%, offer opportunities for pupils to take part in work experience overseas. There has not been any significant change in these proportions since the 2017 survey.

**FIGURE 26: INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY SCHOOLS, 2018**



Teachers comment that where departments are very small, it is difficult to find time to organise and maintain international links:

*“I am currently battling with preparing a brand new GCSE, AS and A level French course on my own, as are many other teachers of French and heads of department.”*

For others, funding is a barrier:

*“We ran an exchange with work experience in Germany for almost 20 years, but had to abandon this in 2011 when the school could no longer afford the staff cover costs.”*

However, there is evidence of use of EU Erasmus funding to enable international projects and teacher CPD:

*“Strong Erasmus project, ePal project with year 9 and 11.”*

*“We have links with schools in Poland and Spain through Erasmus and have done projects with them.”*

*“I accessed Erasmus+ funding to study Spanish in Madrid last summer, to improve my language skills.”*

Schools with more pupils recorded as eligible for Free School Meals are less likely to provide international engagement in relation to MFL, particularly school trips and work experience abroad. Of the 15% of schools that say they do not provide any of the opportunities listed, the average FSM percentage is 18%. For schools that do have some international experience on offer, the average FSM percentage is 15%. This difference, although small, is statistically significant.

### Key points

- Pupils attending schools with higher levels of economic disadvantage are less likely to be offered opportunities to take part in school trips abroad.
- Relatively few schools organise pupil exchanges abroad and very few offer work experience in a foreign country.

### Impact of Brexit

Teachers report that the most significant impact of the Brexit process so far has been on attitudes towards MFL in parents and pupils. Around a third of schools (32%) report that it is having a negative impact on parental attitudes towards MFL and 29% say it is negatively affecting pupil attitudes. In all, 37% of schools report an increase in negative attitudes towards MFL in schools since Brexit, either from pupils or parents.<sup>14</sup>

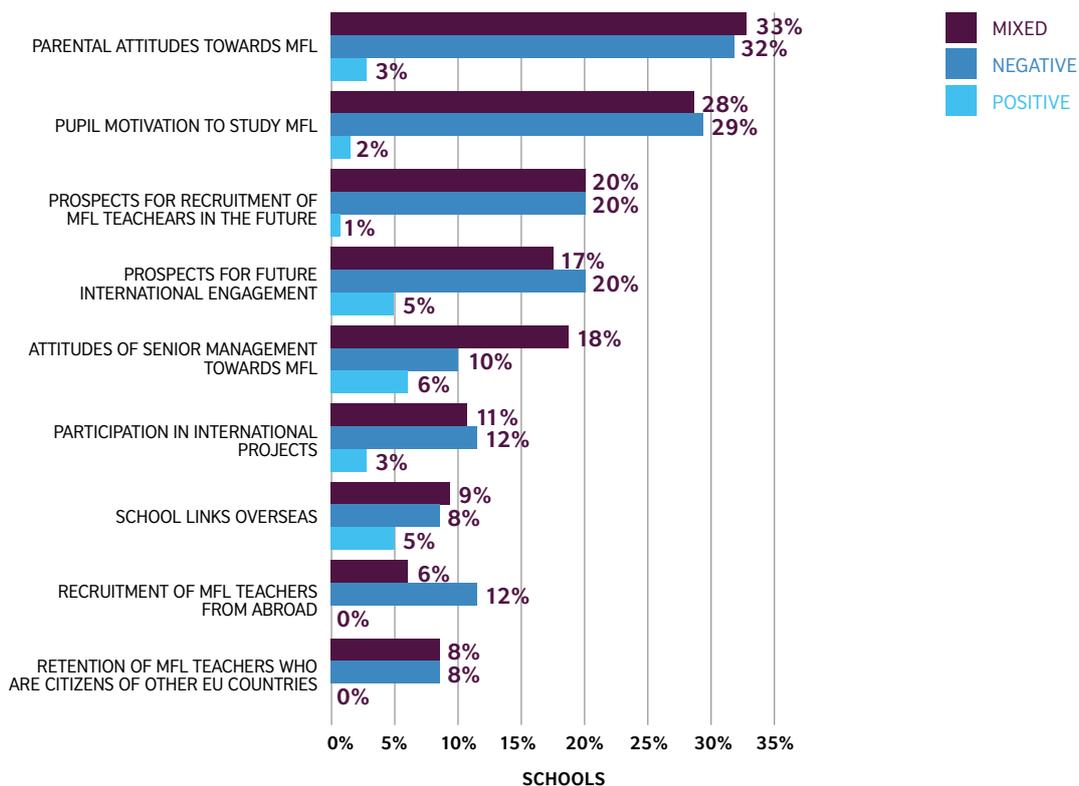
Other areas of concern in relation to Brexit are the prospects for the recruitment and retention of MFL teachers and future international engagement and some schools already report negative impacts in these areas.

Teachers comment that where departments are very small, it is difficult to find time to organise and maintain international links

Teachers report that the most significant impact of the Brexit process so far has been on attitudes towards MFL in parents and pupils

<sup>14</sup>This is slightly higher than the 34% reported in response to the same question in Language Trends England 2018.

**FIGURE 27: IMPACT OF THE UK'S DECISION TO LEAVE THE EUROPEAN UNION ON MFL TEACHING IN SCHOOLS**



Schools that report that the decision to leave the European Union is having a negative impact, either on pupil motivation or parental attitudes towards MFL, are more likely to be in urban areas, however, this effect is not statistically significant. There are statistically significant differences between the four main regions, with the following percentages of schools in each consortia reporting negative attitudes from students and/or parents:

<b>South East Wales</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>South West and Mid Wales</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>North Wales</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Central South Wales</b>	<b>23%</b>

**Key points**

- More than one third of schools (37%) report that the Brexit process is having a negative effect on attitudes towards the study of MFL.
- This effect is most significant among schools in South East Wales.

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## Issues of concern

At the end of our survey we provide an opportunity for respondents to comment on any aspect of MFL teaching in Welsh secondary schools which they would like to say something further 'about languages in your school or nationally' which had not been covered in our questions. Fifty-two people responded to this question. From these comments, the main themes, in order of importance, were as follows:

1. The perceived difficulty of MFL examinations, and the consequences of this for uptake of language and equity of access (17 comments):

*"The expectations of the GCSE put many average ability students off taking it."*

*"I worry that studying a language to AS/A-level is an option only for the most able pupils. The less able pupils have no access to the subject. The level of the translation is scary even for the teachers who have a degree in a language. There is no point in spending money promoting the subject if the content of the course is 'accessible' to the best only."*

2. Reductions in teaching hours or other limitations in provision, such as the availability of courses (13 comments):

*"Lack of sufficient teaching time at KS3 is a real issue. With only three hours per fortnight it is hard to get pupils to the standards needed to do well in the new GCSE MFL Specification. The curriculum is overloaded at KS3 with more time than ever before for Maths, English, Numeracy and Literacy lessons. I fear this will [not] be resolved any time soon."*

*"We introduce Spanish in Year 9 but have to teach it after school and in lunchtime in order to enable pupils to access GCSE in KS4."*

*"They have just scrapped A Level German and there is no longer an opportunity to study more than one MFL in the school."*

3. The low status of MFL amongst pupils and/or the local community, leading to the subject not being valued (12 comments):

*"The attitude, in general, of pupils towards MFL is very negative. Languages are seen as difficult by most and pointless by many."*

*"Welsh is prioritised to an extent that it makes it difficult to motivate students who have no interest in MFL at home."*

Linked to these themes, although mentioned less frequently, were:

- Senior management's focus on core subjects to the detriment of MFL:

*"My Headteacher openly admitted to the department that he is 'not a great believer in MFL!'"*

*"SLT are focussed on core subjects so we are losing teaching time in KS3 to core subjects"*

*"Lack of sufficient teaching time at KS3 is a real issue. With only three hours per fortnight it is hard to get pupils to the standards needed to do well in the new GCSE MFL Specification. The curriculum is overloaded at KS3 with more time than ever before for Maths, English, Numeracy and Literacy lessons. I fear this will [not] be resolved any time soon."*

- The impact of compulsory Welsh at Key Stage 4 on MFL:

*“While the majority would like to take MFL at GCSE, they are put off taking it by the impact of a compulsory full course GCSE. The reintroduction (albeit compulsory) of short course Welsh GCSE would have a favourable impact on MFL uptake. Wales is becoming an increasingly insular and isolated country linguistically.”*

There is a perception that the GCSE specification for Welsh is easier than that for MFL:

*“It’s incredibly difficult to promote MFL for a variety of reasons. The fact that Welsh is compulsory and with a much easier exam specification than MFL is a factor [...] Welsh is not a global language and as much as we understand the importance of teaching and supporting the culture of the nation, we also need to consider the competition out there for our pupils.”*

- A mismatch between the positive work of *Global Futures* and recent reforms to exams and the curriculum which are seen to undermine its aims:

*“I feel that until the curriculum requirements back up the aim of the Global Futures Strategy, it will remain lip service with regards to uptake despite the fantastic efforts of the regional consortium.”*

*“As full of good will as Global Futures is, it does nothing concrete to address the situation, and as a result will have next to no impact on the overall issue. The ridiculously hard new GCSE and A Level coming out right in the middle of the Global Futures scheme is further proof that the core of the issue has not been understood.”*

*“Despite Global Futures many schools are dropping MFL as a KS4 and KS5 subject due to low numbers. Welsh being made compulsory has had a negative impact on uptake”.*

### Key points

- The introduction of new GCSE and A level courses has reinforced the perception that MFL is a difficult subject only suitable for the most able.
- Many MFL teachers feel that they are working at the margins of the curriculum and efforts to promote the subject are unsupported by senior management.
- *Global Futures* is seen by some as undermined by more fundamental policy changes in education.

*“Despite Global Futures many schools are dropping MFL as a KS4 and KS5 subject due to low numbers. Welsh being made compulsory has had a negative impact on uptake.”*



# Chapter 5

## Conclusions



## Impact of *Global Futures*

The regional consortia are continuing to be successful in engaging a large proportion of schools in their areas, and their work is much appreciated. It is clear that they are reaching the vast majority of MFL departments in Wales and the high levels of engagement in CPD are a tribute to their efforts. Many schools are now engaged in multiple activities to raise the profile and status of MFL and some have undoubtedly been successful in boosting numbers taking a GCSE.

The regional consortia are continuing to be successful in engaging a large proportion of schools in their areas, and their work is much appreciated.

## Continuing declines at GCSE and A level

However, the national picture for MFL across Wales as a whole is still worsening. The introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate with the consequent reduction in slots for free option choices, and new examination specifications which teachers say are tougher for pupils, have outweighed the many efforts to encourage pupils to take a modern language.

The impact of financial stringencies, especially at post-16 and, in some schools, an increase in negative attitudes towards language learning in the aftermath of the Brexit vote, are additional factors in the continuing decline. In a context where schools are increasingly being treated as autonomous, senior school leaders have the power to overcome some of these barriers, through timetabling, time-allocation, design of options columns – even, perhaps, compulsion for some pupils – and by establishing an internationalist and language-friendly school ethos. However, only 17% of respondents to this survey say that their school management team currently provides positive messages about MFL.

## The potential of the new curriculum

The new curriculum holds much potential for re-invigorating and re-conceptualising languages education in Wales, and there are signs that some schools are already starting to create structures which will help integrate Welsh, English and ‘international languages’. In some schools, there is already close collaboration and an understanding of where some of the overlaps and synergies lie (e.g., consistent teaching and use of grammar terminology). However, there is no sense of urgency or movement towards a positive vision of what the new curriculum could offer, but rather a sense that MFL teachers will still be the ‘poor relations’. Although time is seen as the key barrier to more collaborative working, effective leadership will be necessary too, to make sure any time available is well-spent. The research provides some indication that Welsh medium schools are more likely to have low take up for MFL and this is something which should be explored further and in depth.

The new curriculum holds much potential for re-invigorating and re-conceptualising languages education in Wales, and there are signs that some schools are already starting to create structures which will help integrate Welsh, English and ‘international languages’.

## Bringing new languages into the primary school

It is perhaps to be expected that the efforts of the regional consortia in the area of primary languages have so far been those that have been the least well-attended and least appreciated by secondary schools. MFL teachers in secondary schools are working under extreme pressure, often in tiny departments, and there is no capacity to reach down into primary schools. It is also perhaps to be expected that they see interventions which focus specifically on MFL (rather than generic language skills in Welsh or English), as the best way of preparing pupils for language learning in secondary school. However, with only 14% of secondary schools saying they have good, regular contacts with their main feeder primary school on MFL matters, and more than one third of primary schools not providing any exposure to MFL at all, the findings are a stark reminder of how much development work will be needed – with the inevitable time and resource implications – if effective innovations are to be introduced in the primary phase.

## The urgency of the situation

Despite the measures being taken, more schools are still reporting declines than increases and the ongoing collapse of MFL at GCSE and post-16 is visible from one year to the next. The unintended consequences of other educational reforms, and a conjunction of factors in the external context has created a tipping point which threatens to wipe out some languages, or languages in some phases, within a very short space of time. The new curriculum and measures to encourage an earlier start to the learning of a new language will take a decade or more to bear fruit. If effectively implemented, such measures could indeed improve the situation for MFL in secondary schools, but the overall conclusion of this report is that the current rate of decline requires more urgent intervention beyond the current scope of *Global Futures*.

The new curriculum and measures to encourage an earlier start to the learning of a new language will take a decade or more to bear fruit.

## Appendix – Response profile

### Secondary State Schools (WALES)

#### RESPONSE RATE

	Base	Response	Response Rate
Secondary schools in Wales	208	135	64.9%

#### RESPONSE PROFILE

Age Range	Base raw	Base %	Response raw	Response %
Middle Schools (ages 3 - 16)	5	2.4%	5	3.7%
Middle Schools (ages 3 - 19)	6	2.9%	3	2.2%
Middle Schools (ages 4 - 19)	1	0.5%	0	0.0%
Secondary (ages 11 - 16)	56	26.9%	32	23.7%
Secondary (ages 11 - 19)	140	67.3%	95	70.4%

Education consortia	Base raw	Base %	Response raw	Response %
North Wales	54	26.9%	32	23.7%
South West and Mid Wales	62	29.8%	35	25.9%
Central South Wales	56	26.9%	43	31.9%
South East Wales	36	17.3%	25	18.5%

School Type	Base raw	Base %	Response raw	Response %
Community School	178	85.6%	116	85.9%
Voluntary Aided School	19	9.1%	13	9.6%
Voluntary Controlled School	2	1.0%	0	0.0%
Foundation School	9	4.3%	6	4.4%

Language	Base raw	Base %	Response raw	Response %
Welsh Medium - Welsh	21	10.1%	20	14.8%
Welsh Medium - Bilingual (Type A)	18	8.7%	11	8.1%
Welsh Medium - Bilingual (Type B)	12	5.8%	6	4.4%
Welsh Medium - Bilingual (Type C)	4	1.9%	3	2.2%
English Medium - English Medium	145	69.7%	87	64.4%
English Medium - English with significant Welsh	8	3.8%	8	5.9%

Free School Meal Eligibility Quintile	Base raw	Base %	Response raw	Response %
High	41	19.7%	23	17.0%
Middle-High	42	20.2%	32	23.7%
Middle	41	19.7%	25	18.5%
Middle-Low	41	19.7%	24	17.8%
Low	42	20.2%	31	23.0%
No data	1	0.5%	0	0.0%



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