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## About the authors

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### Kathryn Board OBE

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



### Teresa Tinsley

Teresa Tinsley established and developed the Language Trends series of surveys which have charted the health of languages in various sectors of education since 2002. As well as producing and analysing information on the situation of languages in English secondary schools, the surveys have also covered provision for community languages across the UK, and language learning in Further and Adult Education.

Formerly Director of Communications at CILT, the National Centre for Languages, Teresa founded Alcantara Communications in 2011 and since then has undertaken policy-focused research on languages for the British Academy and the British Council, as well as CfBT Education Trust. Her work for CfBT includes an international review of primary languages, *Lessons from abroad*, as well as the Language Trends reports from 2011 to 2014.

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## Executive summary

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This first national survey of foreign language teaching in Welsh schools comes at a time of considerable change for education in Wales. Recent reforms such as the introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate and 14–19 Learning Pathways now look set to be incorporated within the new, distinctively Welsh, curriculum and assessment framework proposed by Professor Donaldson. As a bilingual nation, Wales has an advantage in the learning of other languages, since research shows that having learned one additional language, students find other languages are easier to acquire.<sup>1</sup> However, data published by the British Academy<sup>2</sup> show that Wales performs least well of the four UK nations when it comes to learning other languages.

As Wales works to reform its curriculum and assessment arrangements, this report reviews the health of foreign language teaching in Wales and explores the extent to which current arrangements are equipping pupils with the language, intercultural and communication skills to participate fully in a globalised world, given that currently only 22 per cent of pupils take a GCSE in a language other than English or Welsh. This report also seeks to provide evidence of the impact of previous policy initiatives on foreign language teaching in Welsh secondary schools.

Skilled users of other languages who can communicate confidently and who are comfortable in different cultural settings will do much to ensure that Wales achieves its aspirations for the country's competitiveness and prosperity in a complex, globalised 21st century. In a context in which there is increasing emphasis on improving pupils' literacy in Welsh and English, the report explores the relationship between Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)<sup>3</sup> and Welsh/English tuition and the extent to which these learning experiences combine – or have the capacity to combine – to help children and young people in Wales become confident speakers and learners of a range of other languages.

### Key findings

**Modern Foreign Languages are being increasingly marginalised as a result of a number of changes being made by schools in response to challenges they face. These include financial and timetabling pressures as well as new assessment systems and reporting requirements.**

**The considerable benefits of bilingualism which Wales has at its disposal are not being fully exploited in schools to facilitate the learning of a third or fourth language.**

**The contribution which foreign language learning can make to enhancing pupils' literacy is not valued and MFL is not seen by many schools as central to achieving the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) goals.**

**The low levels of appreciation of the value of languages by parents and pupils in particular is having an adverse effect on pupils seeing MFL as a serious subject for study. Such views are not being countered by the messages from policy makers and influencers.**

<sup>1</sup> Cenoz, J. and Valencia, J. (1994) *Additive trilingualism: evidence from the Basque country*. Abu-Rabia, S. and Sanitsky, E. (2010) 'The advantages of bilinguals over monolinguals in learning a third language', *Bilingual research journal*. Vol 33.2, pp.173–199. See also discussion in Cummins, J. (2000) *Language, power and pedagogy: bilingual children in the crossfire*.

<sup>2</sup> British Academy (2013) *Languages: the state of the nation*.

<sup>3</sup> **Note on terminology**

Throughout this report the term 'Modern Foreign Languages' and its abbreviation 'MFL' have been used to denote the subject studied by pupils in Welsh secondary schools. Languages other than Welsh or English are referred to as 'foreign languages' to avoid any confusion with the study of Welsh or English. The generic term 'languages' is used to refer to the system of written or spoken communication used by a particular country or community.

### Key Stage 3

Almost one third of schools (29 per cent) disapply pupils or groups of pupils from studying a foreign language at Key Stage 3. This is a result of an increasing emphasis on English and mathematics.

Despite Estyn guidelines in relation to curriculum time for MFL, as many as 43 per cent of schools have reduced the lesson time allocated for MFL over the past three years.

While 50 per cent of schools report that some pupils coming to them from Key Stage 2 have had exposure to a foreign language other than Welsh or English, their knowledge is rarely more than a few words or phrases. Pupils with more than this are most likely to come from England or from abroad.

A range of factors are limiting the extent and effectiveness of continuing professional development for MFL teachers in Wales.

### Key Stage 4

In the vast majority of schools (93 per cent) MFL is optional at Key Stage 4 for all pupils.

Nearly half of responding schools (47 per cent) report declining numbers for MFL in Key Stage 4, and in one in five schools this decline is by 10 per cent or more of pupils. Some schools, however, are working hard to raise the profile of the subject and have managed to increase numbers.

The reasons for the decrease in the study of foreign languages at Key Stage 4 are seen as the perceived difficulty of language examinations in relation to those in other subjects and the number of subjects on offer in relation to the space available in the curriculum to accommodate free choices. Teachers also see the Welsh Baccalaureate as very likely to adversely affect the future take-up of Modern Foreign Languages due to the way in which study options are grouped.

The number of schools offering vocational alternatives to GCSE language accreditation remains small: some 13 per cent of schools offer National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in business languages and seven per cent offer language modules within the Welsh Baccalaureate as alternatives to GCSE at Key Stage 4.

### Post-16

As many as 64 per cent of schools have seen a decrease in the numbers of students opting to take an A level in a foreign language over the past three years. Three quarters of respondents see low take-up of MFL at post-16 as a challenging issue, even more than those who are concerned about take-up for MFL at Key Stage 4.

Competition and prioritisation of other subjects and the low take-up of MFL generally are seen as pressing concerns by a substantial majority of schools. As many as 61 per cent of teachers say that MFL is not enough of a priority for the senior managers in their schools.

### Languages taught

French is overwhelmingly the main foreign language taught in Wales; fewer than half of schools offer Spanish and only around one quarter offer German. Nearly half (49 per cent) offer some opportunities to learn a second foreign language, with this being associated with schools working in more privileged circumstances.

### Bilingualism and its contribution to literacy

As many as 89 per cent of MFL teachers believe that learning both English and Welsh in primary school benefits pupils when it comes to learning a foreign language in secondary school, and nearly two thirds (60 per cent) think it is of great benefit. However, many teachers believe that the benefit of bilingualism can only be achieved if pupils have had a high quality of Welsh teaching in primary schools – many comment that this has not been the case with the result that pupils struggle with learning foreign languages.

Similarly, the vast majority of teachers (83 per cent) responding to this survey report that MFL is considered to make at least some contribution to literacy in their school; however, it is only considered to make an important contribution in one third of schools (35 per cent). In 16 per cent of schools MFL is not thought to make much contribution and in one school the respondent reports that it is not considered to make any contribution at all. The comments made by teachers participating in this survey suggest that there is considerable confusion in schools about the role Modern Foreign Languages have to play in supporting the development of literacy and the way in which they can contribute to the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF).

Although there are indications that the contribution of Welsh and English to the learning of foreign languages tends to be more highly valued in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools than in English-medium schools, awareness of the corresponding value of foreign languages in relation to general literacy is less pronounced.

### Collaboration between teachers of different languages

Fewer than half (46 per cent) of schools provide regular opportunities for teachers of MFL, Welsh and English to share practice with one another. Some 46 per cent do so infrequently and nine per cent do not do so at all. In some English-medium schools, there is evidence of successful collaboration between teachers of Welsh and those teaching Modern Foreign Languages.

## Conclusions

**Modern Foreign Languages are being increasingly marginalised as a result of a number of changes being made by schools in response to challenges they face. These include financial and timetabling pressures as well as new assessment systems and reporting requirements.**

The overall picture for MFL in Welsh schools is one of attrition, with little prospect of improvement or of the decline being stemmed. There is no sense of dynamism or confidence about the direction of the subject and what the future holds.

The reduction in lesson time for MFL at Key Stage 3, the place of MFL as an optional subject within a vast choice of other options and the lack of opportunities in Key Stage 4 for all pupils who wish to study a language, all add to the impression that the subject is marginal within the Welsh education system. Unlike in England and Scotland, there is no policy for pupils to start learning a foreign

language before age 11, with the implication that Wales is very likely to fall even further behind in future, with serious implications for the comparability of Welsh and English GCSEs in foreign language subjects.

In Key Stage 3, the only education phase at which the study of MFL in Wales is compulsory, many pupils are receiving only a minimal or fragmented experience of language learning. When pupils choose their GCSE subjects, foreign languages fare badly as they are seen as more difficult than many other subjects, unpredictable in terms of delivering the top grades needed for continuing to A levels and not as important for future careers as STEM subjects.

The situation at post-16 is of even greater concern. The very low numbers of students opting for MFL mean that, in many cases, courses are becoming financially unviable. Other issues contributing to the decline in numbers at A level are the greater perceived difficulty of A level examinations in MFL compared to those for other subjects and students' need to be more certain of achieving the highest grades at A level in order to take up university places.

**The considerable benefits of bilingualism which Wales has at its disposal are not being fully exploited in schools to facilitate the learning of a third or fourth language.**

Despite evidence that bilingualism facilitates the learning of further languages, the benefits are not being realised in Wales, which has the lowest level of take-up for Modern Foreign Languages at Key Stage 4 of all four UK countries.

This may be linked to the way that Welsh is taught, particularly in English-medium primary schools, which teachers say does not appear to be aimed at the development of wider language learning skills. The evidence indicates that English, Welsh and MFL are regarded in most schools as quite separate subjects without the potential for collaboration or common approaches to teaching. This leads to the perception that, despite official guidelines, MFL has nothing to do with literacy in English or Welsh, a perception which has a negative impact on pupils' ability to transfer learning from one language into another.

The proposed introduction of a new curriculum which calls for improvements in the teaching of Welsh and which places English, Welsh and MFL within the same area of study, provides an opportunity to remedy this.

**The contribution which foreign language learning can make to enhancing pupils' literacy is not valued and MFL is not seen by many schools as central to achieving the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) goals.**

The report highlights that there is a greater general awareness of the benefits that learning both Welsh and English brings to the study of a foreign language, than there is of the notion that this can also work in the opposite direction. This may reflect the fact that the link between foreign languages and literacy is not made explicit in the LNF documentation, although there is certainly plenty in the LNF documentation to encourage schools to involve MFL along with other curriculum subjects in their work to develop pupils' literacy. Much of the activities which pupils undertake in MFL classrooms support wider literacy, including sound/spelling links, reading strategies, comparative grammar work and extended writing activities.

The evidence from this survey suggests that many schools are confused about the role that MFL can play in the development of literacy. Greater awareness of how foreign languages can contribute would not only support greater whole-school collaboration towards improved levels of literacy and ensure improved results against LNF goals for Welsh schoolchildren, but would also give greater recognition to the valuable role of foreign language learning in children's education.

**The low levels of appreciation of the value of languages by parents and pupils in particular is having an adverse effect on pupils seeing MFL as a serious subject for study. Such views are not being countered by the messages from policy makers and influencers.**

In spite of the many sources of evidence highlighting the contribution that foreign language skills can make to a nation's economic growth and the wellbeing of its citizens, there is very little in the way of Welsh Government policy or the practice of the majority of key stakeholders and influencers in Wales to demonstrate a commitment to languages beyond Welsh and English or to foster an appreciation of the value of languages amongst young people, their parents and potential employers. In terms of attitudes, Wales is very similar to other parts of the UK where a lack of understanding of the value of foreign languages is commonplace. However, in recent years both Scotland and England have introduced policies which are designed to improve the position of foreign language learning in the curriculum.

Professor Donaldson's recently published review of the curriculum and assessment systems in Wales states very clearly that well developed skills in Welsh and English will support the subsequent learning of third and fourth languages and help Wales to exploit its full potential as a confident and competitive nation. However, in the absence of a robust policy on foreign language education to counter the very low levels of take-up for foreign languages and the rapid rate at which take-up is declining, especially at the post-16 level, this potential is unlikely to be realised.

Teachers' responses to our survey suggest that the majority of young people and parents in Wales are neither aware nor appreciative of the benefits which skills in languages and intercultural understanding can bring in terms of advantages for study, personal development and employment. The languages community as a whole is not being successful in exploiting the findings of research to make a strong case for foreign language learning in terms which both key stakeholders and influencers can understand.

To stem the dramatic decline of foreign languages in schools across Wales and to address the widely held perception that foreign languages are unimportant and of little use, will require concerted action at the highest level, both in order to address the systemic/structural challenges being faced by schools and to begin to tackle entrenched and unhelpful social attitudes. The new curriculum proposed by Professor Donaldson has the potential to bring all language subjects closer together and enable children in Wales to become confident users of three or more languages. However, without clear direction and guidance for schools and the active involvement of MFL experts, it also risks MFL becoming further marginalised as a subject of study.

# 1

## Introduction

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### 1.1 | The policy context

This first national survey of modern foreign language teaching in Welsh schools comes at a time of considerable change for education in Wales. The process of gradual divergence from the curriculum structure and examination system traditionally shared with England has accelerated in recent years with the introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate, the 14–19 Learning Pathways, and the implementation of the recommendations of the Review of Qualifications 14–19.<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive review of the curriculum and national assessment arrangements by Professor Graham Donaldson has recently been published which, if successfully implemented, would create a distinctively Welsh system of teaching, learning and assessment with many elements in common with the current Scottish curriculum.

Leading on from its Review of Qualifications, and in the light of reforms to GCSE and A level examinations in England, the Welsh Assembly Government has created a new body, Qualifications Wales, which is responsible for the development of qualifications which are ‘more relevant and responsive to Wales’ needs.<sup>5</sup> The Welsh examination board, WJEC, has published new specifications for core subjects of English, Welsh and mathematics, which will be taught from September 2015. These diverge from the reformed qualifications in England in that they retain a modular approach and an element of teacher assessment. WJEC has recently consulted on the content and assessment criteria for other subjects, including Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and these will be introduced in 2016.

As a bilingual nation, Wales has an advantage in the learning of other languages, since research shows that having learned one additional language, students find other languages are easier to acquire.<sup>6</sup> However, data published by the British Academy<sup>7</sup> show that Wales performs least well of the four UK nations when it comes to learning other languages. A recent report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has also found that Wales lags behind the rest of the UK in other areas of the curriculum and that Welsh teenagers perform poorly against international standards in science, mathematics and reading.<sup>8</sup> As Wales seeks to reform its curriculum and assessment arrangements to bring the attainment of Welsh pupils into line with those of other developed countries, this is an appropriate moment in which to review the health of foreign language teaching in Wales and to explore the extent to which pupils are being equipped with language, intercultural and communication skills which enable them to participate fully in a globalised world. With the Welsh Government firmly committed to increasing the number of pupils receiving education through the medium of Welsh,<sup>9</sup> this report seeks to explore the impact of bilingualism on the learning of third and subsequent languages in Wales.

The report also seeks to provide evidence of the impact of previous policy initiatives on modern foreign language teaching in Welsh secondary schools and to demonstrate the importance of the subject within the distinctive Welsh educational context.

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Government (2013)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.qualificationswales.org/an-introduction-to-qualifications-wales/>

<sup>6</sup> Cenoz and Valencia (1994); Abu-Rabia and Sanitsky (2010); Cummins (2000)

<sup>7</sup> British Academy (2013)

<sup>8</sup> OECD (2014)

<sup>9</sup> Welsh Government (2014)

### Modern Foreign Languages in the curriculum

Before devolution, the national curriculum developed for Wales mirrored that of England except in the requirement for all pupils to study Welsh and English throughout compulsory education. This created a squeeze on the amount of curriculum time available for other subjects and was the reason why, at the time when the study of a foreign language was made compulsory for all pupils in England throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, the national curriculum for Key Stage 4 in Wales did not adopt the compulsory study of a foreign language. It may also explain why the teaching of foreign languages in Welsh primary schools has received relatively little policy attention to date. In England, the compulsory study of foreign languages at Key Stage 4 was abandoned in 2004, but instead a target was set for the introduction of language teaching in primary schools. From September 2014, the teaching of a modern or ancient language has become statutory for all pupils in England at Key Stage 2.

In Wales, as in England, the number of pupils continuing to learn a foreign language beyond Key Stage 3 has long been a cause for concern. The 2010 policy document 'Making Languages Count' set out the Welsh Assembly Government's plan to improve teaching and learning in the subject.<sup>10</sup> It focused on improving the quality of the language learning experience for pupils in Key Stage 3 and on action to develop the 14–19 phase. This included supporting the development of alternative qualifications at GCSE and business/education links focused on foreign languages. Most significantly, it gave foreign languages a prominent position within the new Welsh Baccalaureate. All students were required to complete a 20-hour foreign language module within the 'Wales, Europe and the World' strand. To support this module, CILT Cymru, the National Centre for Languages in Wales, in partnership with its parent company, WJEC, developed foreign language materials which were piloted in schools and FE colleges delivering the Welsh Baccalaureate. However, as a result of the Review of Qualifications, the compulsory foreign language module has now been removed from the Welsh Baccalaureate, although MFL remains as an optional element. The decision to reverse the policy of including the study of a foreign language as a compulsory element within the Welsh Baccalaureate was made on the grounds that there were disparities in the quality of delivery between centres and that it was questionable whether learners could really benefit from such a short period of study.<sup>11</sup> However, the inclusion of a more substantial language element was rejected on the grounds that it would overcrowd the qualification.<sup>12</sup>

The new curriculum proposed by Professor Donaldson places MFL within a single area of learning, along with Welsh and English. This would bring all language subjects closer together and has the potential to boost learning by enabling the transfer of skills between languages. Donaldson's review states that 'the purpose of the curriculum in Wales should be that children and young people develop as... ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world' and argues that a good level of competence in both Welsh and English will provide a solid platform for children to build skills in other languages, whether for work, study or pleasure. He therefore advocates improving the teaching of Welsh in primary schools, ensuring that children gain an understanding of: the structure of language, links between sound and spelling, the origins of words and cognates between languages in order to support them with the learning of foreign languages when they reach secondary school. The increased importance given to the learning of Welsh in Professor Donaldson's proposals follows a review of Welsh as a second language which reported in 2013 that it is 'the eleventh hour' for Welsh second language, with Welsh second language examination results the lowest of any school subjects and pupils reporting that they find the subject neither interesting nor useful.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Welsh Assembly Government and Young Wales (2010)

<sup>11</sup> Huw Lewis, Minister for Education and Skills, Welsh Assembly Government, letter to Baroness Jean Coussins, 21 January 2014

<sup>12</sup> BBC Online, 5 February 2014

<sup>13</sup> Prof Sioned Davies, Chair of the Welsh Second Language Review Group who led the group which produced the review *One Language for All* (2013)

The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales face a dilemma in setting standards for the new GCSEs and A levels in relation to the reformed qualifications in England, which are intended to be significantly more demanding. This is especially so in the case of foreign languages, where the new standards reflect the fact that English pupils will be receiving four additional years of foreign language teaching in primary school. This may not be an issue given that all Welsh pupils have tuition in both Welsh and English throughout primary school but any divergence from practice in England will need to ensure that Welsh pupils have parity in academic performance with their English counterparts, particularly when applying for university places.

### Modern Foreign Languages in secondary schools

All pupils in Wales are currently required to study a foreign language throughout Key Stage 3 (age 11–14). However, since the focus of Estyn's school inspection programme moved away from specific subjects in 2010, there is little detailed information available about practice in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Welsh schools.

At the end of Key Stage 3, teachers are required to make statutory teacher assessments, for each eligible learner, of progress in MFL (and other non-core subjects<sup>14</sup> – though this requirement is currently under consideration as part of the Donaldson review of curriculum and assessment). Data published by the Welsh Government show that in 2014 just over three quarters of boys (76 per cent) and 88 per cent of girls achieved the expected level (L5+) in MFL. These results are the lowest of any of the non-core subjects, with the exception of Welsh as a second language.

Take-up of MFL in Key Stage 4 has always been lower than is the case in England because of its status as an optional subject. However, whereas in 1995 as many as 55 per cent of the cohort in Wales took a language to GCSE, in 2013 the proportion was only 22 per cent. Figures analysed and published by Wales Online for the period 2009 to 2012 showed that there were a significant number of schools where entries were in single figures, and that schools in areas of high socio-economic deprivation were achieving very low levels of participation.<sup>15</sup> Since schools can decide to remove a subject from the curriculum if it does not attract sufficient pupils for two consecutive years, there is a real risk that the very small numbers of pupils opting to study foreign languages at Key Stage 4 may result in schools dropping MFL courses at this level completely, reducing further the numbers of pupils in Wales studying or able to study a foreign language.

Low take-up for foreign languages at Key Stage 4 has become particularly acute since the introduction of the 14–19 Learning Pathways in 2009. These brought a plethora of new subject choices into the Welsh curriculum. Because of the negative impact on the numbers of pupils learning 'traditional subjects' such as foreign languages, the Welsh Assembly held an inquiry into the 'unintended consequences' of the Learning Pathways.<sup>16</sup> The Minister's view of the findings was that the decline in the numbers of Welsh pupils learning foreign languages was not caused by the introduction of the Learning Pathways but was rather a reflection of the decline in foreign language learning also occurring in other UK countries. However, positive policy action in England such as the introduction of the English Baccalaureate as a performance measure has resulted in increases in the uptake for foreign languages by pupils in secondary education.<sup>17</sup> Scotland has had an ambitious '1+2' languages education policy in place since 2012 which includes closely monitored targets aimed

<sup>14</sup> <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Key-Stage-3-Non-Core-Subjects/Results-by-LocalAuthority-Subject-Gender>  
<https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Key-Stage-3-Non-Core-Subjects/Results-by-Subject-Gender-Level>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/school-pupil-performance-gcse-foreign-2513907>

<sup>16</sup> National Assembly for Wales (2012)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/english-baccalaureate-information-for-schools>

at contributing to broader policies to secure Scotland's long-term standing with its chosen international partner countries.<sup>18</sup> Scotland has recently announced increased funding to ensure that all pupils not only start learning a foreign language by the first year of primary school, but also begin to learn a third language later in primary education.<sup>19</sup>

In Wales, a new national school categorisation system uses a range of performance measures, including GCSE outcomes, to identify those schools which are in need of different types of support or which can serve as beacons of good practice for others. However, unlike in England where the use of the English Baccalaureate as a performance measure has resulted in a higher take-up for foreign languages, the Welsh school categorisation system does not differentiate between subjects beyond the 'core indicators' (English/Welsh, mathematics and science) and so provides no incentive for schools to improve participation in foreign languages. From 2016, a new performance measure will be introduced for schools, known as 'Progress 9'. This is designed 'to incentivise schools to support and encourage every learner to achieve the very best grades they can in English or Welsh, mathematics, science and their chosen range of qualifications, and to develop essential transferable skills through the new Welsh Baccalaureate'.<sup>20</sup> Progress 9 will be based on each pupil's score in nine qualifications, five of which will focus on English/Welsh, mathematics and science. The measure deliberately does not incentivise any other specific subjects and the remaining four qualifications may be drawn from other GCSE subjects, the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate, or vocational qualifications. It looks unlikely therefore to provide any boost for numbers taking GCSEs in MFL in Wales. The Welsh Government does not publish any breakdown of examination performance specific to MFL.

In response to recommendations made by Estyn in 2009 that Modern Foreign Languages should be included in vocational courses,<sup>21</sup> CILT Cymru was charged with developing schemes of work and assessment tasks for the delivery of business language units to be assessed as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at Levels 1 and 2. Foreign language NVQs have recently been classified as Initial Vocational Education Training (IVETs) and are therefore available to pupils under the age of 16 and recognised as contributing to school performance measures.<sup>22</sup> In response to the declining market in England (where NVQs can no longer be used to contribute to school performance tables), OCR, the awarding body for NVQs, has ceased to offer the qualification in all but the major European languages. However, the WJEC examination board has developed a new qualification called the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) which is available at three levels (Entry, Level 1 and Level 2) and in six languages. This qualification is made up of a number of small units of around 10/20 hours of language study each and is organised around five themes, e.g. communicating personal information and organising and planning. The QCF qualification is suitable for all types of learner including primary-age children as well as for adults taking vocational courses since it can be tailored to meet the needs of specific groups of students or individuals.

As a result of Wales' poor placing in international league tables focusing on mathematics, science and reading, the strong emphasis in schools is now on mother tongue literacy, numeracy and science, with other subjects receiving very little attention in school inspections. In Estyn's most recent annual report, there is only one mention of MFL (and only one for geography) compared to 103 mentions of 'literacy' and a similar number for 'numeracy'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Scottish Government (May 2012) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/05/3670/downloads>

<sup>19</sup> <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/-7-2-million-for-language-learning-1786.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> <http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2014/ks4/?lang=en>

<sup>21</sup> Estyn (2009)

<sup>22</sup> Most other NVQs have now been classified as Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVETs) and are only available to pupils who are over 16 years of age.

<sup>23</sup> Estyn (2014)

### Primary schools

Languages other than English and Welsh are not part of the primary curriculum in Wales, making Wales, along with Northern Ireland, the countries with the shortest period of compulsory foreign language learning in Europe. The commitment to languages in the English primary curriculum is likely to become an issue in the mid-term for Wales if the decision is made to peg GCSE and A level standards to those in England, as the additional years of foreign language learning begin to have a positive effect on the examination performance of English pupils. In this regard, it is interesting to note that both the Welsh Conservative party and Plaid Cymru have stated their commitment to introducing foreign languages as a compulsory subject in primary schools in Wales should they come into power in future elections.<sup>24</sup>

A government-funded pilot project worth £1.5 million which looked at developing foreign language learning in Key Stage 2 ran between 2002 and 2009. An evaluation report<sup>25</sup> showed a positive impact on Key Stage 4 take-up in some schools and particular benefits for boys as well as for children with additional learning needs.

### Support for foreign languages in Wales

Since the mid-1990s the teaching of languages other than Welsh and English has benefited from the support of a dedicated national body – the National Comenius Centre of Wales – which in 2002 became CILT Cymru. The organisation has coordinated a wide range of training and development activity in support of teachers, schools and pupils and has worked hard to promote a higher profile for languages on the agendas of policy makers, school leaders and businesses across the country. As a result of budgetary constraints, the Welsh Government cut funding for CILT Cymru by two thirds in the financial year 2013-14, much reducing the scope of its activity. A further decision has recently been taken to remove CILT's funding completely with effect from July 2015. In its place the Welsh Government proposes to make use of a 'Teacher to Teacher' model through school consortia, in which teachers and schools with good practice pass this on to their peers.

## 1.2 | The value of languages

Our world of high-speed digital technology, instant communications and easy international travel provides nations with limitless opportunities to develop their prosperity and standing through international collaboration and access to new markets and also offers enormous potential benefits to individuals in terms of opportunities for study, work or leisure. However, although English enjoys 'global language' status, as many as 75 per cent of the world's population do not speak English.<sup>26</sup> Skills in languages other than English and an understanding of how other cultures work are key to accessing the opportunities of a globalised world as well as to winning friends, allies and business partners.

Of the four countries of the UK, Wales is foremost in its commitment to being a bilingual nation and in providing its children and young people with tuition in two languages from age 3 to 16. The importance of this commitment is restated by Professor Graham Donaldson in his review for the Welsh Government in which he sets a new direction for school education in Wales.<sup>27</sup>

Although the focus of Professor Donaldson's proposals is the strengthening of school education in both Welsh and English, he believes that this solid foundation in language learning will stand pupils in good stead when they come to learn their third or fourth languages in secondary school.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.welshconservatives.com/news/movement-inspire-love-language> <http://www.english.leannewood.plaidcymru.org/news/2012/08/10/revolutionise-language-teaching-in-schools-plaid-leader/>

<sup>25</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2006)

<sup>26</sup> British Academy (2011)

<sup>27</sup> Prof Graham Donaldson (2015)

There is a wealth of research evidence highlighting the cognitive and intellectual benefits of learning more than one language and indeed much of this data has been used to demonstrate the value of bilingualism in Wales.<sup>28</sup> The metalinguistic competence acquired through the learning of other languages (knowledge about how language in general works) has been shown to have a positive impact on literacy in the mother tongue<sup>29</sup> and studies in the United States have shown that there is a direct positive correlation between learning other languages and higher achievement not only in English but also in mathematics.<sup>30</sup>

Policies documenting long-term plans for economic growth, investment and prosperity for Wales as well as broader UK policies which include Wales, are clear that the UK and Wales want to play an active and competitive role in an increasingly globalised world. There is a substantial body of evidence, both policy-related and academic, which demonstrates the link between skills in languages and export growth.<sup>31</sup> Research from the University of Cardiff published in 2014 on the relationship between skills in languages and the economy provides compelling evidence of the importance of languages for trade and calculates that the value of business lost to the UK annually because of language barriers is 3.5 per cent of GDP.<sup>32</sup> However, documents setting out the skills needed by the workforce in order to realise these policy ambitions rarely make specific mention of the skills in languages needed for successful international collaboration. International research such as the recent European survey of language skills in young people provides a stark picture of how poorly the UK performs in foreign languages.<sup>33</sup>

In 2013 the National Strategic Skills Audit for Wales found that 'the financial sector middle office functions will require people more highly skilled in financial processes but also with more legal expertise, an international background, language skills and a good knowledge of IT'. It also found that 'access to language skills' would be needed for developing exports to emerging economies and enabling Welsh businesses to understand how they could best focus their efforts.<sup>34</sup> The report revealed a particular skills gap in foreign languages amongst skilled trades and professions, highlighting the need for foreign languages in combination with high quality vocational courses.

The most recent UK-wide survey from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI)/Pearson Education and Skills shows that 65 per cent of businesses value skills in foreign languages among their employees, and 62 per cent are dissatisfied with school/college leavers' language skills and international cultural awareness.<sup>35</sup> However, respondents to the CBI/Pearson survey also rank languages bottom in terms of factors they consider when recruiting graduates. This means that, despite the recognition that the UK needs foreign language skills to improve economic performance, demand is not articulated clearly enough by business to have any kind of positive impact on teaching and learning in schools or, crucially, on pupil choices.

Poor levels of skill in foreign languages are severely hampering young people in Wales both in their development as young citizens of an interconnected, globalised world as well as in their search for employment.<sup>36</sup> Opportunities for valuable international experience such as that available through the European Union's Erasmus Plus scheme risk not being taken up by young Welsh people because of

<sup>28</sup> Baker (2011)

<sup>29</sup> Narcy-Combes et al. (2007)

<sup>30</sup> Caccavale (2007)

<sup>31</sup> British Academy (2013)

<sup>32</sup> Foreman-Peck and Wang (2014)

<sup>33</sup> European Commission (2012)

<sup>34</sup> Welsh Government (2013)

<sup>35</sup> CBI/Pearson Education and Skills (2014)

<sup>36</sup> British Academy (2014)

inadequate skills in foreign languages.<sup>37</sup> This, in turn, restricts young people from being able to show potential employers that they are at ease with international settings and have experience of the wider world. A report by the Association of Graduate Recruiters and others highlights how important this 'global competency' is for British graduates in competing with highly-skilled graduates from across the world.<sup>38</sup> Companies which are dependent on such skills to sustain and grow their business are forced to recruit overseas because they cannot find candidates at home with the language and intercultural skills they need.<sup>39</sup> This was exemplified recently in a statement to *The Economist* made by the industrial equipment company Eriez Magnetics, based in South Wales, who said that their most recent appointments had been to multilingual foreigners because none of the UK applicants had the requisite skills in languages.<sup>40</sup>

The importance of skills in languages for attracting inward investment has also been widely recognised, with the availability of skills in languages among the key factors that businesses take into account when deciding where to locate. A report carried out for the Scottish Government in 2011 highlighted the damage done to its economy when a major local employer amalgamated with a European partner but lost the opportunity of accommodating the European Sales Office because the necessary skills in languages were not available locally.<sup>41</sup> The Scottish Government has since adopted an ambitious new policy on languages, based on the European 'mother tongue plus two' model<sup>42</sup> and closely integrated with Scotland's long-term policy for growing its international standing and engagement.

Following on from the publication of Professor Donaldson's comprehensive review of the curriculum and assessment arrangements for Welsh schools, the Language Trends survey for Wales 2014/15 provides a spotlight on what is happening with the teaching of foreign languages in Welsh secondary schools, of the relationship between MFL and Welsh/English tuition and the extent to which these learning experiences combine, or have the capacity to combine, to make children and young people in Wales confident speakers and learners of a range of other languages. Skilled users of other languages who can communicate confidently and who are comfortable in different cultural settings will do much to ensure that Wales achieves its aspirations for the country's competitiveness and prosperity in a complex, globalised 21st century.

<sup>37</sup> A study commissioned by the European Parliament in 2010 highlighted insufficient language skills as a barrier to improving take-up of the Erasmus programme: European Parliament (2010)

<sup>38</sup> Association of Graduate Recruiters et al. (2011)

<sup>39</sup> British Academy (2013)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21645247-woeful-approach-language-education-continues-shout-louder?frsc=dg%7Cd>

<sup>41</sup> Grove (2011)

<sup>42</sup> Scottish Government Languages Working Group (2012)

# 2

## Research design and data collection

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The Language Trends survey of secondary schools is the first research exercise of its kind in Wales, although similar surveys have been carried out in England annually since 2002.<sup>43</sup> The aim is to provide evidence for policy development by acting as a two-way conduit between schools and government, on the one hand charting the impact of government policies on schools and on the other reflecting the views and experiences of MFL teachers as they adapt to changing contexts for foreign language teaching in schools.

### 2.1 | 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 foreign languages in secondary schools. The findings of the survey have therefore been prefaced by a presentation of examination data relating to MFL, 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), comprise entries from learners of all ages and from all types of institution including schools, further education (FE) colleges and adult centres.

### 2.2 | Development of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed in August 2014 by the researchers in consultation with an advisory group comprising representatives of both commissioning organisations, the British Council (Wales) and CfBT Education Trust, and CILT Cymru. Consultations were also held with the Welsh Government. The questionnaire – a single bilingual document – was uploaded to the online survey platform Survey Monkey and trialled in early September 2014.

The questionnaire sought to explore the following topics:

- The range of languages (in addition to English and Welsh) offered in schools at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, post-16 and outside curriculum time
- Whether pupils have the opportunity to learn more than one language in addition to English and Welsh and if so how this is organised
- To what extent teachers think that pupils learning foreign languages benefit from having learned both Welsh and English in primary school
- To what extent teachers share practice in the teaching of foreign languages, English and Welsh
- To what extent the teaching of foreign languages is considered to support the wider agenda to develop literacy skills, as defined by the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF)
- Which issues teachers see as challenging in the context of their own school
- How teachers access CPD for foreign languages
- Accreditation offered for foreign languages

<sup>43</sup> The most recent survey is published at <http://www.cfbt.com/en-GB/Research/Research-library/2015/r-language-trends-2015>

In addition, the survey explored the following in relation to specific key stages:

### Key Stage 3

- Whether all pupils study a foreign language throughout Key Stage 3 and any changes to provision that have been introduced over the past three years
- The extent to which secondary schools are receiving pupils who have learned a foreign language in primary school

### Key Stage 4

- Whether foreign languages are optional or compulsory for some or all pupils at Key Stage 4 in the school
- Whether any pupils are prevented from studying a foreign language in Key Stage 4
- Current school trends in take-up for foreign languages at Key Stage 4

### Post-16

- Current school trends in the take-up of foreign languages post-16

## 2.3 | Data collection

In September 2014 an invitation to complete the online questionnaire was sent out in English and Welsh to all 213 secondary schools in Wales, addressed to the head of MFL. The letters were signed by the Chief Executives of CfBT Education Trust and the British Council.

Reminder letters were sent to heads of MFL to arrive in schools in the week after half term, with a deadline of 17 November for responses. Schools which had not replied by the deadline were emailed with a further reminder and telephoned by bilingual staff who were able to explain the purposes and importance of the survey, and arrange for pdf versions of the questionnaire to be sent to those who preferred to respond by email or in hard copy. These responses were later transferred onto the Survey Monkey database.

A total of 136 secondary schools responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 64 per cent. This high response rate was necessary in order to ensure that findings would be representative of the national profile of secondary schools in Wales.

Comparisons of the achieved sample with the national population of schools have been carried out (see Appendix). In general, the profile of schools responding to our survey is a good match with the profile of schools nationally in terms of their geographic location, although no responses were received from any of the four schools in Blaenau Gwent and from only one in Merthyr Tydfil. Schools in Newport are also slightly under-represented and schools in Pembrokeshire slightly over-represented.

In terms of the language of tuition, the achieved sample is a good match with the national population of schools: 17 per cent of responding schools are Welsh-medium schools, which account for 15 per cent of all secondary schools in Wales.

In terms of banding, the achieved sample is also a good match with the national picture.

## 2.4 | Analysis of the data

Researchers were interested in exploring any patterns in the responses to the survey by different types of school. However, the relatively small sample – just 136 schools – means that when broken down further, the numbers of schools in each sub-sample are too small to provide any reliable data on response variance between types of school. Nonetheless, the responses to a number of questions were analysed by type of school, and commentary included within the text where any pattern could be detected. The categories used were as follows:

### Language of tuition

The sample contained six types of school, categorised by language of tuition (see Appendix). Some types are represented by very small numbers of respondents. In order to gauge the impact of bilingualism, and recognising that although pupils in Welsh-medium schools are likely to be bilingual, they are not taught bilingually, the six categories were initially collapsed into two: bilingual schools (including English with significant Welsh) and monolingual schools, including both Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. We also undertook a further analysis of certain responses, distinguishing between three categories of school: English-medium, Welsh-medium and bilingual schools. However, we have had to take great care not to attribute too much validity to the resulting findings, on the one hand because of the small numbers of schools in the bilingual and Welsh-medium categories, and on the other because the responding Welsh-medium schools tend to represent more favourable socio-economic circumstances (see below).

### Banding

All secondary schools in Wales were until recently allocated to one of five categories of band (now known as the 'national categorisation system') based on an eclectic range of factors denoting quality.<sup>44</sup> Researchers used banding data published in 2013 to explore whether the answers to particular questions were associated with different bands. However, when survey responses are broken down by band, this gives very small numbers in some cases, so it is not possible to rely on the validity of the findings. Nonetheless, we have noted in the text where patterns emerge.

### Socio-economic status

All responding schools were allocated to one of five categories based on the average number of pupils eligible for free school meals during 2011–2013. All the schools in the most deprived category (those with the highest proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals) and 23 of the 25 in the second most deprived category were English-medium schools. Once again, this may give rise to misleading data and the results of the analysis have been used with care in the text.

<sup>44</sup> Details of secondary school banding can be found at: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/schoolbanding/?lang=en>

# 3

## Schools examination data in Wales

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The figures shown below are taken from 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 2014.

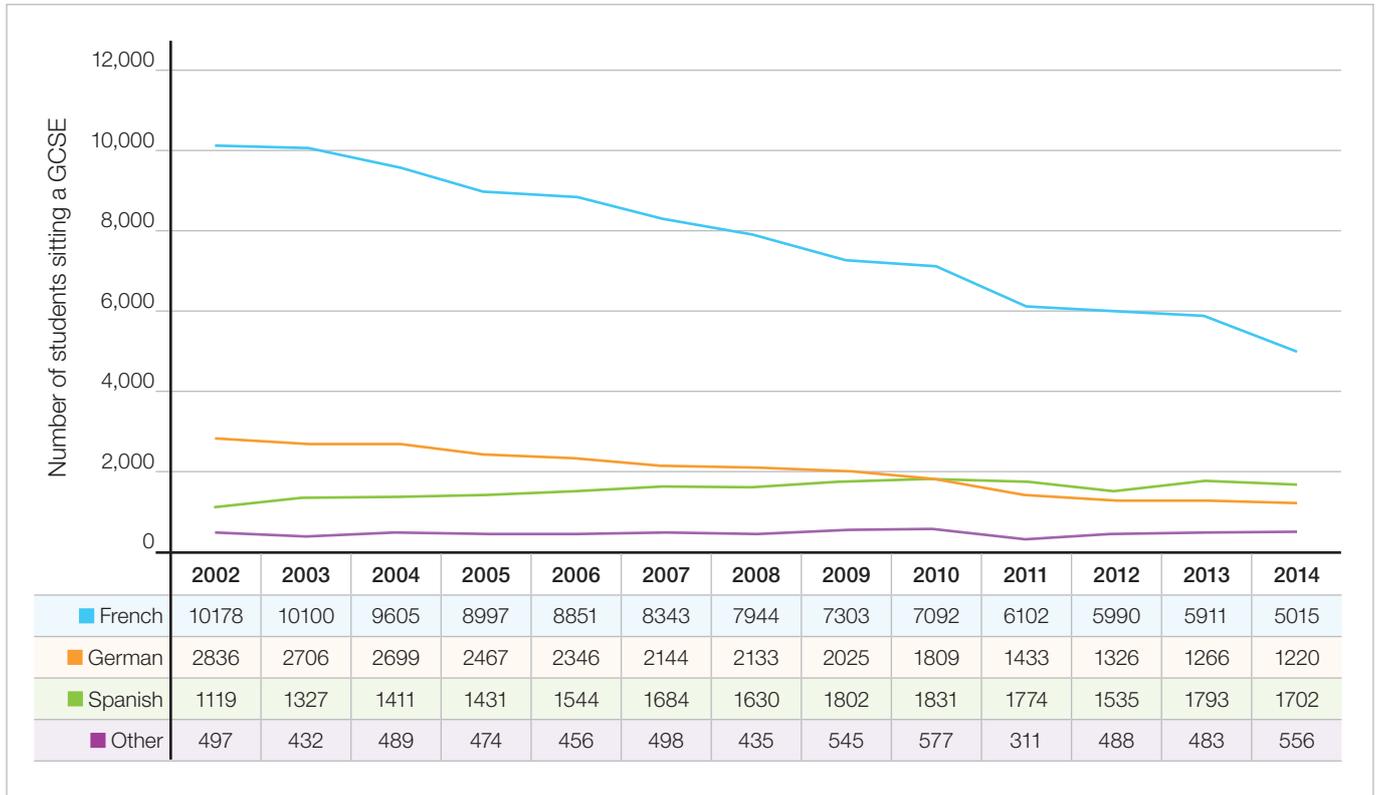
### 3.1 | GCSE

Overall, MFL entries at GCSE have fallen by 42 per cent between 2002 and 2014 – but the overall figures conceal a disparity between languages. French and German, traditionally the most widely taught foreign languages in Welsh schools, have fallen by 51 per cent and 57 per cent respectively; while the lesser taught languages have seen a small increase of 12 per cent from a low base. Entries for Spanish increased steadily until 2011, overtaking numbers for German in 2010. However, they fell back in 2012 and in 2014 numbers for Spanish are lower than they were in 2009.

In the 'Other languages' category there are potentially a further 17 foreign languages (including Irish) 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. In the case of Chinese, combined figures were provided for Northern Ireland and Wales for 2013 – a total of 51 entries. It is likely that many of the entries in the 'Other languages' category come from the FE, adult or voluntary sectors since the results of this survey show that there is very little teaching of languages other than French, Spanish and German in Welsh schools.

The decline in MFL entries should be seen in the context of an overall eight per cent decline in GCSE entries across all subjects over the period in question. However, the ratio of combined French, German and Spanish entries to entries across all subjects declined from five per cent to three per cent between 2002 and 2014.

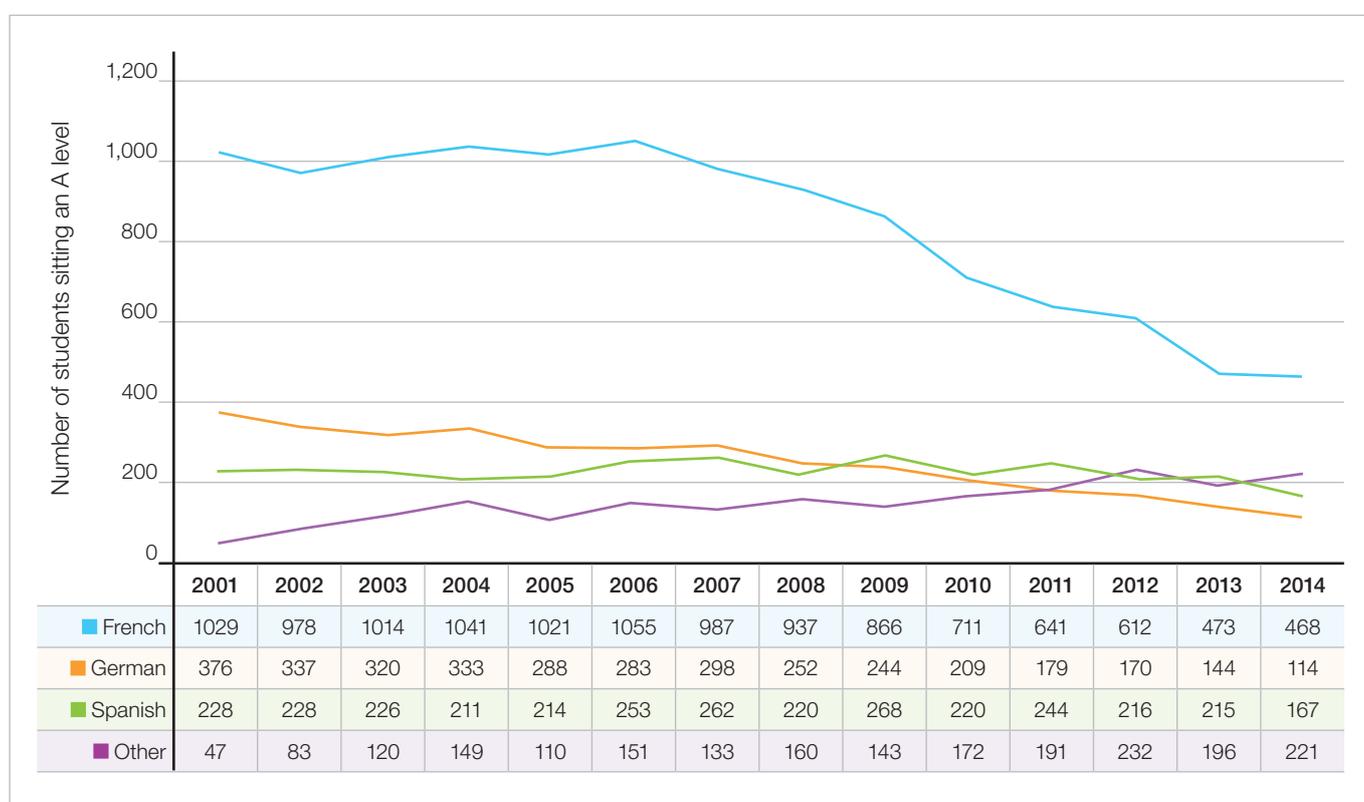
Figure 1: GCSE Modern Foreign Language entries for Wales, 2002–2014



### 3.2 | A level

Entries for MFL subjects at A level remained steady between 2001 and 2006, but since then the main languages have seen steep declines. In the ten-year period from 2005 to 2014, entries for French, German and Spanish combined have halved, while entries for 'Other languages' have doubled. Total entries for A level across all subjects have remained steady during this ten-year period (35,492 in 2014), meaning that MFL entries as a proportion of all entries have dropped from five per cent to three per cent.

**Figure 2:** A level Modern Foreign Language entries for Wales, 2001–2014



The biggest declines are in French and German, traditionally the two most widely taught foreign languages in Wales, with entries dropping by 41 per cent and 54 per cent respectively over the ten-year period. Spanish saw a slight upward trend from 2001 and overtook German as the second most widely studied foreign language at A level in 2009. However, in recent years Spanish too has seen a decline in numbers with a particularly heavy fall of 22 per cent between 2013 and 2014.

Evidence from this survey confirms that the 'Other languages' do not 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 are currently offered at A level, but the JCQ does not provide a breakdown of entries for different languages specific to Wales (except that there were no entries for Irish). However, JCQ was able to confirm that in 2013 there were 140 entries for Chinese from Wales and Northern Ireland combined.

# 4

## Provision for Modern Foreign Languages in Wales

With Key Stage 3 being the only point in the education of young people in Wales at which the study of a foreign language is compulsory, quantitative and qualitative data from a wide range of schools across the country provide rich evidence about the extent of and commitment to foreign language learning in this key stage, which languages are offered and what challenges teachers face.

In the context of rapidly declining numbers of young people in Wales choosing to study a foreign language to GCSE, this report examines the combination of factors which are seen to be contributing to this. The views of teachers on pupil attitudes towards the learning of other languages alongside Welsh and English<sup>45</sup> are explored as well as the links between social disadvantage and participation in foreign language learning.

Information is provided on the extent to which vocational language qualifications are being used and the impact of the Welsh Baccalaureate on Modern Foreign Languages in secondary schools.

### 4.1 | Key Stage 3

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

A small proportion of schools (five per cent) do not require all pupils to study a foreign language throughout Key Stage 3. Comments from teachers show that this occurs where lower ability or special needs groups follow a different curriculum:

*‘Lower ability group follow a bespoke curriculum which does not include MFL.’*

*‘The special needs class in Year 9 does not learn a foreign language. This class follows the WJEC Pathways curriculum and the school does not follow a foreign language option within these options.’*

In one case, a school has reduced Key Stage 3 to two years, and although all pupils are studying French in Years 7 and 8, this is not the case in Year 9.

However, a far higher proportion, 29 per cent, say that individual lower ability pupils are disapplied in Key Stage 3, for example:

*‘At least 10 per cent of the year group end up disapplied or not taking French as management frequently decide that this is the lesson that they should “give up” in order to have extra English or maths.’*

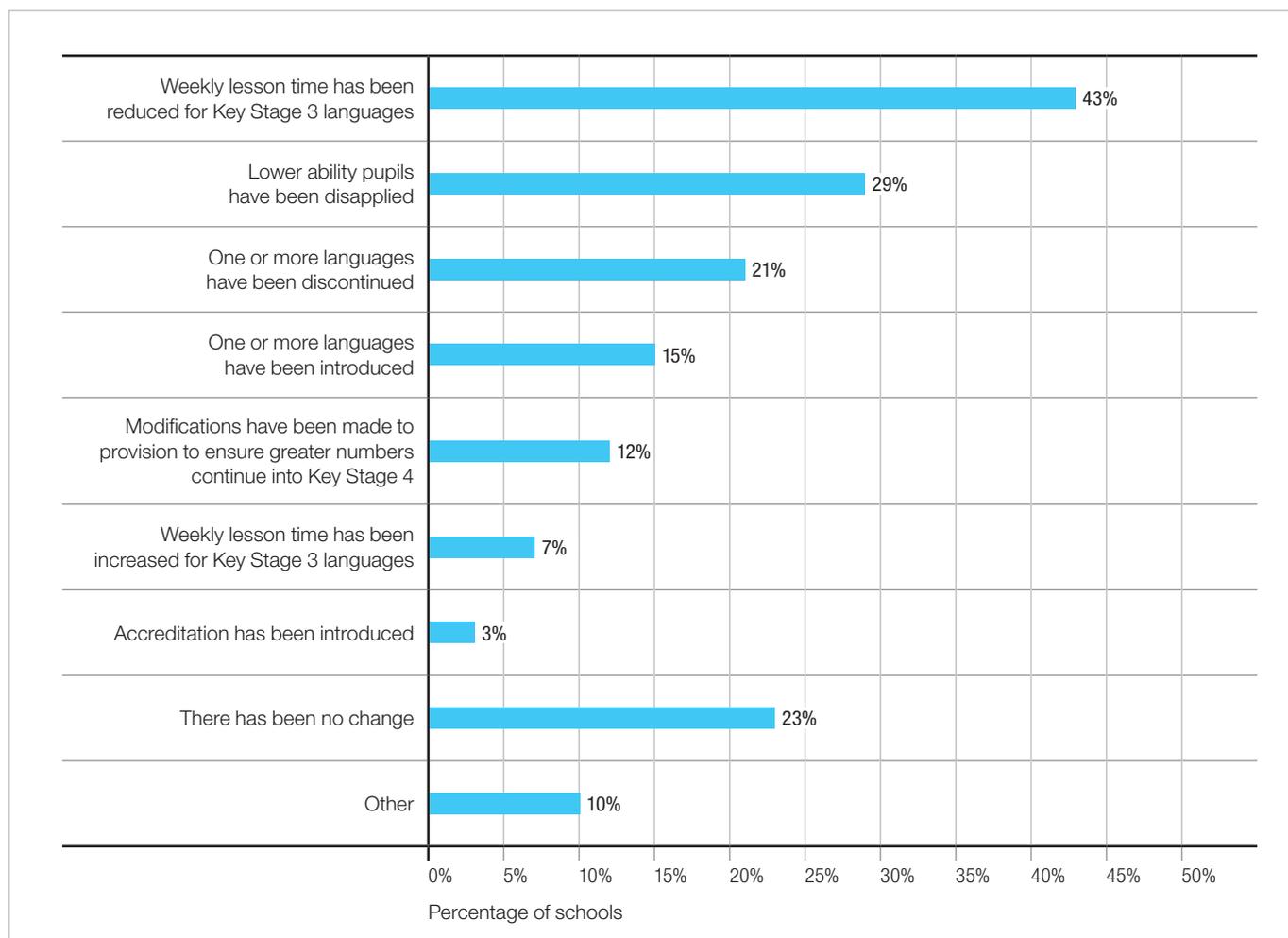
*‘20 per cent do functional skills – only study a handful of [language] lessons in Years 7 and 8. In Year 9, they are “re-integrated” into mainstream French despite the gap in skill and with no support.’*

The responses to this question were further analysed by the socio-economic status of the schools (based on the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals) but there is no evidence of a relationship between the opportunity to study a foreign language throughout Key Stage 3 and the socio-economic status of the school.

<sup>45</sup> Findings from a survey of pupil attitudes towards language learning which has also been commissioned by the British Council, will complement this in due course.

### What changes have schools made recently to MFL provision in Key Stage 3?

Figure 3: Recent changes to Modern Foreign Languages provision in Key Stage 3



The overall picture for foreign languages at Key Stage 3 is one of attrition, with the most commonly reported change being a reduction in lesson time for MFL (43 per cent of schools). This finding is of concern given that Estyn has recommended that schools should timetable MFL for at least two hours per week in order for pupils to be able to make good progress.<sup>46</sup> Schools report:

*‘Our allocation was slashed from five hours a fortnight to four hours a fortnight four years ago, and then from four hours a fortnight to three hours a fortnight this year (Years 7 and 8). The two Year 9 “top sets” get four hours a fortnight, while the less able get two hours a fortnight from Years 7 to 9.’*

*‘The allocation of teaching hours has reduced from four hours to three hours a fortnight to allow more teaching time for the LNF.’*

<sup>46</sup> Estyn (2009)

With the increasing emphasis on literacy and numeracy, well over a quarter of schools now exclude or excuse lower ability pupils from learning a foreign language in order to focus on core subjects such as English and mathematics.

As many as 21 per cent of schools have stopped teaching one or more languages in the course of the past three years, again as a result of an increased focus on literacy or for financial reasons:

*'We used to teach German and French, but due to financial constraints staffing was reduced and German discontinued. The decision to disapply a significant number of pupils from French was also a financially driven decision in part, as the school did not have enough staff able to teach French.'*

*'We have lost time across languages (French, 2nd MFL and Welsh) in order to support literacy. We have argued that we have a very strong literacy focus in our lessons but we still lost weekly lesson time.'*

However, the evidence of a reduction in offer needs to be balanced against the 15 per cent of schools which report that they have introduced one or more new languages.

Very few schools (12 per cent) report having made modifications to provision in Key Stage 3 to encourage greater numbers to continue with MFL into Key Stage 4, but the following examples show the actions being taken by such schools to encourage pupils to continue with a foreign language to GCSE:

*'We have adapted teaching methods in Year 9 to attract more pupils to take GCSE French and to challenge the more able.'*

*'The aim of making pupils choose early between French and German is to ensure that they continue with the one that they have chosen, rather than be overloaded, not able to cover enough topics and, therefore, unlikely to continue with either language into Key Stage 4.'*

A small number of schools (three per cent) have introduced accreditation for MFL in Key Stage 3, but the vast majority of schools do not offer any accreditation for foreign languages at this key stage (see Table 2, page 32).

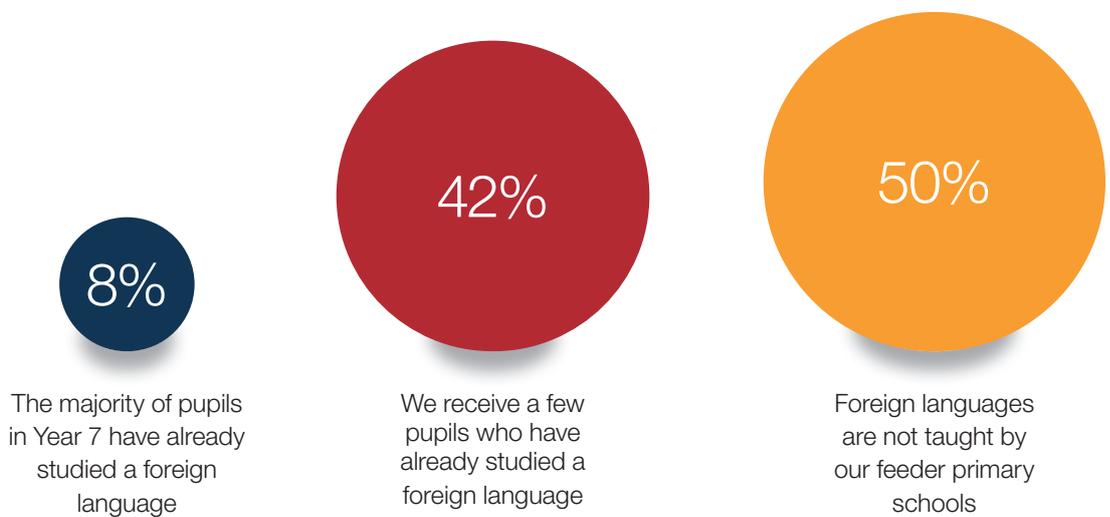
The responses to this question were also analysed by band, according to the 2013 school categorisation system (see Chapter 2). The numbers in each case are very small, so it is not possible to draw statistically valid conclusions. However, there are indications that schools in bands 4 and 5 – i.e. those performing least well – are more likely than average to have discontinued teaching one or more foreign languages at Key Stage 3 (33 per cent of those in band 4, and 38 per cent of those in band 5, compared to 21 per cent overall). On the other hand, those in the highest band in terms of overall performance are much more likely to have introduced a foreign language – 31 per cent compared to 15 per cent overall.

From the data available, the tendency to disapply lower ability pupils or to decrease lesson time for MFL does not appear to be associated with the schools' status in terms of banding.

### Do schools receive significant numbers of pupils who have studied a modern foreign language in Key Stage 2?

Exactly half of responding schools receive pupils who have already studied a foreign language in primary school. However, in only eight per cent of cases does this refer to the majority of pupils joining Year 7.

**Figure 4:** Whether schools receive pupils who have already studied a foreign language in Key Stage 2



Where schools report receiving pupils in Year 7 who have studied a language other than Welsh or English, many comment that pupils' knowledge is confined to a few words or phrases learned in taster sessions or clubs, for example:

*'Over the last few years, we have noticed a bigger proportion of students with "some" knowledge of French. Unfortunately, it is often very inconsistent among students and very limited.'*

*'Language learning at primary level is more like taster sessions than proper lessons – the pupils learn and remember a few words of vocabulary at best – they can never manipulate the language in any way.'*

A few respondents comment that the number of pupils who have learned a language other than English or Welsh at primary school has actually declined in recent years, for example:

*'Not recently – in the past some had done taster sessions. There was some work years back with the Languages Bridge but this has fallen by the wayside long since.'*

*'After an MFL pilot scheme in primary by CILT Cymru most came into Year 7 having studied French. By now there is a deterioration as some of the primary staff have retired or lack confidence to continue to teach the language.'*

*'We used to be part of the pilot project by CILT to teach French in primary schools. Worked well for 7 years but finished when the money ran out. Scheme was otherwise very successful.'*

Respondents report that the majority of pupils with knowledge of a language other than Welsh or English have either done Key Stage 2 in England or come from another country – Portugal and Poland are both specifically mentioned.

*'The only pupils to have any meaningful MFL experience in Key Stage 2 come from England.'*

*'A very small number of pupils have been exposed to any MFL in primary. If so, very basic. The exceptions are pupils coming from English primaries or abroad.'*

Only a handful of schools report that they are actively involved with MFL teaching in primary schools, for example:

*'For the first time since September, we have started introducing an MFL as part of the Year 6 transition programme. The benefits will be evaluated in September 2015.'*

*'Our staff teach a lesson of French a week in all our primary schools.'*

*'Members of the French department teach once a fortnight in each of our cluster schools and have produced materials on CD for consistency. Primary colleagues are asked to deliver French in the interim week, though this input varies in practice across the cluster.'*

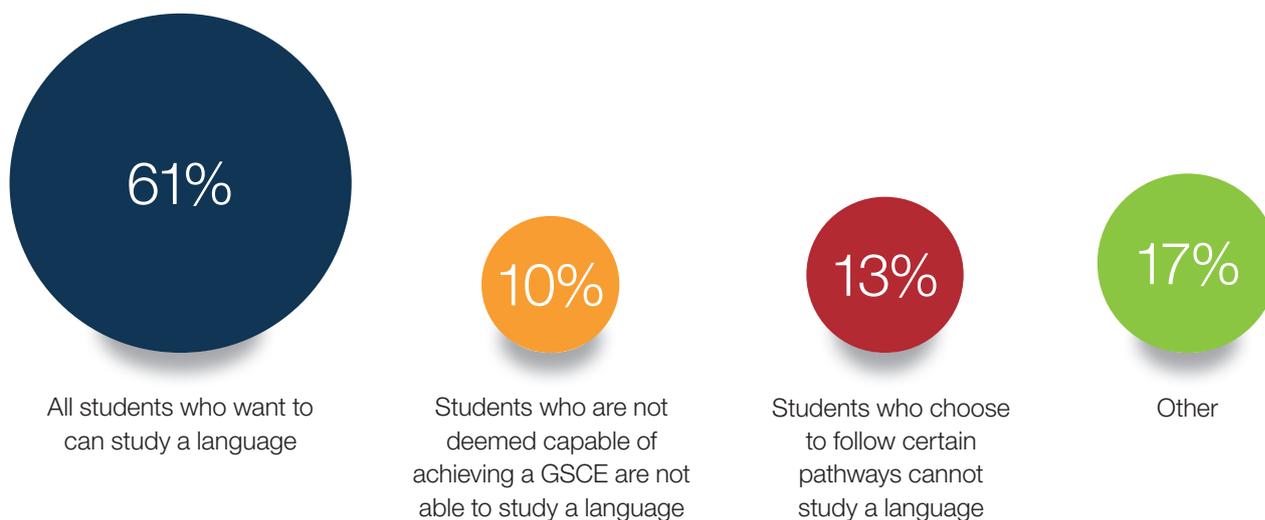
## 4.2 | Key Stage 4

### What is the status of Modern Foreign Languages in Key Stage 4?

Only two schools in the survey make Modern Foreign Languages compulsory for all pupils in Key Stage 4. In 93 per cent of schools it is optional for all pupils, and seven per cent of schools say that it is an option just for some pupils.

However, when asked whether all students who want to study a foreign language in Key Stage 4 are able to do so, only 61 per cent say this is the case. In 13 per cent of schools, students who follow certain pathways are not able to study a foreign language and in 10 per cent of schools, students not deemed capable of achieving a GCSE are not able to study a foreign language.

Figure 5: Whether any students are prevented from studying a foreign language at Key Stage 4



Restrictions on pupils studying a foreign language in Key Stage 4 tend to be more common in English-medium schools (44 per cent) than in Welsh-medium (26 per cent) or bilingual schools (33 per cent), although the small numbers – and a possible link with socio-economic factors (see Chapter 2) – mean that this finding must be interpreted with care.

Comments from teachers show that restrictions on studying a foreign language in Key Stage 4 affect pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), those whose literacy is poor, or those who did not study the language in Key Stage 3:

*'A small number of SEN pupils are disapplied from languages at Key Stage 3, and are not therefore able to pick up the GCSE at Key Stage 4. Other SEN pupils only receive one hour of Spanish a fortnight at Key Stage 3, and are therefore also discouraged from taking it at GCSE.'*

*'Pupils are encouraged to follow the pathway suggested but if they really want to study a language and the teacher feels the pupil will be OK, then there is no problem. Because of the pressure with results etc., in the future we will only choose pupils who can get a C and above. This has never been our policy but we are under pressure to improve results.'*

*'Technically the course (GCSE French) is offered to all pupils at Key Stage 4. However, some pupils are sometimes discouraged from following the course if their literacy is deemed too low or if other options would lead to higher grades for those pupils.'*

*'SEN pupils do not have the ability to study at Key Stage 4. Pupils who did not study Spanish at Key Stage 3 are barred from choosing it as an option. The school's option columns do not always promote the study of MFL as there are often competing subjects.'*

Only one bilingual school in the research sample places restrictions on pupils who choose certain pathways from studying a foreign language at Key Stage 4, whereas a far higher proportion of monolingual schools report putting restrictions in place in such circumstances. There is no difference between monolingual and bilingual schools in terms of the other responses to this question.

#### Changes in pupil take-up for Modern Foreign Languages in Key Stage 4

As one would expect in light of declining GCSE entry figures for MFL, a high proportion of schools (47 per cent) have seen overall decreases in numbers for MFL at Key Stage 4. In more than one in five schools this decrease has affected more than 10 per cent of pupils.

**Table 1:** Changes experienced in pupil numbers for Modern Foreign Languages in Key Stage 4 over the last three years

Increase – by 10% or more	Increase – by less than 10%	No significant change	Decrease – by less than 10%	Decrease – by more than 10%
15%	7.5%	30%	26%	21%

Band 1 schools are less likely than other schools to have experienced an increase and, along with those in band 3, most likely to have experienced a decrease, although the actual numbers are too low to make this a statistically valid finding. There is no difference between monolingual and bilingual schools in terms of the changes they have experienced in pupil numbers for MFL in Key Stage 4 over the last three years.

Comments from teachers responding to the Language Trends survey provide an insight into some of the reasons for the declines in take-up at Key Stage 4:

*'Pupils have stated the following reasons: other subjects are more useful for their chosen career; too much learning and too many tests; can only choose four optional subjects and there are subjects they enjoy more: Art/PE/Music/Media studies.'*

*'The take-up in our schools has always been rather low. The structure of the new curriculum (two-year Key Stage 3, one-year GCSE, one learning gap year) makes it difficult for pupils to want to choose a language.'*

*'The main reason is the introduction of Welsh as a compulsory GCSE for all pupils. Most pupils do not want to study two languages and cannot see the benefit or the difference of a foreign language. Pupils only have three option choices in the school and these have to be selected from pools. Very often languages are in the same pool as other popular, academic choices so pupils are forced to decide. For example, this year six pupils switched from French to triple science when they found out they could not study both due to pool options.'*

In contrast, 23 per cent of schools have seen numbers rise, and in 15 per cent of schools this rise is by more than 10 per cent. One example of a school which has seen increases is as follows:

*'We are finding more pupils opt for languages. We have changed personnel to a younger team and have had a new HoD in the past two years. We have worked hard to raise the profile of the subject with strong teaching resources and use of IT and creating a fun buzz about the department. We offer more trips – we started a Year 8 trip two years ago and now have our highest ever take-up in Year 10.'*

However, the examples of increasing uptake for MFL are not widespread enough to compensate for the more frequent evidence of decline.

#### **Data for specific languages**

Decreases in numbers for French and German at Key Stage 4 are taking place in large numbers of schools. Nearly half (47 per cent) have either seen decreased numbers for German, or have discontinued it altogether. For French the proportion is slightly lower (40 per cent) but still very significant.

The situation of Spanish is more volatile. Six schools have discontinued Spanish but another six have introduced it as a new language. While around a quarter (26 per cent) of schools have seen decreases in numbers for Spanish at Key Stage 4, a higher proportion (36 per cent) have seen increases.

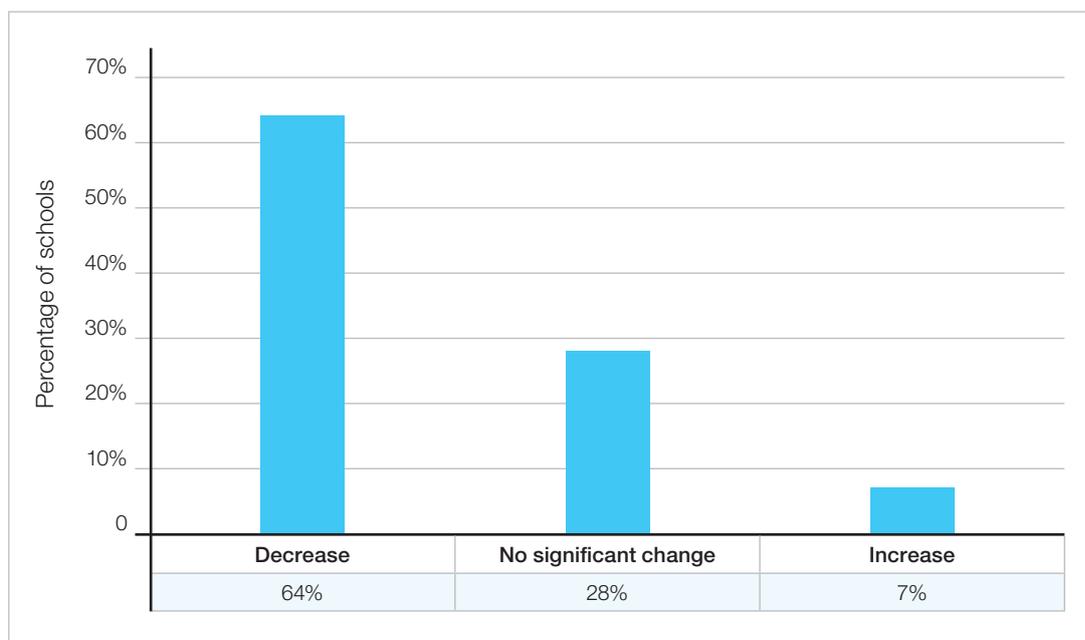
In terms of other languages, one school has discontinued the teaching of Italian at Key Stage 4 and another has seen a decrease in numbers for Latin. Three schools report that they have introduced Chinese as a new subject, usually with the support of the Confucius Institute.

### **4.3 | Post-16**

#### **Changes in pupil take-up for Modern Foreign Languages post-16**

Nearly three quarters of responding schools (71 per cent) have post-16 pupils and their responses in relation to take-up for Modern Foreign Languages post-16 are perhaps the greatest cause for concern to emerge from this survey. As many as 64 per cent of schools have seen numbers decrease, 28 per cent have seen no significant change in numbers over the past three years and only seven schools report increases in numbers for languages post-16. Both bilingual and monolingual schools have been equally affected.

**Figure 6:** Schools reporting increases or decreases in numbers for Modern Foreign Languages post-16 over the last three years



In an increasingly tough financial climate, teachers report pressures on the viability of MFL subjects post-GCSE:

*'The class sizes have dwindled and there isn't currently a class and the worry is that with lower numbers opting for GCSE that the number will unlikely be viable to run a sixth form class in the future.'*

*'The last two years have seen a decrease. Officially foreign languages are not available this year due to numbers. HoD is teaching a small class "off-timetable" to accommodate their wish to learn a language without having to change schools. Languages have always been small classes in this school. We will probably never have a sixth form class again as it is highly unlikely that we will ever have the "right" number of pupils. From a GCSE cohort of 20–30 pupils, which is approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of our year group, we would need 12 pupils to choose a language at A-Level. The system crucifies small schools and pupil choice.'*

*'No change in the take-up, just a change in whether or not we can run the class.'*

As with uptake at Key Stage 4, it is German and French which have been hardest hit by declines post-16, although Spanish has also been badly affected. One third of schools that offered German post-16 (32 per cent) have now discontinued it and more than another third (39 per cent) have seen numbers fall. Ten per cent of schools have completely discontinued the provision of French post-16, in addition to almost half (48 per cent) which have seen numbers decrease. Ten per cent of schools

offering Spanish post-16 have withdrawn from doing so, and another third (37 per cent) have seen numbers fall. A further two schools report that they have discontinued Italian post-16. Comments from respondents highlight the fragile situation of German in particular:

*'German discontinued – consequently, fewer students are opting for German at Key Stage 4 because they know they will have to attend our partner school.'*

*'Spanish is thriving as a GCSE option and numbers are consequently very healthy. The uptake for French is steady but has been impacted on by Spanish and numbers have therefore declined. German is proving to be the least popular subject and most pupils find it difficult. Uptake has declined, particularly since the introduction of Spanish.'*

In an effort to resolve this situation and to continue offering students the widest number of options at A level, many schools are now working in consortia but pupils often have to travel a long way for their classes and are frequently reluctant to attend another school.

#### **Accreditation across the key stages**

GCSE and AS/AL remain the preferred accreditation options for MFL at Key Stage 4 and post-16 respectively. Despite recommendations by Estyn that the Welsh Government should work to include foreign languages in vocational courses,<sup>47</sup> the evidence shows that the numbers doing so are still quite low. At Key Stage 4, some 17 schools (representing 13 per cent of respondents) offer an NVQ in business languages and nine (seven per cent) offer Welsh Baccalaureate foreign language modules.

Apart from these, just one school in each case offers the following:

- Entry level certificate
- FCSE
- IGCSE
- International Baccalaureate
- QCF language units

More than a third of schools with post-16 provision offer MFL modules within the Welsh Baccalaureate.

<sup>47</sup> Estyn (2009)

**Table 2:** Number of responding schools offering different forms of accreditation at each key stage

	Key Stage 3 (n=132)	Key Stage 4 (n=132)	Post-16 (n=95)
GCSE	6	129	2
IGCSE	0	1	0
NVQ business languages	1	17	1
AS	1	3	76
A level	1	3	79
Welsh Baccalaureate (foreign language modules)	1	9	39
QCF language units	1	1	3
Other	3	0	0

A number of respondents are concerned that the Welsh Baccalaureate, which groups all subjects into three ‘pools’ will have a further adverse effect on the take-up for MFL:

*‘The number of option blocks is going to be reduced to three in Key Stage 4 with the implementation of the Welsh Bacc in Key Stage 4. We fear this may well make life even more difficult.’*

*‘There is less choice for pupils since the introduction of the Bacc. At Key Stage 4, only three columns are available to them now.’*

*‘The current Year 9 made their choices at the end of Year 8 but as the Welsh Bacc will be compulsory at Key Stage 4 our students are only allowed to choose three subjects and this has impacted greatly on us.’*

Teachers’ comments highlight the perceived difficulty of GCSEs and A levels in MFL compared to other subjects:

*‘The subject is perceived as too difficult – the access to high GCSE grades seems harder in French than Welsh for example.’*

*‘Students find the [A level] syllabus too demanding and beyond their realm of interest. Expectations are so high from the examiners. There is no comparison between other subjects at this level.’*

*‘Importance of scientific and mathematical subjects. The fact that pupils perceive a foreign language to be difficult in Key Stage 5. Inconsistent results within external examination units in Wales.’*

The introduction of the NVQ in business languages as an option has had variable impact on take-up for MFL:

*'The addition of NVQ business languages has proved very popular and has helped us to retain the lower set students into Key Stage 4. Our take-up is 58 per cent this year which is very pleasing indeed.'*

*'Increase due to NVQ Business French as a short course option but numbers of GCSE students have fallen.'*

#### 4.4 | Foreign languages taught

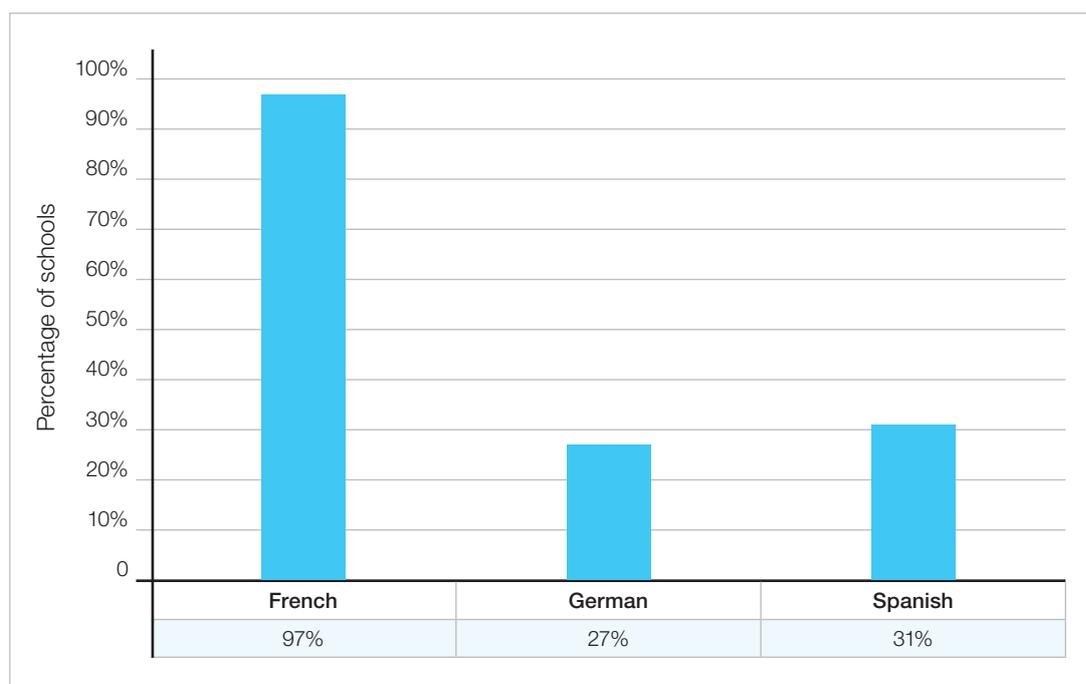
The overall picture is one of mainly French provision, with little diversity. German is taught in around a quarter of schools and Spanish in fewer than half. No schools offer Arabic, Russian, Urdu or Ancient Greek and only a very small number offer lesser taught languages such as Chinese, Italian or Latin.

The qualitative evidence from teachers' comments shows that both lesser taught languages as well as Spanish, German and, occasionally, French are offered within curriculum time but also through classes and clubs which are provided through extra-curricular arrangements.

##### Foreign Languages taught at Key Stage 3

Although the vast majority of Welsh secondary schools teach French at Key Stage 3, slightly fewer than a third (31 per cent) offer Spanish and an even smaller proportion (27 per cent) offer German. Four schools offer Chinese at Key Stage 3, one offers Latin and one Italian, otherwise lesser taught languages tend to be offered on an extra-curricular basis.

**Figure 7:** Percentage of schools teaching French, German or Spanish at Key Stage 3\*

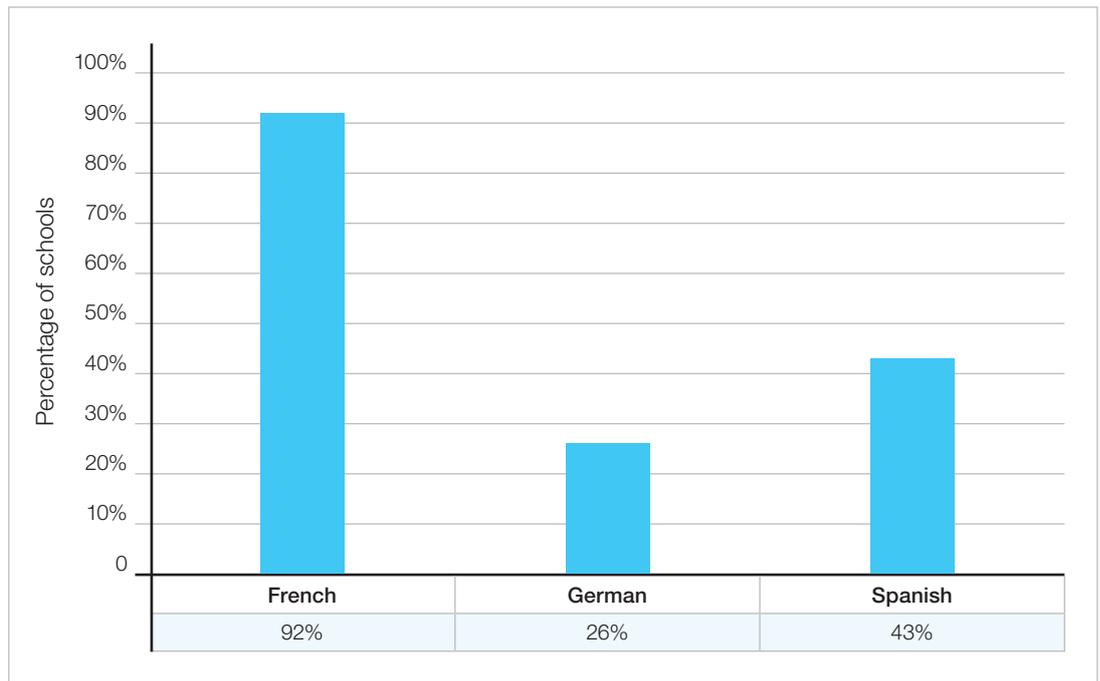


\*Multiple responses permitted

#### Foreign languages taught at Key Stage 4

At Key Stage 4, the picture is very similar to that for Key Stage 3, with the majority of schools teaching French and smaller proportions offering German and Spanish. However, more schools offer Spanish at Key Stage 4 than is the case at Key Stage 3, and slightly fewer schools offer German at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3.

**Figure 8:** Percentage of schools teaching French, German or Spanish at Key Stage 4\*

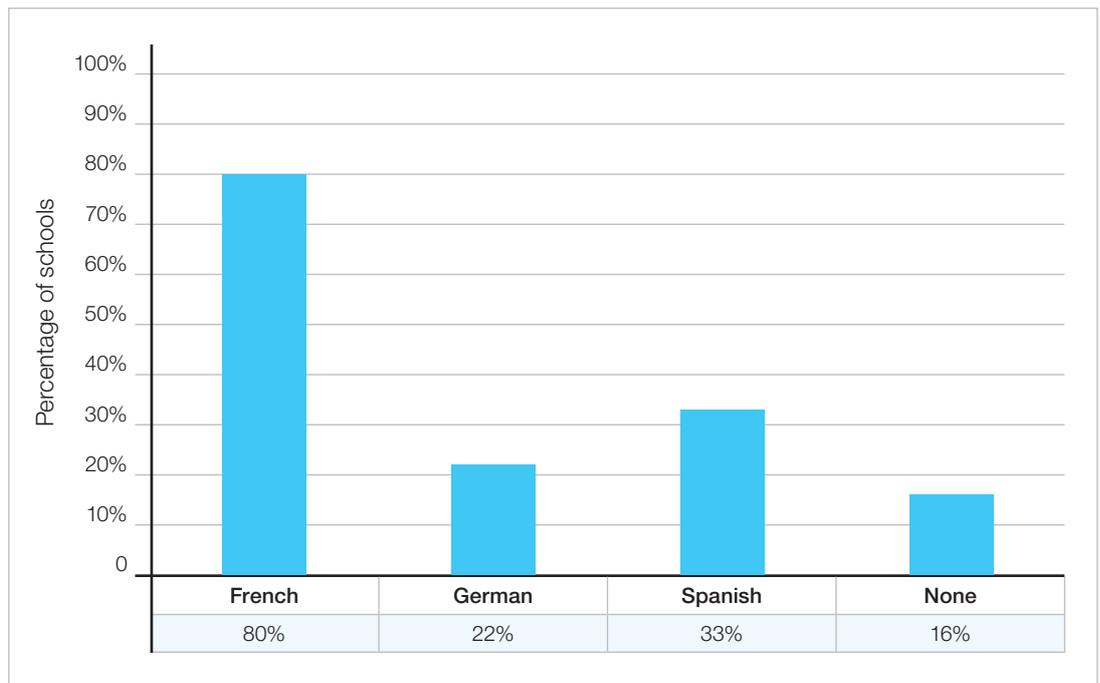


\*Multiple responses permitted

In addition to French, German or Spanish, four schools offer Italian at Key Stage 4, four offer Chinese and two offer Latin.

### Foreign languages taught post-16

**Figure 9:** Schools with post-16 provision teaching French, German, Spanish or no languages\*



\*Multiple responses permitted

Of the responding schools with post-16 provision, some 80 per cent offer French, one third offer Spanish and 22 per cent offer German. As many as 16 per cent offer no opportunity to study a foreign language at this level.

Three schools offer Chinese post-16, two Italian and one Japanese. No schools offer Latin at this level.

### Foreign languages taught outside the curriculum

Just over one third of schools (39 per cent) offer extra-curricular provision in foreign languages, with Spanish, Chinese and Italian the languages most frequently offered in this way.

**Table 3:** Number of schools offering extra-curricular provision in different foreign languages

Arabic	3
French	9
German	9
Italian	10
Japanese	1
Chinese	15
Russian	5
Spanish	25
Urdu	2
Latin	9

There is also qualitative evidence of Bengali and Dutch being taught in extra-curricular classes. The following comments from teachers participating in the survey show some of the extra-curricular arrangements in place to enable pupils to learn a variety of languages:

*'We are in negotiation with the Confucius Institute in Bangor to provide after-school clubs in Mandarin Chinese. Currently we envisage running two sessions, one for Key Stage 3 and one for Key Stages 4 and 5. We envisage the Key Stage 3 sessions to be very cultural rather than purely language learning.'*

*'Extra-curricular MFL is offered to pupils who want to take the language at GCSE but who find they have a clash with other subjects in the option groups. This year for the first time MFL is only taught after school, to four pupils in Year 10. This is because there were too few who opted for it in the option groups. A very small number of other pupils considered (and indeed started) the after-school class but found it too much and have dropped it.'*

*'I teach Spanish to ten pupils in Year 10 every Monday night for an hour and a half. They are preparing for an NVQ qualification in Spanish Language for Business.'*

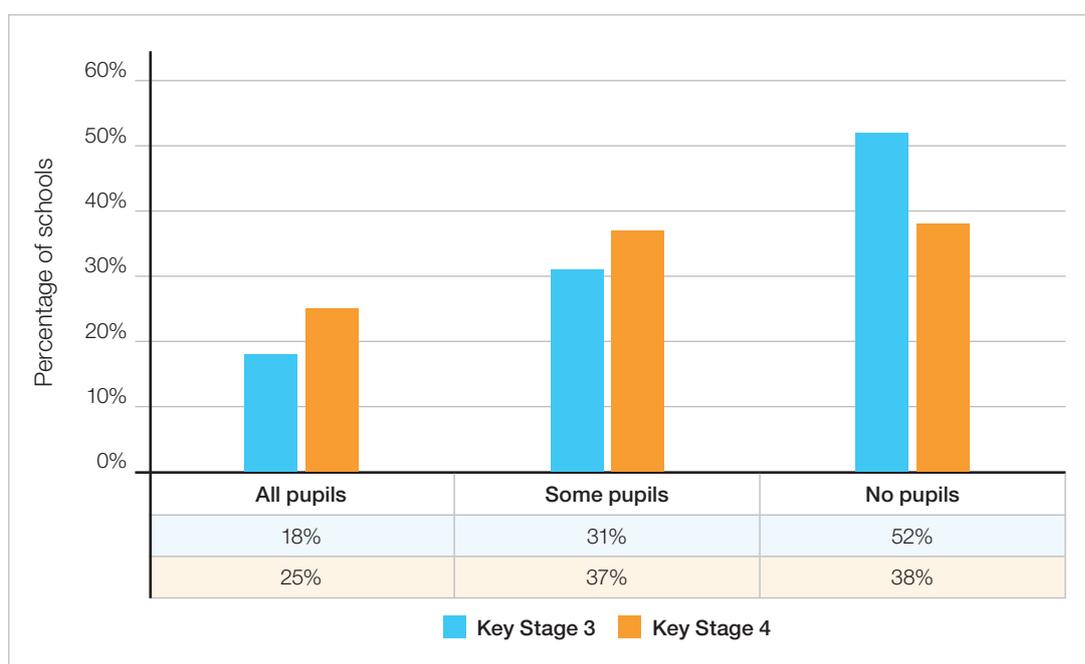
*'Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 have the opportunity to do Latin before school and at lunch times. This is taught by a former Classics lecturer (funded by Classics for All).'*

*'Spanish is taught as a twilight session in Years 10–11, one hour per week straight after school, over two years. We don't have enough time on the timetable to include Spanish! We also offer this to staff and have both teachers and teaching assistants taking the Spanish course. We are a Confucius school and provide some GCSE Mandarin as a consortium of schools, with one after-school session per week.'*

### 4.5 | Opportunities to learn more than one foreign language

With all pupils in Wales already studying both Welsh and English, schools say that there is little curriculum time left over to accommodate one foreign language, let alone two. However, just under half of schools (49 per cent) do offer all or some pupils the opportunity to learn more than one foreign language in Key Stage 3, and 62 per cent do so in Key Stage 4. However, as both the chart and comments below show, this offer is more often only for some pupils than for all:

**Figure 10:** Schools which offer pupils the opportunity to learn more than one foreign language at Key Stages 3 and 4



When these responses are analysed by the socio-economic status of the school, it is apparent that those with low numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals are more likely to offer all or some pupils the opportunity to study two foreign languages. The pattern is the same both for Key Stage 3 and for Key Stage 4.

Teachers' comments provide further detail on the types of arrangements in place for studying more than one foreign language:

*'In Year 7 pupils are taught each of the three languages on a 10-week rotation basis. Pupils with learning difficulties only attend one of the rotations. With the exception of these pupils, all other pupils are required to opt for two MFL to take through to Years 8 and 9.'*

*'All pupils apart from SEN pupils study French and Spanish at Key Stage 3. SEN pupils study French only. Pupils are able to take both French and Spanish at Key Stage 4.'*

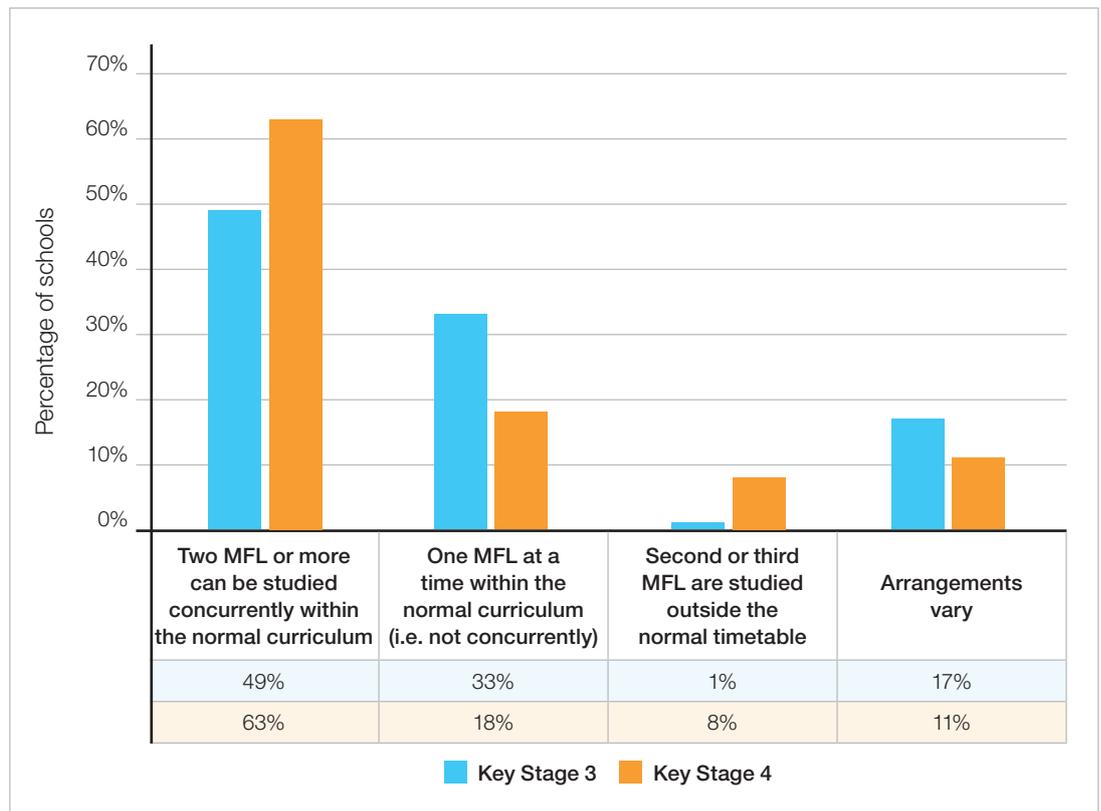
*'In Key Stage 4 pupils are offered the opportunity to study French, Spanish or a combination of the two languages. A GCSE French course is taught. An NVQ Level 2 Spanish course is taught but those pupils who excel in the course get the chance to study for a GCSE Spanish qualification also. During the last four years between 33 and 45 per cent of Key Stage 4 pupils decided to study a foreign language. Because of the nature of the course (paperwork and oral assessments) no more than 15 pupils are allowed to study Spanish.'*

In those schools which offer pupils the opportunity to study more than one foreign language, the most usual model, in both key stages, is for the languages to be studied concurrently. A few schools, however, arrange for second or third foreign languages to be studied outside the normal curriculum, for example:

*'At the end of Key Stage 3 the pupils are offered the opportunity to study GCSE French during school hours and NVQ Spanish in the workplace as another foreign language outside school hours. This is a good offer considering there are only 270 pupils in the whole school, and only one MFL teacher in the school. I very much hope to be able to offer GCSE Spanish to them as well in the future.'*

*'French is taught to all pupils in Key Stage 3. Spanish is offered as a second language to higher achieving pupils in Years 8 and 9. All pupils can opt for French GCSE. Only pupils who studied Spanish at Key Stage 3 can opt for it at Key Stage 4. Italian is open to all in Year 10 as an extra-curricular course but is recommended to more able and talented pupils due to the challenging nature of completing a GCSE from scratch in one year.'*

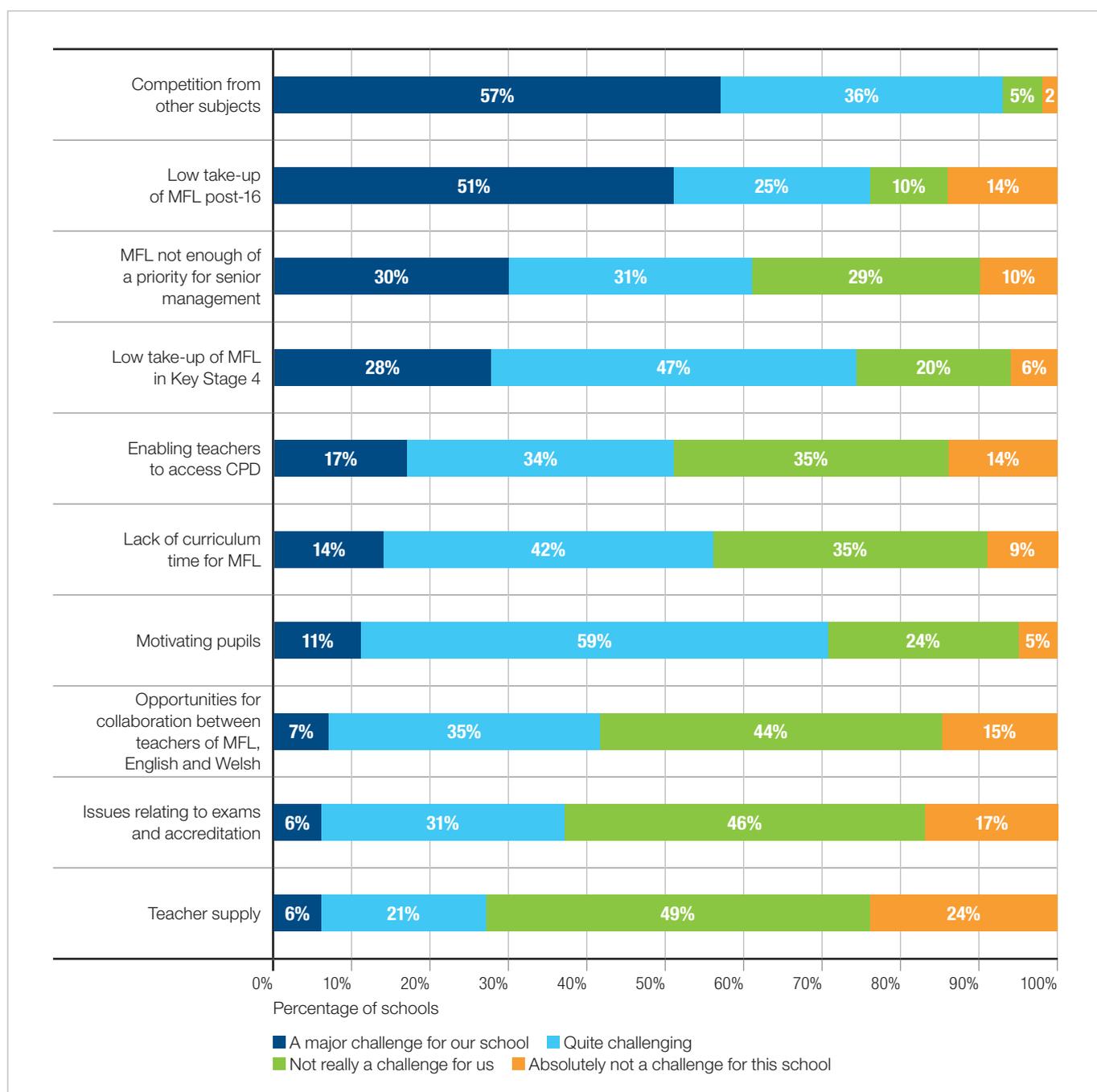
**Figure 11:** Arrangements for pupils to study more than one foreign language at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 (NB: as proportion of schools offering this facility)



### 4.6 | Strengths and challenges

From a prompt list of issues identified by the researchers and advisory group as potential challenges for schools, respondents were asked to say whether each one is in fact a challenge in their school.

Figure 12: Whether various issues are perceived as challenging



The greatest challenge for the largest proportion of schools – a total of 93 per cent, combining those for whom it is either ‘a major challenge’ (57 per cent) or ‘quite challenging’ (36 per cent) – is competition from other subjects. The following sample of comments from responding teachers illustrate this challenge:

*‘The option pool for 2014 contained nine subjects, two of which were French and Spanish. Competition from other subjects particularly those which are new at Key Stage 4 is an issue. Pupils tend to choose subjects which they feel are an easier option. They consider languages to be difficult and are put off by having to sit two controlled assessment oral tests worth 30 per cent.’*

*‘Universities accept Welsh in place of another MFL where an MFL is a requirement. Pupils don’t want to study two foreign languages: Welsh and French/Italian. Welsh is compulsory to GCSE.’*

*‘Pupils are actively encouraged to opt for subjects other than MFL. No consideration is given to the importance of languages for pupils with the potential to go on to the Russell Group universities. Their choices are purely based on the benefit to the school’s statistics, so pupils are encouraged to opt for less academic subjects where they are guaranteed to attain A\*-C.’*

Although the level of concern about the place of MFL in relation to other subjects is high in all types of school, Welsh-medium schools are more likely to rate it as no more than ‘quite challenging’ (48 per cent), with just 39 per cent finding it a ‘major challenge’. This compares with 58 per cent of English-medium schools and 90 per cent of bilingual schools who regard competition from other subjects as a ‘major challenge’. However, this correlation may be due to socio-economic factors rather than as a consequence of the language of instruction, as Welsh-medium schools participating in the survey were almost all distributed in the mid to high quintiles and there were no Welsh-medium schools in the most deprived socio-economic category.

Another major concern for respondents is the low take-up of MFL post-16 and at Key Stage 4. Three quarters (76 per cent) of survey participants see take-up for MFL post-16 as either ‘a major challenge’ (51 per cent) or ‘quite challenging’ (25 per cent). Teachers in Welsh-medium schools are less likely to see post-16 take-up of MFL as a challenge than are teachers in other types of school (68 per cent compared to 90 per cent of respondents from bilingual schools and 75 per cent in English-medium schools). This again may be the result of socio-economic factors rather than the language of instruction.

A sample of teachers’ comments expressing concern at the low levels of take-up at A level are as follows:

*‘Languages are considered hard by pupils and SLT, especially French. Pupils are often discouraged from choosing French. Spanish has a reputation of being easier and pupils are attracted more to the Spanish way of life. A levels are considered very challenging and SLT has been known to tell students that they would not be able to get their target grades in French and may need to consider other options if they needed A grades for university entry.’*

*‘Exams are much more difficult compared to other “less challenging” subjects. This puts pupils off continuing to A Level.’*

*'Pupil perception is that languages are hard. Those who want to become doctors and vets are under pressure to get A\*s in every subject.'*

A similar proportion (74 per cent) of teachers are concerned about low take-up at Key Stage 4, although the latter is more often seen as 'quite challenging' than as 'a major challenge'. Teachers in bilingual schools are more likely to see take-up at Key Stage 4 as a challenge – a third see it as a 'major challenge' and nearly half see it as 'quite challenging'.

Sixty-one per cent of responding schools say that MFL is not enough of a priority for the senior managers in their schools. Responses to this question are noticeably more vehement from English-medium and bilingual schools than from Welsh-medium schools. While 30 per cent of respondents from English-medium schools and 43 per cent from bilingual schools say this is a 'major challenge', only 17 per cent of respondents from Welsh-medium schools see this as a major concern and fewer than half (48 per cent) rate the competing priorities of senior managers as either 'quite challenging' or 'a major challenge', compared to an average of 61 per cent across all types of school. Once again, socio-economic rather than other factors may be involved here.

Motivating pupils is seen as 'quite challenging' in 59 per cent of schools, and 'a major challenge' in 11 per cent of schools. There do not appear to be major differences between different types of school in the response to this question. One respondent comments:

*'Pupils cannot see how languages benefit them, neither can some parents.'*

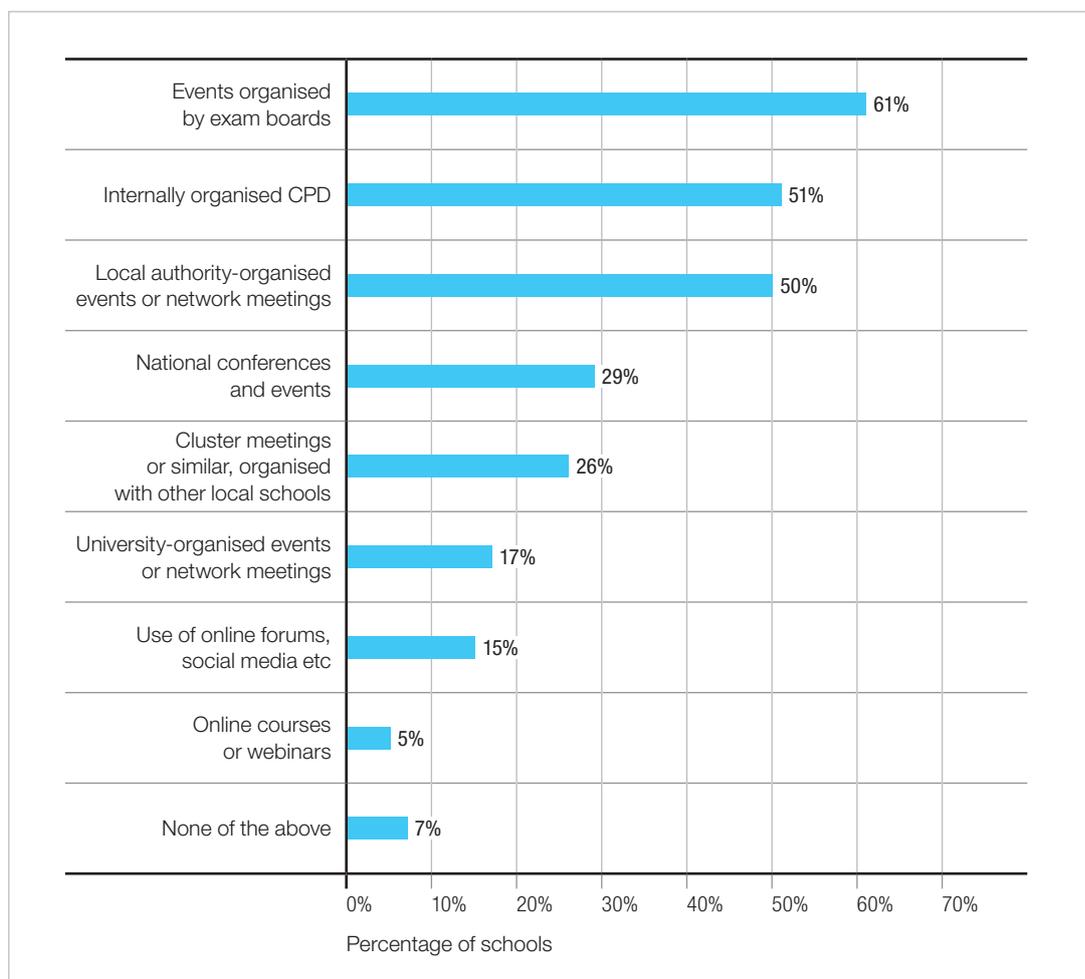
Teacher supply, issues relating to examinations and accreditation as well as opportunities for collaboration between teachers of MFL, English and Welsh, are less likely to be seen as challenges. The challenge of finding opportunities for collaboration between teachers of different languages is more likely to be highlighted by teachers working in Welsh-medium or bilingual schools (52 and 57 per cent respectively) than those working in English-medium schools (35 per cent). Although numbers are small, there is some indication that Welsh-medium schools may be finding the issue of teacher supply in MFL more challenging than other types of school. Three out of the 23 Welsh-medium schools say teacher supply is a 'major challenge', compared to just one of the 21 bilingual schools and four of the 89 English-medium schools who express such a high degree of concern about this issue.

#### 4.7 | Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers

##### **What types of CPD for languages have teachers in MFL departments attended in the past year?**

Although the vast majority of MFL departments (93 per cent) have participated in some form of CPD in the past year, the qualitative evidence suggests that most of the training being provided is of a generic nature or based on national priorities rather than being subject specific. The most common form of CPD participation is in events organised by examination boards (61 per cent of schools), followed by internally organised CPD (51 per cent) and meetings or events organised by local authorities (50 per cent). Just under a third of MFL departments have been represented at national conferences and events for languages, and around a quarter have attended cluster meetings or similar with other local schools.

Figure 13: Types of CPD attended by MFL teachers in the past year\*



\*Multiple responses permitted

Describing the CPD situation in their own particular school, many respondents comment on growing funding constraints for CPD or the fact that the only CPD to which they have access relates to issues to do with teaching in general rather than training aimed at developing subject specific skills. For example:

*'Internal CPD events... focus on whole school issues and national priorities.'*

*'Only general LA/exam board CPD is allocated.'*

The most frequently mentioned exception to this is the training events, networking opportunities and conferences organised specifically for MFL teachers by CILT Cymru for which there is much praise, for example:

*'CPD provided by CILT Cymru was fantastic and shared with the Welsh department. We have implemented many of the ideas put forward for raising the attainment of boys.'*

In light of the Welsh Government's decision to cease funding CILT Cymru and change the way in which specialist CPD for MFL teachers will be delivered in future, it would be interesting to explore the issue of CPD in greater detail to ensure that teachers of MFL in Welsh secondary schools are able to maintain the highest level of professional practice and competence in the languages they teach.

Use of online forums and courses, webinars and social media for languages CPD is relatively infrequent in Wales. Comments from a very small minority of teachers responding to the survey show the pros and cons of this training medium:

*'Not enough teachers in Wales on Twitter – promoting this needs to be looked at nationally.'*

*'Online fora and social media CPD has to be done in our own time.'*

The qualitative evidence available from the survey also shows that many schools struggle to release teachers for CPD because of financial/budgetary constraints as well as workload issues:

*'Budget constraints have limited CPD opportunities for staff. Much work has been done internally.'*

*'Any language-based CPD: very useful indeed e.g. CILT meeting to promote languages. Due to financial pressures/cover cost, we are only "allowed out" if there are no cover implications.'*

*'All are useful, but as with everything, time constraints and workload make it difficult to implement new ideas.'*

#### 4.8 | Key points

- Almost one third of schools (29 per cent) disapply pupils or groups of pupils from studying a foreign language at Key Stage 3. This is as a result of an increasing emphasis on English and mathematics.
- Despite Estyn guidelines in relation to curriculum time for foreign languages, as many as 43 per cent of schools have reduced lesson time for MFL languages over the last three years.
- While 50 per cent of schools report that some pupils coming to them from Key Stage 2 have had exposure to a foreign language other than Welsh or English, they have found that their knowledge is rarely more than a few words or phrases. Pupils with more than this are most likely to come from England or from abroad.
- The vast majority of schools (93 per cent) have Modern Foreign Languages as optional at Key Stage 4 for all pupils. In 39 per cent of schools not all pupils who wish to study a foreign language have the opportunity to do so.
- Nearly half of responding schools (47 per cent) report declining numbers for MFL at Key Stage 4, and in one in five schools this decline is by 10 per cent or more of pupils. Some schools, however, are working hard to raise the profile of the subject and have managed to increase numbers.

- The reasons for the decrease in the study of foreign languages at Key Stage 4 are seen as the perceived difficulty of language examinations in relation to those in other subjects and the number of subjects on offer in relation to the space available in the curriculum to accommodate free choices. Teachers also see the Welsh Baccalaureate as very likely to adversely affect the future take-up of MFL due to the way in which study options are grouped.
- The number of schools offering vocational alternatives to GCSE accreditation for foreign languages remains small: some 13 per cent of schools offer NVQ business languages and seven per cent offer foreign language modules within the Welsh Baccalaureate as alternatives to GCSE at Key Stage 4.
- As many as 64 per cent of schools have seen a decrease in the numbers of students opting to take an A level in a foreign language over the past three years. Three quarters of respondents see low take-up of Modern Foreign Languages at post-16 as a challenging issue, even more than those who are concerned about take-up for MFL in Key Stage 4. This is perhaps the most serious finding to emerge from the survey.
- Competition and prioritisation of other subjects and the low take-up of MFL generally, are seen as pressing concerns by a substantial majority of schools. As many as 61 per cent say that foreign languages are not enough of a priority for the senior managers in their schools.
- French is overwhelmingly the main foreign language taught in Wales; fewer than half of schools offer Spanish and only around one quarter offer German. Nearly half (49 per cent) offer some opportunities to learn a second foreign language, with opportunities to do so being associated with schools working in more privileged circumstances.
- A range of factors are limiting the extent and effectiveness of CPD for MFL teachers.

# 5

## The impact of bilingualism

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Wales is in a unique position among UK countries in that all children are taught two languages, both English and Welsh, throughout their primary and secondary education. A French review of research on the inter-connection between first language development and the learning of a foreign language found that, while literacy in the mother tongue supports the learning of a foreign language, learning a foreign language also helps the mother tongue.<sup>48</sup> The Language Trends survey explores both these aspects in the context of bilingualism in Wales.

The 2009 Estyn report on Modern Foreign Languages highlighted the need to harness the benefits of Wales' commitment to bilingualism in relation to the learning of foreign languages, and called for greater collaboration between teachers of all languages.<sup>49</sup> It reported very favourably on the outcomes of CILT Cymru's Triple Literacy project (2005–2007) which had enabled teachers of Welsh, English and Modern Foreign Languages to work together on common approaches and to share ideas on how to improve pupils' understanding of language concepts. In response to Estyn's report, the Welsh Government published guidelines and recommendations for approaches to triple literacy in Key Stages 2 and 3.<sup>50</sup>

The Language Trends survey therefore wanted to explore on the one hand teachers' views as to the extent to which the teaching of both Welsh and English in primary schools is perceived as an advantage when children are later taught a third or even fourth language, and correspondingly whether the learning of a foreign language is seen as contributing to the new aspirations for literacy in English and Welsh as defined in the LNF.<sup>51</sup>

Given that some children receive tuition bilingually in both Welsh and English, and that most but not necessarily all children in Welsh-medium schools are bilingual, this research sought to unravel the inherent complexities in relation to the impact of this on the learning of foreign languages. The survey also explored whether, and to what extent, teachers of languages, including Welsh and English, share professional practice with one another.

<sup>48</sup> Nancy-Combes et al. (2007)

<sup>49</sup> Estyn (2009)

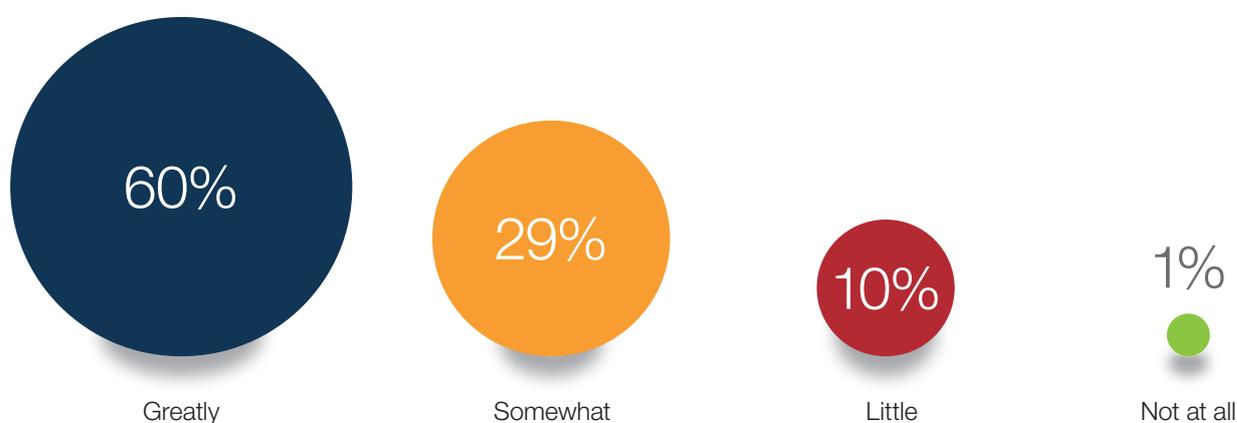
<sup>50</sup> Welsh Government (2011)

<sup>51</sup> Welsh Government (2013)

### 5.1 | Perceptions of benefits

Do teachers think that pupils benefit in learning a third or fourth language from having learned both Welsh and English in primary school?

**Figure 14:** Whether MFL teachers think that learning both Welsh and English in primary school benefits the learning of new languages



The vast majority – roughly nine out of ten – of Modern Foreign Language teachers, believe that learning both English and Welsh in primary school benefits pupils when it comes to learning another language in secondary school, and nearly two thirds (60 per cent) think it is of great benefit.

Evidence from our research shows that Welsh-medium schools and bilingual schools are more likely than English-medium schools to place a higher value on these benefits. All the bilingual schools which took part in the survey, and all but one of the Welsh-medium schools, state that learning both Welsh and English benefits pupils ‘somewhat’ or ‘greatly’. In contrast, 85 per cent of English-medium schools say this. Welsh-medium and bilingual schools are also more likely to say that pupils benefit ‘greatly’ (70 per cent and 73 per cent respectively) compared to only 54 per cent of English-medium schools who see this benefit as ‘great’. However, because of the small number of schools involved, care must be taken in interpreting these findings.

One respondent from a bilingual school comments:

*‘The opportunity to review basic grammatical points, like the appropriate use of capitals, verb forms, adjectives, apostrophes and accents, and so on. The opportunity to consider the correct structure of sentences in different languages. The opportunity to develop the skill of using context to work out the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. They already understand how to make the mental switch between one language and another, and are already aware of the fact that different languages express the same ideas in different ways – studying a foreign language adds to this understanding and awareness.’*

Comments from teachers in Welsh-medium schools identify the following specific ways in which the learning of Welsh and English in primary schools helps the learning of a foreign language at a later stage:

*'Pupils have a better knowledge of how to put words in order. The difference between "ti" and "chi" in Welsh makes it easier to understand "tu" and "vous" in French.'*

*'Speaking two languages makes the pupils more confident whilst learning a further language. However, the benefits should be much greater. Welsh and English are not taught as languages, so pupils have little knowledge of grammatical concepts which would be transferable to the learning of other languages.'*

*'As I am a teacher in a specifically Welsh comprehensive school, I teach bilingual children. The fact that they already speak two languages helps them to think about their third language, without doubt. The fact that they have learned a second language makes it easier for them to learn a third and fourth language. In the words of a pupil from Year 13, "learning the tenses of verbs and learning verbs comes easily to me because I have been thinking of the difference and the similarity between them in Welsh and English for years. Some words are like Welsh words and others like English ones, which makes it easier to learn them!" Generally, they have a superb French/Spanish accent, and their understanding of the subject is very good. Because they switch from one language to the other all the time, speaking a third language, and being confident in it, comes easily to them, I am convinced!'*

However, one respondent from a Welsh-medium school expresses the view that the way that English and Welsh are taught in primary schools does not necessarily provide language learning skills which can be applied to other languages:

*'I don't find that having learnt English and Welsh in primary benefits foreign language learning. They are not given the language skills needed to succeed easily in a foreign language.'*

This particular view is echoed in the comments of a number of respondents from English-medium schools:

*'Pupils still don't know what a verb, adjective, noun etc is. Punctuation can be a problem.'*

*'In principle exposure to one foreign language at an early age should help the acquisition of further foreign languages later on but I know little of how much children can do in Welsh when they arrive from an English-medium primary school. This will surely depend on the quality of provision for Welsh as a second language in the primaries – from the experience of my own children possibly the answer in an English-speaking area with an English-medium primary school is not a huge amount.'*

*'Not much knowledge about grammar from primary, little awareness of how English/Welsh work.'*

*'It generally does not. They usually have poor or very little Welsh, with no consistency between what is being taught in the primaries.'*

*'I cannot detect a greater understanding of language despite doing these two subjects. The pupils do not appear to "carry" forth a general knowledge of structure or grammar into secondary. I feel that it is all piecemeal. Their real practical use of Welsh is very patchy.'*

However, some teachers in English-medium schools feel that where pupils have had a good experience of learning Welsh second language in primary school, this is beneficial to them when they come to learn a foreign language:

*'Bilingual pupils have a far more positive approach to learning French in our school. We have a bilingual class in Year 7 who consistently perform higher than the other classes.'*

*'Pupils can make the language links. Grammar becomes clearer. Triple literacy improves English literacy. Metalanguage is learnt, making grammar easier.'*

*'We find that pupils who have learned Welsh in the primary phase are very accepting of learning a new language in secondary. They have the skills needed to learn another language and don't question why they should have to learn another language so much.'*

*'Already having knowledge of other language(s) opens the mind to similarities and differences in new ones. Adjectival agreement and position/gender of nouns etc.'*

*'It would be even more beneficial if those languages were taught grammatically, and the pupils were initiated to the basics of grammar, including specific terminology.'*

Where Welsh second language has not been taught well, some respondents feel this can have a negative effect on pupils' motivation to learn another language:

*'It can lead to an indifference towards language learning after not wholly positive experiences of learning Welsh in primary school.'*

*'Living in a largely anglicised area, the teaching of Welsh in primary schools often has a negative effect on the teaching of MFL. A proportion of English parents, having moved into Wales, see Welsh as a foreign language and this negative mind set towards languages persists as the pupils enter high school.'*

However, in other schools, a negative experience of learning Welsh second language in primary school does not translate into a reluctance to learn other languages:

*'Unfortunately, a lot of pupils have had a negative experience of learning Welsh in primary school. Pupils are always enthused by learning French and relieved to experience language learning differently.'*

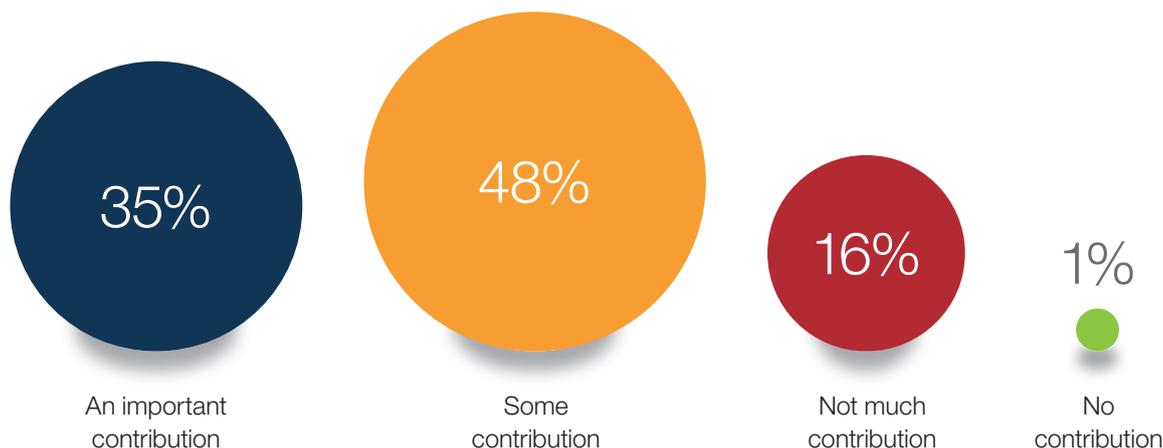
*'Having learnt both Welsh and English does not seem to benefit the learning of languages as pupils often resent the learning of Welsh. Most enjoy a foreign language much more and often claim it to be more useful than Welsh (views we do NOT share of course!).'*

## 5.2 | Contribution to literacy

### Are Modern Foreign Languages considered to contribute to literacy in English and Welsh?

The benefit of a connection between English/Welsh and foreign language learning was then explored from the point of view of the potential value of MFL to children's overall literacy. Respondents were asked to what extent MFL is considered in their school to support the wider agenda of developing literacy skills in Welsh and English, as defined by the LNF. The vast majority of respondents (83 per cent) report that MFL is considered to make at least some contribution in their school; however, it is only considered to make an important contribution in one third of schools (35 per cent). In 16 per cent of schools MFL is not thought to make much contribution and in one school (rounded up to one per cent) the respondent reports that MFL is not considered to make any contribution at all.

**Figure 15:** Whether schools consider that Modern Foreign Languages contribute towards the development of literacy skills in Welsh and English



Respondents from bilingual schools (bilingual and English with significant Welsh) are slightly less likely than those from Welsh- or English-medium schools (73 per cent versus 91 and 84 per cent respectively) to say that the learning of a foreign language is considered to make a contribution to literacy skills, though numbers are small and it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions based on the type of school. Comments from teachers in bilingual schools support this interpretation of the data:

*'I think the extent to which MFL can contribute to the LNF is undervalued due to the lack of understanding of the subject by SLT.'*

*'Annoys me greatly that our County Advisor told me in an INSET [that] French isn't part of the LNF.'*

Although MFL teachers in Welsh-medium schools are most likely to say that their subject is considered to make 'some' contribution to literacy skills (65 per cent, compared to 46 and 41 per cent for English-medium and bilingual schools respectively), they are the least likely to say that it is considered to make 'an important contribution' (26 per cent, compared to 37 and 32 per cent in English-medium and bilingual schools). A number of comments from teachers in Welsh-medium schools indicate that the role of the MFL department can be rather marginalised with respect to the development of literacy:

*'We don't have any language consultants, and the language teachers have had no training in boosting literacy skills, so as Welsh and English are the languages of the literacy leaders in the school, MFL is rather in the background at the moment.'*

*'Not enough – our department has been chosen to report back on numeracy not literacy!'*

*'We frequently feel second class to Welsh and English as MFL are not core subjects.'*

However, there is also evidence of good practice:

*'We are encouraged and supported to ensure that MFL supports the wider agenda to develop literacy skills as defined by the Literacy Framework.'*

Comments in particular from teachers in English-medium schools provide evidence of a certain amount of confusion as regards the definition of 'literacy' and whether it is understood to include skills in languages other than English and Welsh:

*'We are charged with delivering some of the literacy strands but we are under the impression that "literacy" refers to a learner's first languages.'*

*'Other staff are of the view that MFL makes no contribution to literacy teaching because we are teaching another language. The impact that we are able to have on literacy skills is completely undervalued.'*

*'MFL is considered to benefit literacy in the same way as other non-core subjects only. There is little understanding or interest in developing MFL in a specific way for this purpose. Within the MFL Department we of course focus very much on developing literacy, e.g. by sound spellings, reading strategies, comparative grammar etc.'*

However, MFL teachers are very aware of the contribution they make, not only to literacy but also to numeracy:

*'I think they acknowledge our contribution but I'm not sure how much colleagues realise how much we contribute to literacy and numeracy! Especially when teaching pupils how to tell the time before teaching it in French, or telling Year 7s what singular and plural means in English because they don't understand the concept of it!'*

*'We feel that as language teachers we use more grammatical terminology than English teachers and often have to explain the terminology to the pupils. We are pushing for our role within the LNF and within developing literacy skills to be recognised more.'*

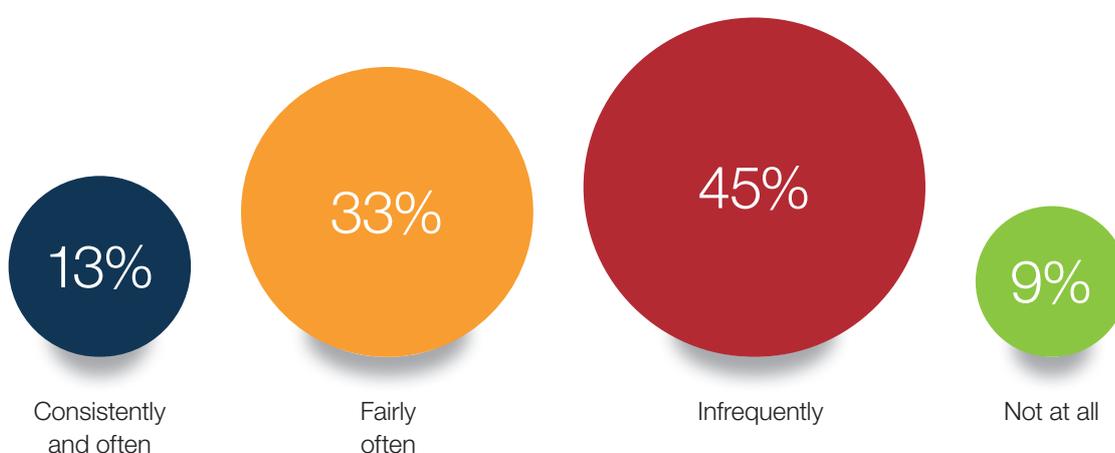
*'Clearly the teaching of MFL has a massive contribution to the development of our pupils' literacy skills. However, due to the low acquisition of language in Key Stage 3, we are not reporting against the LNF on Literacy.'*

### 5.3 | Shared practice with teachers of Welsh and English

#### Do Modern Foreign Languages teachers share practice with teachers of Welsh and English?

Fewer than half (46 per cent) of schools provide regular opportunities for MFL teachers and teachers of Welsh and English to share professional practice with one another; 45 per cent do so infrequently and nine per cent not at all.

**Figure 16:** Whether Modern Foreign Languages teachers share practice with teachers of Welsh and English



Analysis of responses by type of school shows that MFL teachers in bilingual (and English with significant Welsh) schools are less likely to share practice with teachers of English and Welsh than are those in monolingual schools. None of the teachers from bilingual schools say they share practice 'consistently and often' and they are more likely to do so 'infrequently' or 'not at all'. However, there were no comments on this topic from teachers in bilingual schools.

Teachers in Welsh-medium schools highlight the difficulties of sharing professional practice, but note that the LNF is now creating opportunities for exchange:

*'Time pressure makes sharing practice difficult in a small school.'*

*'We have little or no contact with the English department and very little sharing of good practice takes place with Welsh, even though we make up one faculty. The literacy framework and its implementation is bringing about more discussion, though.'*

*'Good practice was shared more in the past but with the introduction of the Literacy Framework, the school organises pedagogy meetings quite regularly so that we can compare pupils' progress from the viewpoint of Literacy, as well as sharing good practice.'*

One respondent comments that:

*'Methods of teaching a first language are different to methods of teaching a foreign language.'*

Modern Foreign Language teachers from English-medium schools are more likely to share professional practice with colleagues teaching Welsh second language than they are with teachers in the English department:

*'MFL and Welsh always share good practice as we are part of a closely working faculty. We do not, however, work closely with English.'*

*'At the school, we do enjoy very good working relations with the Welsh department, and curriculum matters are often discussed on an informal basis. There are numerous examples of sharing of good practice between the French, Spanish and Welsh departments.'*

*'There is likely to be some change in this position in the near future as we are doing some trio working with staff from both departments and under the restructuring that is proposed Welsh and French will be grouped as a language faculty with one Head of Faculty overseeing work in both departments.'*

*'Up until this year Welsh, French, German and Spanish had been in the MFL Faculty under the guidance of the Head of Faculty. We do not have any links with the English Department. As language teachers we share good practice at faculty meetings and have produced quadruple literacy posters on verbs, connectives, adjectives and time phrases. As we have some Welsh teachers teaching French this year this is more crossover occurring.'*

Projects run by CILT Cymru have done much to encourage the notion of 'triple literacy' and have provided opportunities for departments to work together:

*'Within the school sharing is good with Welsh but this has only improved since we are part of a CILT working party on the LNF.'*

*'We have held successful training sessions with Welsh and MFL involved in assessment for learning, and triple literacy meetings for English, Welsh, French to look at Tactical Teach methods for raising reading standards. This has been quite in depth at the time but lack of time makes it difficult to meet on an ongoing regular basis.'*

However, other comments show that there is a gulf in some schools between the teaching of MFL and English/Welsh:

*'The Welsh department teach in a very different way to us so we tend not to discuss methodology much with them.'*

*'The English Department don't see the nuts and bolts of language (grammar) as part of their job. There is some cross-fertilisation with Welsh, but we are all busy people. I tried to get a Triple Literacy Professional Learning Community off the ground with a colleague from both the Welsh and English departments, but there was a lack of interest and enthusiasm for the project.'*

## 5.4 | Key points

- As many as 89 per cent of MFL teachers believe that learning both English and Welsh in primary school benefits pupils when it comes to learning a foreign language in secondary school, and nearly two thirds (60 per cent) think it is of great benefit. However, many teachers believe that the benefit of bilingualism can only be achieved if pupils have had a high quality of Welsh teaching in primary school – many comment that this has not been the case with the result that pupils struggle with language learning.
- Similarly, the vast majority of teachers (83 per cent) responding to this survey report that MFL is considered to make at least some contribution to literacy in their school; however, they are only considered to make an important contribution in one third of schools (35 per cent).  
In 16 per cent of schools MFL is not thought to make much contribution and in one school (rounded up to one per cent) the respondent reports that it is not considered to make any contribution at all. The comments made by many teachers participating in this survey suggest that there is considerable confusion in schools about the role foreign languages can play in supporting the development of literacy and the way in which they can contribute to the LNF.
- Although the survey provides some evidence that the contribution of Welsh and English to the learning of foreign languages tends to be more highly valued in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools, awareness of the corresponding value of MFL in relation to general literacy is less pronounced and appears to be to be less highly valued in Welsh-medium schools than in English-medium schools.
- Fewer than half (46 per cent) of schools provide regular opportunities for teachers of MFL, Welsh and English to share professional practice with one another. Some 45 per cent do so infrequently and nine per cent do not do so at all. In some English-medium schools, there is evidence of successful collaboration between teachers of Welsh second language and MFL.

# 6

## Conclusions

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### **1. Modern Foreign Languages are being increasingly marginalised as a result of a number of changes being made by schools in response to challenges they face. These include financial and timetabling pressures as well as new assessment systems and reporting requirements.**

The overall picture for foreign language learning in Welsh schools is one of attrition, with little prospect of improvement or of the decline being stemmed. If Professor Davies has noted that it is the 'eleventh hour' for Welsh second language, then it is also getting very late for foreign languages. There is no sense of dynamism or confidence about the direction of the subject and what the future holds.

The reduction in lesson time for MFL at Key Stage 3, the place of MFL as an optional subject within a vast choice of other options and the lack of opportunities in Key Stage 4 for all pupils who wish to study a foreign language, all add to the impression that the subject is marginal within the Welsh education system. Unlike in England and Scotland, there is no policy to start learning a foreign language earlier than age 11, with the implication that Wales is likely to fall even further behind in future. This could have serious implications for the comparability of Welsh and English GCSEs in Modern Foreign Languages.

In Key Stage 3, the only education phase at which the study of a foreign language in Wales is compulsory, many pupils are receiving only a minimal or fragmented experience of foreign language learning. When pupils choose their GCSE subjects, Modern Foreign Languages fare badly as they are seen as more difficult than many other subjects, unpredictable in terms of delivering the top grades needed for continuing to A levels and not as important for future careers as STEM subjects. Many teachers responding to the Language Trends survey also express a concern that the new grouping of subject options for the Welsh Baccalaureate will have a further adverse effect on take-up of Modern Foreign Languages.

The situation at post-16 is of even greater concern. The numbers of young people choosing to take a foreign language at A level have always been small but as many as 64 per cent of schools report that they have seen a decrease in the already small numbers of students opting to take an A level in MFL over the past three years. The very low numbers of students opting for MFL mean that, in many cases, courses are becoming financially unviable. Other issues contributing to the decline in numbers at A level are the greater difficulty of A level examinations in MFL compared to those for other subjects and students' need to be more certain of achieving the highest grades at A level in order to take up university places.

The new curriculum proposed by Professor Donaldson has the potential to bring all language subjects closer together and enable children in Wales to become confident users of three or more languages. However, without clear direction and guidance for schools, it also risks Modern Foreign Languages becoming even more marginalised as a subject, as schools increase their focus on Welsh and English.

## 2. The considerable benefits of bilingualism which Wales has at its disposal are not being fully exploited in schools to facilitate the learning of third or fourth languages.

The abundant evidence from academic research that bilingualism facilitates the learning of further languages<sup>52</sup> is likely to lead one to expect significant numbers of pupils in Welsh schools opting to learn third or fourth languages as well as a high success rate in languages examinations. However, available quantitative data shows quite the reverse to be the case, with Wales, in fact, having the lowest level of take-up for foreign languages at Key Stage 4 of all four UK countries.

The Language Trends survey shows that as many as 90 per cent of MFL teachers believe that learning both English and Welsh in primary school benefits pupils when it comes to learning a foreign language in secondary school, and nearly two thirds (60 per cent) describe it as of 'great benefit'. However, the qualitative data gathered in the course of this research reveals that many teachers believe that the potential benefit of bilingualism can only be realised if pupils receive a high quality of Welsh teaching in primary school and many comment that because this has not been the case, pupils struggle with learning a foreign language in secondary school. Respondents to the Language Trends survey also find that the teaching of Welsh in primary schools does not appear to be aimed at the development of wider language learning skills and cite this as one of the reasons why previous language learning experiences cannot be built on in Key Stages 3 and 4.

The survey reveals that English, Welsh and MFL are regarded by most schools as quite separate subjects without the potential for collaboration or common approaches to teaching. These disparities lead to a lack of opportunities for teachers to exchange good professional practice and the perception that, despite official guidelines, MFL has nothing to do with literacy in English or Welsh. This impacts on pupils' ability to carry over learning from one language to another. Our research shows that fewer than half (46 per cent) of schools provide regular opportunities for teachers of MFL, Welsh and English to share professional practice with one another.

The introduction of a new curriculum which places English, Welsh and MFL within the same area of study, provides an opportunity to remedy this.

## 3. The contribution which foreign language learning can make to enhancing pupils' literacy is not valued and MFL is not seen by many schools as central to achieving the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) goals.

Both the Welsh Government and Estyn have issued guidance and recommendations on the development of common practices between teachers of MFL, Welsh and English.<sup>53</sup> The innovative Triple Literacy project implemented by CILT Cymru in schools across Wales from 2005 to 2007, did much to foster collaboration between teachers of different languages all working towards improving pupils' general literacy skills and was cited on a number of occasions by respondents to the Language Trends survey. It is pleasing, therefore, to see that the vast majority of teachers (83 per cent) responding to the Language Trends survey report that Modern Foreign Languages are considered to make at least some contribution to literacy development in their school. However, the contribution of MFL to general literacy is only considered to be 'important' in one third of schools (35 per cent) and as many as 16 per cent of schools do not see MFL as making much contribution to literacy. It is interesting to note that there is a greater awareness of the benefits of learning both Welsh and English in the teaching of a foreign language, than there is of the notion that this can also work in the opposite direction. This may reflect the fact that the link between foreign languages and literacy is not made explicitly in the LNF documentation; however, there is certainly plenty in the

<sup>52</sup> See introduction to Chapter 5, page 46.

<sup>53</sup> Welsh Government (2011); Estyn (2009)

LNf documentation to encourage schools to involve MFL in their work to develop pupils' literacy. While the cross-curricular working advocated in the official LNf documentation for schools ought to counter isolationist practices, qualitative evidence gathered as part of this research suggests that schools are confused about the role that MFL has to play in the development of pupils' general literacy. Teachers participating in this research, however, provide plenty of evidence that much of the activity pupils undertake in MFL classrooms supports wider literacy, including sound/spelling links, reading strategies, comparative grammar work and extended writing activities. Greater explicit effort to show how MFL can contribute to wider literacy would not only support greater whole-school collaboration towards improved levels of literacy and ensure improved results against LNf goals, but would also give greater recognition to the role of foreign language learning in children's education.

#### **4. The low levels of appreciation of the value of languages by parents and pupils in particular is having an adverse effect on pupils seeing Modern Foreign Languages as a serious subject for study. Such views are not countered by the messages from policy makers and influencers.**

In spite of the many sources of evidence highlighting the contribution that language and intercultural skills can make to a nation's economic growth and the well-being of its citizens, there is very little in the way of Welsh Government policy or the practice of the majority of key stakeholders and influencers in Wales to demonstrate a commitment to languages beyond Welsh and English or to foster an appreciation of the value of foreign languages amongst young people, their parents and potential employers. In terms of attitudes, Wales is no different from elsewhere in the UK, where a lack of understanding of the full value of foreign languages is commonplace. However, in recent years both Scotland and England have introduced policies which are designed to improve the position of foreign language learning in the curriculum.

Professor Donaldson's recently published review of the curriculum and assessment systems in Wales makes a clear point that well developed skills in Welsh and English will support the subsequent learning of third and fourth languages and help Wales to exploit its full potential as a confident and competitive nation. However, in the absence of a robust policy on MFL education to counter the very low levels of take-up for foreign languages and the rapid rate at which take-up is declining, especially at post-16, this potential is unlikely to be realised.

Teachers' responses suggest that the majority of young people and parents in Wales are neither aware nor appreciative of the benefits which skills in foreign languages and intercultural understanding can bring in terms of advantages for study, personal development and employment. The findings of research are not being successfully exploited by the MFL community as a whole to make a strong case for the learning of foreign languages in terms which both key stakeholders and influencers can understand and appreciate.

The lack of an explicit policy on Modern Foreign Languages education as well as actions such as the removal of foreign languages as a core element of the Welsh Baccalaureate or the withdrawal of the annual grant made to the national agency for languages, CILT Cymru, to fund a wide range of languages-related activities with schools, only adds further weight to the message that foreign languages are not central to the education of young people in Wales.

To stem the dramatic decline of Modern Foreign Languages in schools across Wales and to address the widely held perception that languages are unimportant and of little use will require concerted action at the highest level, in order both to address the systemic/structural challenges being faced by schools and to begin to tackle entrenched and unhelpful social attitudes.

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## Appendix: Response profiles

### By local authority

	Population		Responses	
Blaenau Gwent	4	1.9%	0	0.0%
Merthyr Tydfil	4	1.9%	1	0.7%
Monmouthshire	4	1.9%	3	2.2%
Ynys Môn	5	2.3%	4	2.9%
Torfaen	7	3.3%	2	1.5%
Conwy	7	3.3%	4	2.9%
Ceredigion	7	3.3%	4	2.9%
Newport	8	3.8%	3	2.2%
Denbighshire	8	3.8%	5	3.7%
Vale of Glamorgan	8	3.8%	6	4.4%
Pembrokeshire	8	3.8%	8	5.9%
Bridgend	9	4.2%	7	5.1%
Wrexham	9	4.2%	7	5.1%
Neath Port Talbot	11	5.2%	8	5.9%
Flintshire	12	5.6%	7	5.1%
Carmarthenshire	12	5.6%	8	5.9%
Powys	12	5.6%	8	5.9%
Gwynedd	14	6.6%	8	5.9%
Caerphilly	14	6.6%	10	7.4%
Swansea	14	6.6%	10	7.4%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	17	8.0%	10	7.4%
Cardiff	19	8.9%	13	9.6%

By language of tuition (as defined by the Welsh Government)

	Population		Responses	
Bilingual (Type C)	4	1.9%	2	1.5%
Bilingual (Type A)	5	2.3%	4	2.9%
English with significant Welsh	9	4.2%	8	5.9%
Bilingual (Type B)	13	6.1%	8	5.9%
Welsh Medium	32	15.0%	23	16.9%
English Medium	150	70.4%	91	66.9%

By banding (according to the Welsh Government's national categorisation system, 2013)

	Population		Responses	
Band 1	20	9.4%	13	9.6%
Band 2	61	28.6%	43	31.6%
Band 3	57	26.8%	36	26.5%
Band 4	47	22.1%	27	19.9%
Band 5	20	9.4%	13	9.6%
n/a	8	3.8%	4	2.9%



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