



# Language Trends Wales 2021

## Language Teaching in Secondary Schools and Post-16 Colleges

Survey Report  
by Ian Collen, Aisling O'Boyle and Sarah O'Neill

## British Council Wales

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# Foreword from British Council Wales

**The British Council builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language.**

Our world has become more interdependent and as international relationships grow, so does the need to be able to communicate and connect with people. We believe that languages play a vital role in giving young people the skills, intercultural understanding and confidence to access a wide range of opportunities both here and across the world, as well as support future career opportunities.

British Council Wales has published the Language Trends Wales report annually, since 2015, and advocating for language learning in schools and the provision of resources, activities and programmes supporting language teaching is an important part of our work in Wales. While it has been hard to watch the downward trend in international languages in schools, the new curriculum along with changes to qualifications provide a unique opportunity to address this decline and to support young people in Wales to become global citizens, able to communicate effectively in other languages and to appreciate other cultures.

*Jenny Scott, Director, British Council Wales*

# Introduction

**Language Trends Wales 2021 is published in the context of a global pandemic. Teachers and students have risen to unprecedented challenges. The education sector is only beginning to count the cost, not only to students' learning and development, but also to their mental health and wellbeing. And, even as Covid-19 presented new hurdles, we have seen teachers create and seize new opportunities for both student education and teacher professional development.**

On behalf of British Council Wales and Queen's University Belfast, we would like to put on record our sincere thanks to teachers for participating in our research in this unprecedented year. Without teachers' participation, our research would not be possible.

This year, British Council Wales contracted Queen's University Belfast to conduct the seventh annual Language Trends Wales survey report, which is designed to gather information about the situation for international language teaching and learning in Wales. The report looks to assess the impact of policy measures, and to analyse strengths and weaknesses based on quantitative evidence and on views expressed by teachers. The aim is to provide a catalyst for teachers, school leaders, academics, inspectors, policy makers and the general public to consider the provision for international languages in the Welsh education system.

## Headline Findings

- Despite a stable population of 16-year-olds in Wales between 2015 and 2021, GCSE entries for French and German have declined by almost half. Entries in GCSE Spanish have been erratic in the same period, but a notable increase between 2020 and 2021 is observed.
- If current trends continue without an urgent intervention at system-level, it is possible that there will be less than one hundred GCSE entries in French and German in Wales by 2030. Entries in Spanish will need to stabilise to ensure the long-term viability of this language. This will have an inevitable knock-on effect at A level, as well as the pipeline to Higher Education.
- As was mirrored in other UK nations, Wales saw a considerable decline during the Covid-19 pandemic in GCSE and A level entries in international languages other than French, German and Spanish. This trend was largely caused by the way in which language learners in supplementary schools were unable to receive certification due to the pandemic.
- The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have a bigger negative impact in more deprived areas of Wales. Over half of teachers working in schools in areas of social deprivation reported a 'big negative impact' on language learning.
- Unlike other parts of the UK, schools' engagement with international projects has remained steady during the past two years, though there is still much work to be done. Teachers are to be commended for their agility in sustaining international work through online platforms.
- Our data show that a significant majority of teachers in Wales are in favour of reviewing the content and assessment of GCSEs in French, German and Spanish. This follows years of teachers highlighting the difficulty of modern foreign language (now international language) exams in comparison with other subjects. It is thus pleasing that Qualifications Wales has committed to reviewing GCSEs in French, German and Spanish for first teaching from September 2025.

# Policy Context and Background

This year's survey was conducted in the wake of a national lockdown and the aftermath of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, as Wales prepares to implement the Curriculum for Wales 2022 co-currently with the next phase of the Global Futures Plan (2020-2022) and proposals for new 'made-for-Wales' qualifications.

There have been UK-wide proposals in 2020 from the British Academy, working with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Association of School and College Leaders, the British Council and Universities UK, for a National Languages Strategy<sup>1</sup>, including a number of proposals which relate directly to Wales. Of particular note is the call for a languages premium, a financial incentive to encourage schools to run (small) A level classes in international languages.

In terms of government policy, the Welsh Government's Programme for Government 2021 – 2026 explicitly commits to expanding the teaching of international languages in schools, as well as increasing Welsh across all stages of education. Indeed, it is the Welsh government's ambition to push forward towards a million Welsh speakers.<sup>2</sup>

The new Curriculum for Wales will be introduced in primary schools for first teaching from September 2022, and thereafter rolled out in secondary schools in successive years. The Welsh Government's implementation plan, 'Curriculum for Wales: The journey to 2022' establishes shared expectations as to how schools should develop their new curriculum in the coming academic year.<sup>3</sup>

Building on the Successful Futures (2015) review, the new Curriculum for Wales reconceptualises and integrates 'traditional' subjects into six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). Under this reform, 'modern foreign languages' are relabelled 'international languages' and integrated with Welsh and English as part of the AoLE 'languages, literacy and communication'.

Currently, the study of at least one international language is compulsory at Key Stage 3 (ages 11 – 14) and offered as an option at Key Stage 4 (ages 14 – 16). However, under the new Curriculum for Wales, schools will be required to ensure that learners make progress in at least one other international language from primary school. A non-statutory framework for Key Stage 2 is currently available to support schools.<sup>4</sup>

However, despite the fact that at least one international language is compulsory at Key Stage 3, Wales is in the weakest position in terms of the uptake of international languages<sup>5</sup> at both GCSE and A level when compared to England and Northern Ireland. However, the uptake of Welsh as a second language (Welsh L2) at GCSE has evinced rapid growth in recent years.<sup>6</sup> A contributing factor is the statutory status of Welsh across the entire period of compulsory education (ages 3 – 16).<sup>7</sup>

## Global Futures 2020-2022

Both Language Trends Wales 2020: The Conversation and the Global Futures 5-year Summary Report highlight a broad range of initiatives realised through the Global Futures Plan (2015 – 2020), which was renewed for the period 2020 – 2022. At the time of publication of Language Trends Wales 2021, Global Futures is undergoing its first independent evaluation.

The original Global Futures plan envisaged Wales as a 'Bilingual Plus 1' nation, in which learners study English, Welsh and at least one other international language from primary to examination level. The extended strategy explicitly emphasizes global citizenship and multilingualism, complementing the new Curriculum for Wales which seeks to develop cross-linguistic skills, such as mediation, translanguaging and plurilingualism.<sup>8</sup>

This emphasis on a multilingual society of plurilingual citizens offers opportunities for other international languages spoken in homes and communities to gain greater recognition as a linguistic resource in the classroom. In 2019/2020, nearly 30,000 school-age learners in Wales reportedly spoke a first language other than Welsh or English.<sup>9</sup> However, the uptake of GCSEs and A levels in international languages continues to decline, and GCSE entries for 'other languages'<sup>10</sup> appear to be worst affected. This year's survey asked whether the cancellation of external exams resulted in students missing out on receiving a grade for their language spoken at home or in the community.

## Welsh language

After decades of decline, the Welsh language in Wales is experiencing a reversal of fortune, which has been described as a "best practice example of how language immersion in education can be used as a 'counterweight' to minority language decline."<sup>11</sup> Welsh language learning is supported by the Cymraeg 2050 strategy, which envisions one million Welsh speakers by 2050, including the strategic aim that 70% of all learners will be able to speak Welsh by the end of statutory education.<sup>12</sup>

It could also be argued that legislation has been the predominant influence to increasing uptake. With the inclusion of Welsh in the national curriculum following the Education Reform Act (1988), Welsh became a compulsory subject for all learners in Wales in Key Stages 1, 2, and 3 (ages 5-14) in 1990, and at Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16) from September 1999 onwards. Many pupils take Welsh as a second language at GCSE, although it is not mandatory. An increase in Welsh-medium schools has also played a part.



## New qualifications

In January 2021, Qualifications Wales launched a consultation on proposals for new GCSEs and other qualifications to support the new Curriculum for Wales. The proposed 'made-for-Wales' qualifications would first be awarded in 2027 and offered in both English and Welsh, integrating academic, technical and vocational pathways, and recognising achievement at earlier progression steps.<sup>13</sup> In October 2021, this led to Qualifications Wales launching a national conversation on the future of qualifications and publishing its decisions on the range of subjects in which a new generation of GCSEs will be co-created. A year of intensive collaboration will deliver proposals by summer 2022 for new qualifications that will be ready for learners in 2025, with the first award in 2027. For international languages there will be new GCSEs in French, German and Spanish. There will also be a new set of small qualifications in a range of international languages to encourage wider engagement with language learning.

The new curriculum and assessment regime comes at a time of great sea changes in society and policy. In this context, our survey explored the impact of Covid-19 on language learning, use of technology, and international activities; teachers' opinions of proposed changes to qualifications, and how language departments are preparing for the new Curriculum for Wales.

# Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

The school year 2020/21 was like nothing ever before imaginable and has changed education in Wales, and society at large, beyond all recognition. School-based learning was severely disrupted by three national lockdowns in the period March 2020 – April 2021.<sup>14</sup> A report by the Centre for Economic Performance calculates that school pupils and post-16 college students in Wales lost 124 out of 190 classroom days over the calendar year, representing the highest loss of classroom teaching in the UK.<sup>15</sup> Post lockdown (12<sup>th</sup> April – 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021), twelve per cent of students in Wales missed at least one week of face-to-face teaching due to Covid-19.<sup>16</sup>

Lost learning has impacted on the awarding of qualifications. In 2020, external examinations were cancelled, and qualifications were ultimately awarded according to teachers' estimated grades. In summer 2021, students working towards GCSE, AS or A level qualifications and equivalent were awarded a Centre Determined Grade based on school or college assessment.<sup>17</sup>

In our survey, forty-two per cent of responding schools told us that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a 'big negative impact' on language learning and a further 37% of schools reported a 'small negative impact'. The pandemic was more acutely felt in schools in the most deprived areas, where over half of schools reported a 'big negative impact' on language learning. One in five responding schools, mainly in more affluent areas, reported that the pandemic had not had an impact on language learning.

Teachers estimated that one in five students in Key Stage 3 (ages 11 – 14) did not have regular access to the internet in January and February 2021. It quickly became clear that this 'access' was varied: in some schools all children have a laptop and/or tablet device, and in other situations students' access was limited to connecting to the internet via a smartphone. In the latter, it was impossible for students to complete and upload work for marking. Teachers reported that a considerable number of students did not have any access to the internet, even via a smartphone.

In turn, teachers reported issues with waning engagement and motivation during the lockdown of January and February 2021; on average two out of five students in Key Stage 3 in Wales did not engage with language learning. The outworking of this period in history on language learning will need to be borne in mind for the foreseeable future.

However, while the pandemic has presented new challenges, such as remote online learning, there have also been new opportunities for both student education and teacher professional development. This included a number of positive developments for teachers' pedagogical practice. Teachers of languages told us that they are now more agile, and have learned new skills and modes of delivery. Teachers also reported that many older students' independent learning skills have improved. One teacher commented:

**“I have joined many of the Continuing Professional Development opportunities and trained myself in using technology to teach languages. The use of Google Classroom is an enormous benefit for setting homework learning tasks and I will continue to use it post lockdown.”**

# Research Outline

Ethical approval was secured from the Research Ethics Committee at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. All participants gave their voluntary and informed consent to participate.

The research question guiding the study was 'What is the current state of language teaching in secondary schools and post-16 colleges in Wales?' To answer the research question, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach, building on the previous Language Trends Wales reports and using methodologies which are broadly comparable with recent Language Trends England and Language Trends Northern Ireland reports. The research methods comprised a survey, quantitative in nature but with space for qualitative comments, and two case studies (qualitative) in order to compare international language learning in Wales with Finland and the Republic of Ireland.

Questions for the survey were developed by the research team in early 2021 and refined in consultation with a group of stakeholders, convened by British Council Wales. The surveys, in English and in Welsh, were emailed to 182 secondary schools and 13 post-16 colleges in Wales in May 2021, addressed to the Head of Modern Foreign Languages / Head of International Languages. Every school was also contacted by a member of the research team by telephone to encourage participation.

Schools were invited to submit one response only; where multiple responses were received from the same institution, the first response to be received was included in our data. For the survey, quantitative responses were analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative comments were approached using thematic analysis.<sup>18</sup>

Once survey data sets had been cleaned and duplications removed, the following response rates were achieved:

	Base	Achieved	% response
Secondary School HoD Survey	182	52	28.6 %
Post-16 College HoD Survey	13	11	84.6%

**Table 1: Response rates**

For the two case studies, professionals working in two different geopolitical contexts were invited to take part in one 45-minute audio recorded interview to discuss their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes to language provision in their context.

Data from these interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using content analysis. As a result of this data collection and subsequent content analysis, we include in this year's report two case studies which highlight language learning provision in the Republic of Ireland and Finland. These case studies show that a multilingual approach to language policy is possible; Wales has an opportune moment to reconsider the place of international languages in society.

We thank previous researchers, Dr Teresa Tinsley in particular, for their contributions to the Language Trends series.

# Public Examination Figures

Within Wales, a slight overall decline in GCSE entries for the 'Big 3' of French, German and Spanish is noted. We know the teenage population in Wales is growing slightly, so any decline in the numbers of students studying languages cannot be attributed to falling school enrolment.

As can be seen in figure 1, entries for GCSE French and GCSE German have again declined by 11% and 12% respectively from 2020, but it is pleasing to see significant growth in Spanish. This mirrors the trend which we see in this year's Language Trends England and Language Trends Northern Ireland reports; in Northern Ireland, Spanish is now the most popular language at GCSE, after many years of French holding the top spot.

In Northern Ireland this could in part be due to a policy decision to run a primary modern languages programme in Irish and Spanish (but not French or German) in a significant majority of primary schools from 2007 – 2015.

It is important to note that whilst the growth in Spanish between 2020 and 2021 is welcomed, the overall picture over the past six years is erratic. An overall decline in Spanish is recorded in that the 2021 figure is 10% below that of 2015. Furthermore, if the rate of decline in French and German continues, there will be less than 100 entries for both languages by 2030.

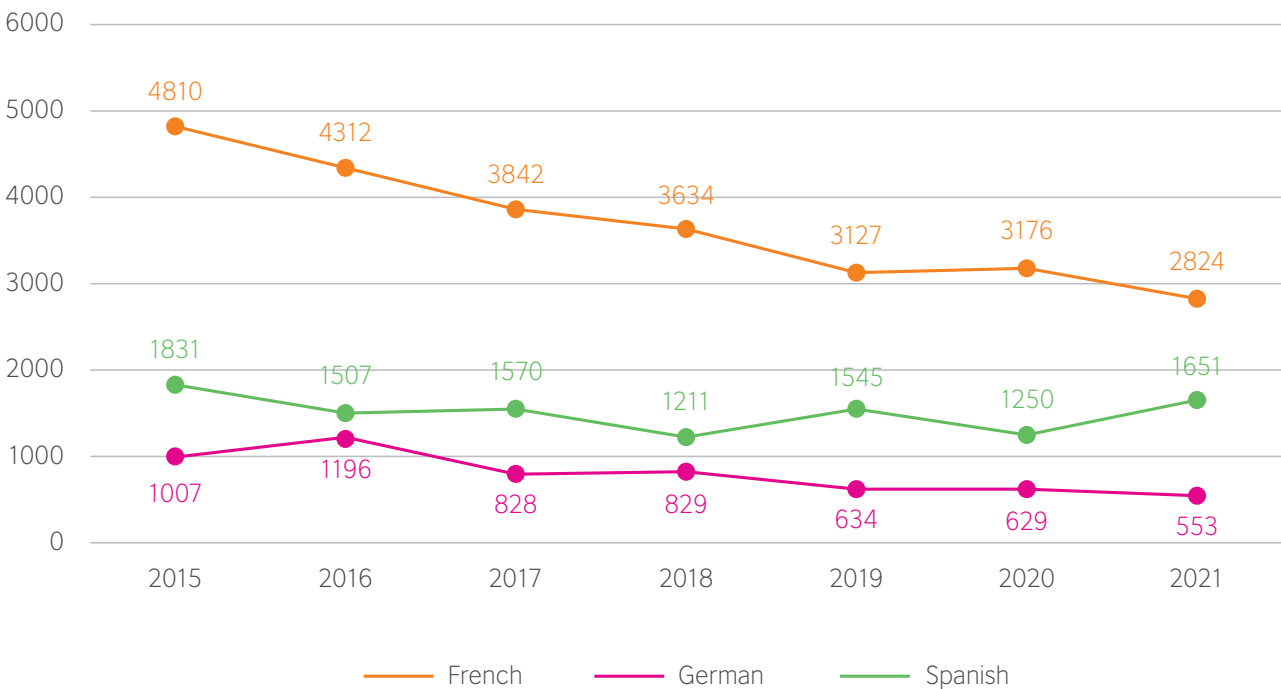


Figure 1: GCSE entries in French, German and Spanish 2015 – 2021

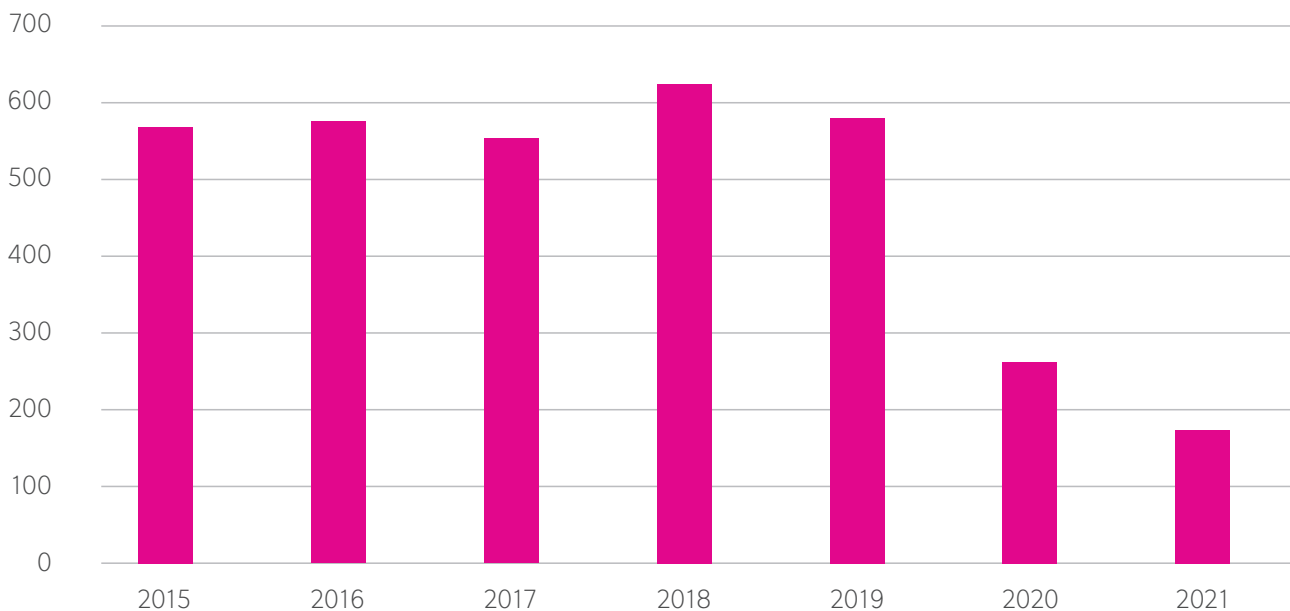
In our survey, one teacher commented:

**“The GCSE French and Spanish exams are perceived by pupils as very difficult. The emphasis [in the GCSE exam] seems to be placed on understanding minute details and trying to trick pupils, instead of focusing on what pupils can communicate and understand as a whole.”**

Another teacher noted:

**“Please sort out the marking and awarding of GCSE grades. There is an urgent need to reduce the GCSE content so that we do not have completely overwhelmed, demoralised students saying that French and German are the hardest GCSEs on offer.”**

Figure 2 shows that over the past two years, GCSE entries for languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh have declined significantly from 626 in 2018 to just 175 in 2021. This can be attributed in part to barriers during the Covid-19 pandemic, whereby some learners of international languages other than French, German and Spanish (often learned in supplementary schools) were unable to receive certification.



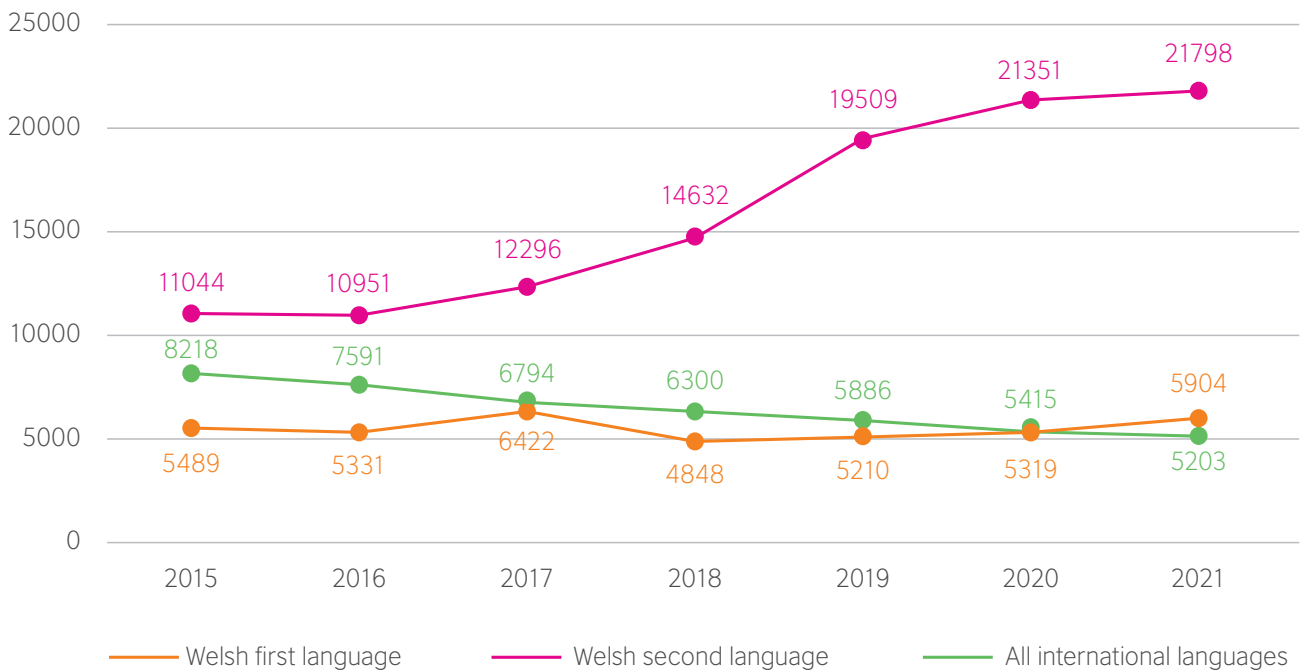
**Figure 2: GCSE entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 – 2021**

In our survey, teachers reported:

**“As a result of exams being cancelled in summer 2020 and not having in-school expertise in languages such as Polish, Mandarin Chinese and Arabic, some pupils have not been able to access qualifications for their home language.”**

**“I was unable to sort out outside specialists to support the teaching of lesser taught languages and home languages.”**

Figure 3 shows a clear trend of increasing entries for Welsh (first language and second language), but an overall decline in all international languages. It could be that compulsory Welsh in schools up to Key Stage 4 has had an impact, although it must be borne in mind that not all pupils actually sit the GCSE in Welsh.

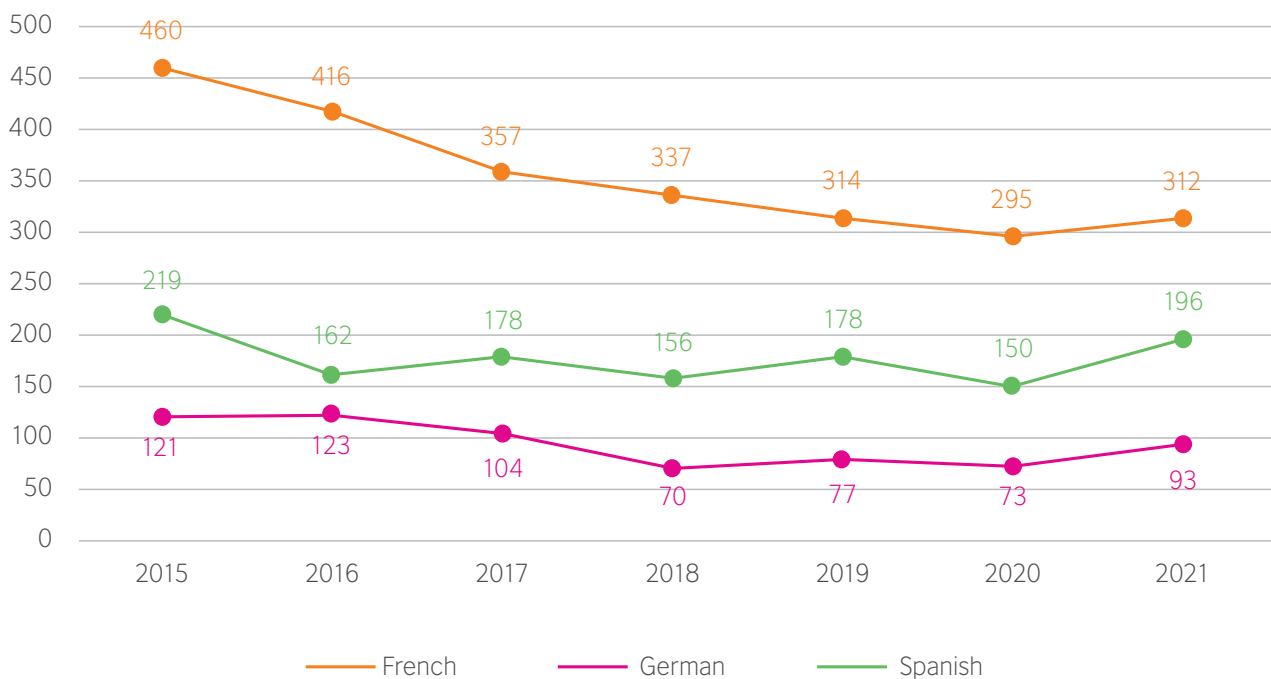


**Figure 3: Comparison of entries for GCSE Welsh (first and second language) and all international languages**

Figure 4 shows encouraging signs in so far as entries for French, German and Spanish have all increased in the past school year. Nonetheless, entries for the 'Big 3' at A level remain significantly below those in Northern Ireland, where there is a smaller school population, but a different politico-linguistic landscape in the sense that the indigenous language, Irish, does not have statutory status at any stage of education.

One teacher told us:

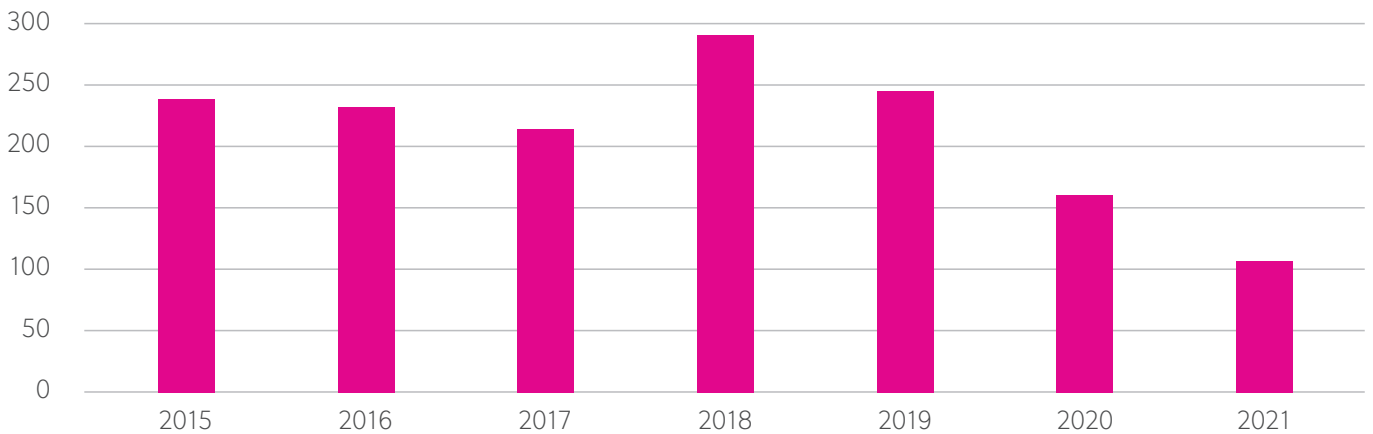
**“Having to travel to another school for A level classes puts pupils off. There is a perceived difficulty with language exams and the GCSE course has done nothing to encourage students to continue with the subject to A level. The reading and listening exams are far too demanding also the amount of vocab that needs to be learnt is far too great. Better knowledge and understanding of less content would be far more beneficial.”**



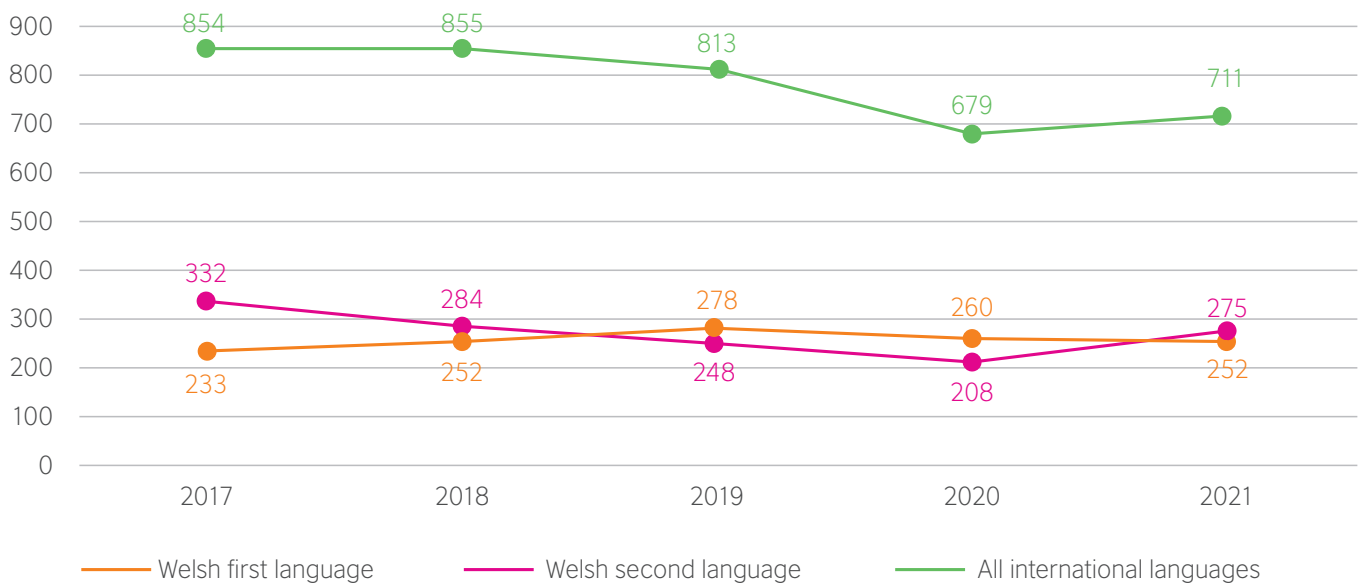
**Figure 4: A level entries in French, German and Spanish 2015 – 2021**

Similar to GCSE (see figure 2), figure 5 shows a sharp decline in entries for languages other than the 'Big 3' and Welsh. This again can be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that many learners of international languages other than the 'Big 3' were often unable to get certification for their efforts.

Figure 6 shows that entries for A level international languages have fallen over the past two years, mainly due to the drop in other international languages (such as those spoken at home and in communities). The strong uptake of compulsory Welsh at GCSE does not carry through to A level Welsh, where numbers are comparatively low. Only 2% of GCSE Welsh candidates continue on to A level. By contrast, international languages are able to convert a greater proportion of learners from GCSE to A level – approximately 11%.



**Figure 5: A level entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 – 2021**



**Figure 6: Comparison of entries for A level Welsh (first and second language) and all international languages**



# Findings from the Secondary Schools Survey

## Profile of responding secondary schools

In the 2020/21 school year, there were 182 state secondary schools in Wales, of which 130 were English Medium, eight were English Medium with significant Welsh, 17 were Welsh Medium and 27 were bilingual English/Welsh.

Each state secondary school in Wales is a member of one of 22 local authorities (councils), based on geographical location. Local authorities are grouped into four education consortia to facilitate school improvement, raise standards, and achieve efficiencies. Given the response rate and to protect the identity of individual participating schools, the report will draw comparisons between consortia where appropriate.

To ascertain any socio-economic differences in relation to language learning, the research team looked at the percentage of students in each school entitled to free school meals.

On 1 April 2019, the Welsh Government introduced new rules for claiming free school meals. Because of this, a small number of children and young people could have lost their eligibility for free school meals. “Transitional protection” was introduced to ensure that these children and young people could continue to receive free school meals for a limited period.

Using data from the Wales School Census in January 2020, the full complement of 182 schools invited to respond to the survey were arranged into quintiles by the percentage of students (up to age 15) entitled to Free School Meals (FSM).

Education Consortia	Includes local authorities of	Base	Number of responding schools
North Wales	Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham	50	14
South West and Mid Wales	Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot	51	16
Central South Wales	Bridgend, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff	49	14
South East Wales	Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport	32	8

**Table 2: Number of responding schools by education consortium**

	Base total = 182	Achieved total = 52	% Response rate to survey
Quintile 1 – least deprived	36	17	33%
Quintile 2	37	8	15.5%
Quintile 3	36	12	23%
Quintile 4	37	8	15.5%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	36	7	13%

**Table 3: FSME quintiles for state secondary schools**

Table 3 shows that almost half of responding schools were in quintiles 1 and 2 (i.e. in the least deprived areas of Wales as measured by the number of students entitled to free school meals). Just 13% of responses to the survey came from schools in the most deprived areas. What follows may therefore be more favourable than the reality in many schools.

**Language learning at Key Stage 3**

We asked teachers which international languages students were learning at Key Stage 3. Table 4 shows the percentage of schools offering the ‘big 3’ in each year of Key Stage 3. The data are broadly in line with the findings of our 2019 survey, with the exception that German has decreased over the past two years.

	French	German	Spanish
Year 7	79%	2%	19%
Year 8	77%	8%	15%
Year 9	54%	2%	17%

**Table 4: International languages at Key Stage 3**

Table 5 shows the minority of schools which offer two international languages to some pupils in years 8 and 9.

	French	German	Spanish
Year 8	12%	10%	10%
Year 9	35%	15%	25%

**Table 5: International languages at Key Stage 3 – schools offering 2 languages to some pupils**

French remains the most popular international language at Key Stage 3. The majority of responding schools offer only one international language in Year 7, hence there is no significant data in Table 5 for this year group. Spanish and German are offered in some schools as an option in Years 8 and 9. One responding teacher commented:

**“Y7 and Y8 are all taught French in mixed ability forms. Pupils can then choose in Y9 whether to continue with French, begin Spanish, study both or do neither.”**

We asked teachers what proportion of their students are learning more than one international language:

	All	More than half	Less than half	None
Year 7	11.9%	4.8%	2.4%	81%
Year 8	14.3%	9.5%	4.8%	71.4%
Year 9	14.3%	7.1%	19%	59.5%

**Table 6: Proportion of students at Key Stage 3 learning more than one international language**

One teacher commented:

**Pupils in KS3 have three lessons over a two-week timetable. The decision was made two years ago to only offer Spanish to all KS3 Pupils (so all pupils had the same experience but also due to a decline in numbers). We are increasingly following the Conti approach\* to language learning at Key Stage 3.”**

\*The ‘Conti Approach’ is based on the work of Dr Gianfranco Conti. It is also called E.P.I. (Extensive Processing Instruction), which is based on the notion that teaching language through chunks (e.g. polywords, collocation, sentence heads and frames) is much more effective than the teaching of single words as it is more economic in terms of cognitive load, particularly for beginner to intermediate learners.

The number of schools offering German has decreased from 2019. The majority of responding schools still teaching German are in quintile 1, i.e. in more affluent areas. This resonates with findings from Language Trends England 2021 and Language Trends Northern Ireland 2021, where a clear socio-economic divide in students' access to German can be seen.

Our data also show that some students may be disapplying from international language learning in Year 9; further research is needed to investigate the extent of this.

We also asked about curricular international languages other than French, German and Spanish. Four responding schools reported that they make timetabled provision for Mandarin and/or Italian.

### Time for international languages

In terms of content time for international languages, the majority of schools allocate 1 – 2 hours per week throughout Key Stage 3, and 2 – 3 hours in Year 10:

	Less than 1 hour	1 – 2 hours	2 – 3 hours	3 – 4 hours
Year 7	4.8%	88.1%	7.1%	0.0%
Year 8	0.0%	90.5%	11.9%	0.0%
Year 9	2.4%	83.3%	14.3%	4.8%
Year 10	2.4%	23.8%	69.0%	7.1%

**Table 7: Contact time for international languages at Key Stage 3 and in Year 10**

Many responding schools operate a two-week timetable, and it can be the case that students in Key Stage 3 have long gaps between international language classes. GCSE qualifications have guided learning hours of 120 hours; it is therefore difficult to see how any allocation of two hours or below could be sufficient in Year 10.

### Language learning at Key Stage 4

All responding schools with Key Stage 4 provision in international languages offer GCSE accreditation. Three responding schools also offer the WJEC Level 2 in Global Business Communication<sup>19</sup>.

As noted in Language Trends Wales 2019, there were no schools in any year of the survey where more than 75% of the cohort were taking an international language in either Year 10 or Year 11. On average, teachers reported that 15% of their Year 10 students were taking a language for GCSE or alternative Level 2 qualification (e.g. WJEC Level 2 in Global Business Communication). Furthermore, just over one in five responding schools said they had no students studying international languages in Year 10. We asked teachers to think about the past three years and how the proportion of students studying an international language at Key Stage 4 had changed (if at all). The teachers' perceptions in Table 8 corroborate the national statistics shown in figure 1 earlier in the report.

	Percentage of responding schools
No clear trend	27%
Fewer students choose an international language	53%
More students choose an international language	0%
Similar numbers to before	20%

**Table 8: Teachers' perceptions of uptake at GCSE over past three years**

When we probed as to the reasons for the decline, these were myriad. Four out of ten schools told us that due to timetable constraints, not all students who wish to learn an international language for GCSE are assured of the opportunity. One teacher wrote:

**“Numbers have drastically reduced now KS4 option columns have been reduced. Numbers have dropped from 100 opting for international languages down to 40.”**

In another school, the reason for decline relates to competition from Welsh:

**“As Welsh is compulsory, pupils feel that they gain the linguistic skills required from their Welsh lessons and have no need to take an international language further.”**

**International language learning post-16 in secondary schools**

Forty-six per cent of responding secondary schools either do not have post-16 provision or do not offer international languages in the sixth form. In those secondary schools where international languages are offered, a third offer the subjects wholly in-house and the remaining two thirds rely on collaboration with another institution for delivery.

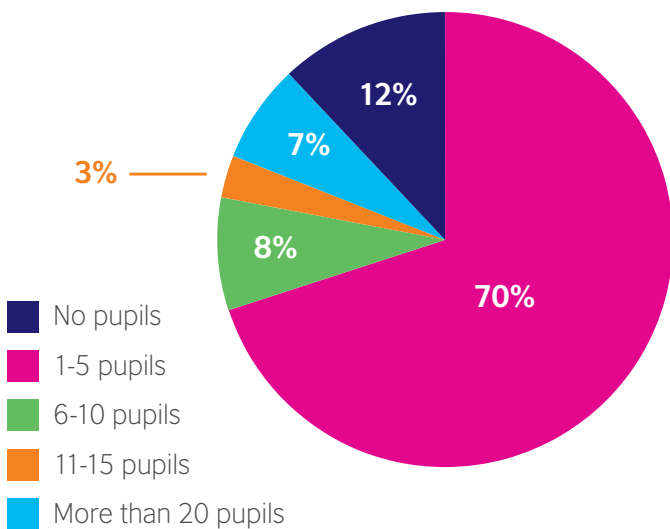
Class sizes remain very small in most schools. Figure 7 shows that 12% of schools which do offer access to A level languages report that they currently have no pupils. Seventy per cent of schools have less than six students in Year 12 language classes. Just 18% of schools report having six or more pupils in post-16 international languages.

One teacher from a quintile 1 (most affluent) school commented:

**“The exam experience at GCSE puts off many pupils from continuing at A level. Languages are not taken in favour of subjects such as Sociology. Not running a class due to low numbers will naturally lessen its importance. Pupils don’t value the importance of a language or the skills when looking at professions.”**

Some schools report needing a minimum of ten students for a subject to run at A level. One teacher from a quintile 3 school commented:

**“The 10-pupil minimum required to run a course literally prevents us from ever running again when we get groups of 15-ish at GCSE. 75% retention is not realistic.”**



**Figure 7: Number of pupils in Year 12 taking at least one international language (at schools which offer access to at least one international language).**

# International Language Learning in Post-16 Colleges in Focus

## Language learning in post-16 colleges

Eleven out of a possible 13 post-16 colleges responded to our survey. Two of the eleven responding institutions report having no students studying an international language, despite offering it; these two institutions did respond to survey questions regarding the international dimension of college life and their answers are included.

Three colleges each report having more than 20 students studying an international language in Year 12, whilst three colleges report having less than five students. Where there are low numbers, classes often run on a reduced timetable, or Year 12 and Year 13 students are taught in a composite class. One college reports that take-up for international languages has increased over the past three years, but five colleges report a decrease; other colleges report stability in numbers (where offered). When asked about reasons for the decline, colleges reported:

**“Covid has had an impact. We currently can’t offer a day-time provision for learners of GCSE or A Level for all subjects as it simply isn’t viable.”**

**“I think less are opting for languages at KS4 – three out of four of our feeder schools used to offer both languages and now they all only offer one language at KS4 – I think especially since the content and volume is so great at GCSE students are opting for what they perceive as ‘easier’ subjects.”**

**“Few learners 16-19 come to College hoping to continue with an international language since so few have done them at GCSE in schools. [There are] few qualifications available for adult learners that are pre-GCSE, and bridge the gap between AS and A2.”**

A recent report by Arad Research (commissioned by ColegauCymru) found a range of benefits to international language learning. The research was conducted with the further education sector in Wales and aimed to support the development of a strategic internationalisation plan for the sector. In providing an international experience to students, the report comments that there should be more emphasis on supporting language skills development before, during and after international exchanges. There is often a missed opportunity to capitalise linguistically. The report goes on to state that there is a need for stronger senior management support and that direction in relation to international language learning across all post-16 colleges would be beneficial.

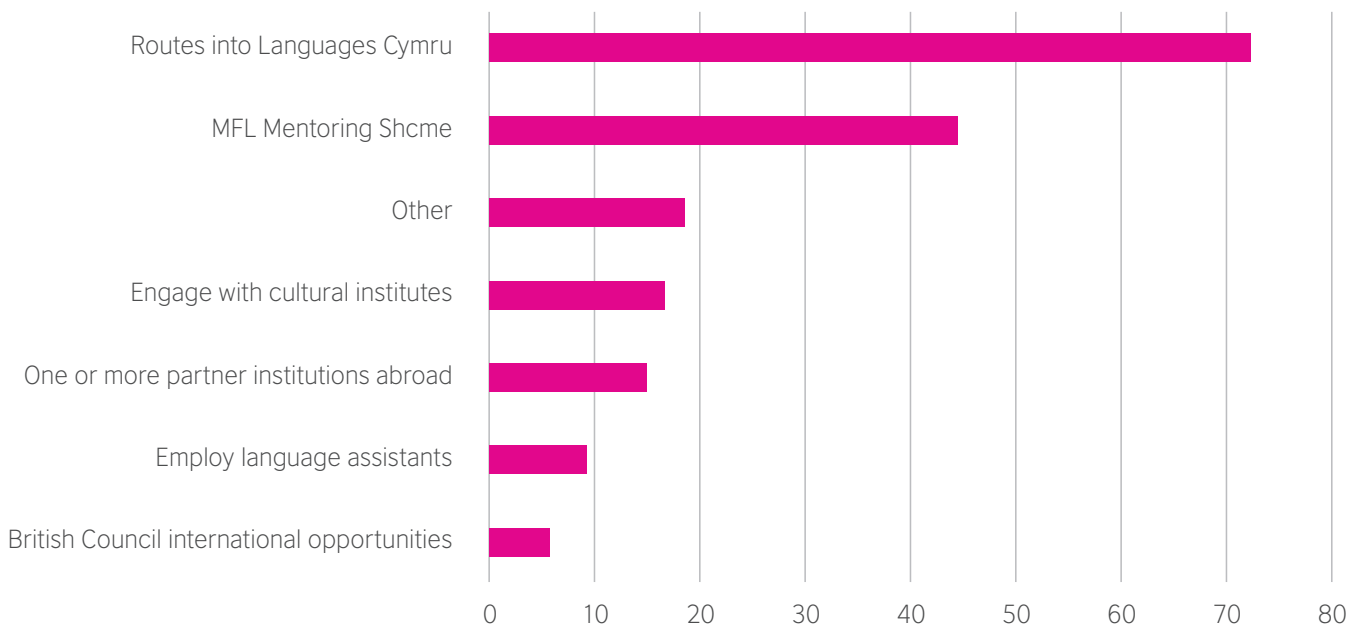
# International Dimension in Secondary Schools and Post-16 Colleges

This section combines responses from teachers in secondary schools and post-16 colleges in relation to the international dimension in schools. It is pleasing that the international dimension appears relatively healthy, despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our data show very good engagement with both Routes into Languages Cymru<sup>20</sup>, a pan-Wales collaborative outreach project that promotes the visibility, uptake and profile of languages in schools, and the MFL Student Mentoring Project<sup>21</sup> which encourages the learning of international languages at GCSE level and beyond via a programme of in-classroom mentoring and online mentoring.

The MFL Student Mentoring Project partners undergraduate and postgraduate university students with secondary schools across Wales to increase learners' motivation to study languages and increase aspirations for higher education. Since 2015, the project has grown to work with over 100 schools and has enjoyed consistent success as measured by independent evaluation reports available on their website.

On the other hand, just 15% of responding institutions have a partner school abroad and less than one in ten institutions employ a language assistant. Twelve per cent of all institutions report they have a French assistant and/or a Spanish assistant. The number of assistants in German and Mandarin is extremely low. Teachers cite budget constraints as the main reason for not being able to engage language assistants.



**Figure 8: International engagement in secondary schools and post-16 colleges**

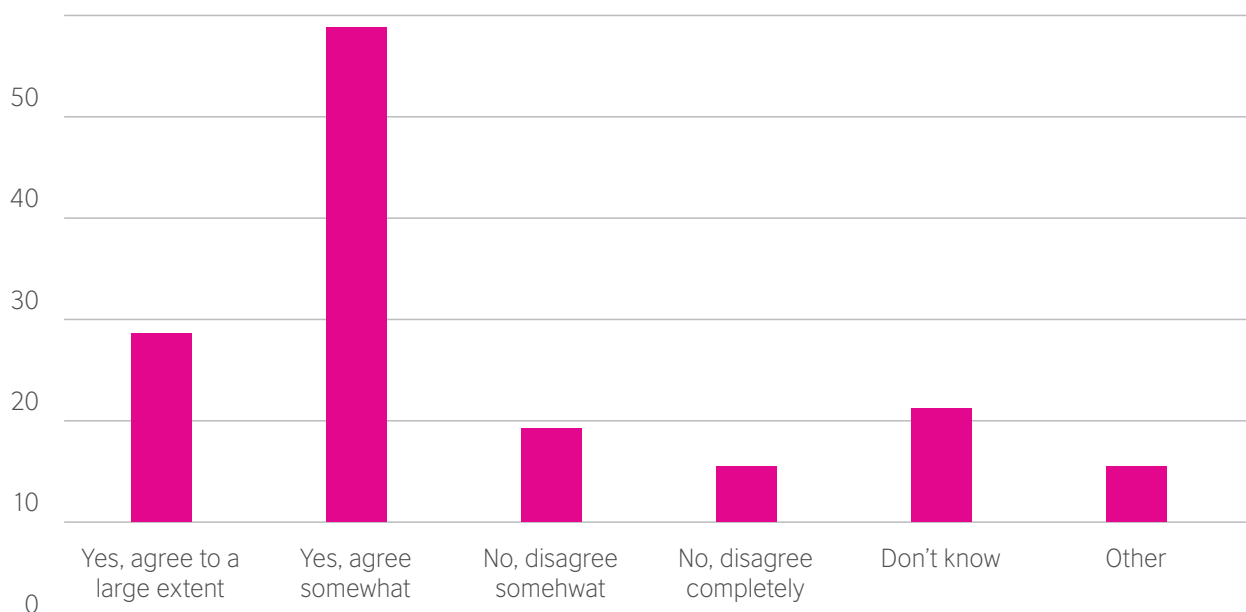
### Qualifications in Wales

We asked teachers in secondary schools and post-16 colleges to consider potential changes to qualifications in Wales.

Figure 9 shows that a significant majority of teachers (68%) are in favour of reviewing and reforming GCSEs in French, German and Spanish. A review of GCSE Modern Foreign Languages in England is already underway. In 2019, Ofqual investigated whether GCSEs in French, German and Spanish were severely graded in comparison to GCSEs in other subjects. They concluded that grading standards in GCSE French and German, but not Spanish, should be adjusted from summer 2020 onwards.

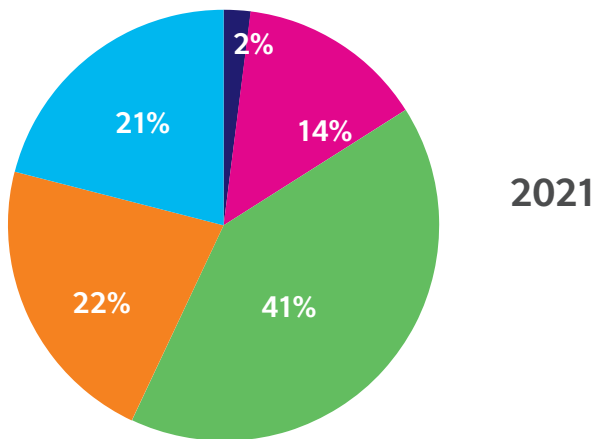
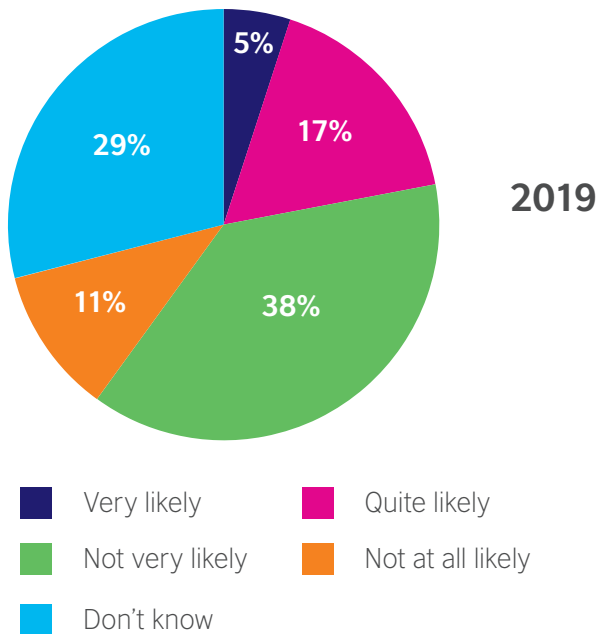
Our Language Trends data show that a similar number of teachers in Wales are also in support of the Qualification Wales proposal to create a set of small, ‘made-for-Wales’ qualifications in international languages to support engagement and progression in language learning. In addition, half of responding teachers felt that their students would be interested in language qualifications with a vocational slant, for example a stand-alone GCSE in French with Business or GCSE in Spanish with Travel/Tourism.

We asked teachers about the new Curriculum for Wales and to what extent it will improve the situation for international language learning; our data in figures 10 and 11 show that attitudes have deteriorated since 2019.



**Figure 9: Teachers’ answers in response to ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Qualification Wales proposal that GCSEs in French, German and Spanish should be reviewed and reformed to make sure they are ‘made-for-Wales?’**

We asked the same question to teachers in post-16 colleges. Of the eleven responding teachers, five said the new Curriculum for Wales was ‘quite likely’ to improve the situation for international language learning, but five said it was ‘not very likely’ and one teacher was undecided.



**Figures 10 and 11: Teachers’ responses to the question, ‘In your professional opinion, how likely is it that the new Curriculum for Wales, with international languages part of the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience, will improve the situation for international languages in Wales?’**

### Sharing good practice

We gave teachers the opportunity to tell us what is working well in their school and what good practice they could share with others. In qualitative comments, teachers wrote with enthusiasm about the positive impact of engagement with Routes into Languages Cymru and the MFL Mentoring Project, funded by the Welsh Government and based at Cardiff University.

Many teachers told us that they have been focussing on their pedagogy and have started to use the work of applied linguists, such as Dr Gianfranco Conti. Teachers are thinking more deeply about *how* children learn languages and are adapting their teaching to take greater account of second language education theories. One teacher commented:

**“In French, we are using Extensive Processing Instruction and sentence builders as a new teaching method. Due to reduced curriculum time, we feel that a greater focus on developing confidence is needed. Pupils are responding well and we can see that their learning is improving. We are hoping that this will have an impact on their option choices next year.”**

In order to further improve language learning, teachers said that funding is needed to allow international languages in Wales to grow. One teacher commented:

**“Allowing a class to run regardless of numbers would increase the perception of importance and allow those pupils to continue the journey they began. It seems unfair to disrupt and halt their language learning for financial reasons.”**

Teachers also requested funding for a national campaign on language learning, as well as students being given robust careers advice about the many doors which language learning can open.



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## Case Studies

In this section we discuss language education in Finland and the Republic of Ireland (ROI). Like Wales, languages and multilingualism hold significant positions in both Finland and the ROI. We conducted descriptive case studies of these two regions in order to illustrate language learning provision in international contexts. Each case study includes a description of the policy context, followed by discussion of key studies, illustrations of innovations, and the perspectives of practitioners whom we interviewed from these two regions.

# Finland

## Policy Context

Finland is situated in northern Europe along the Gulf of Bothnia and shares land borders with Norway, Sweden and Russia. After centuries of Swedish rule followed by integration into the Russian Empire, Finland declared independence in 1917.<sup>22</sup> Following civil war, the Constitution Act of 1919 established a parliamentary republic.<sup>23</sup> Finland joined the European Union in 1995.<sup>24</sup>

The national languages of Finnish and Swedish are constitutionally equal,<sup>25</sup> as underpinned by the Language Act.<sup>26</sup> Basic Education is arranged separately for Finnish and Swedish-speaking children,<sup>27</sup> with special provisions for the indigenous Sami, Roma and other groups.<sup>28</sup> According to birth registrations, 87% of the population speak Finnish; five per cent Swedish, and less than one per cent Sami.<sup>29</sup>

Finland is among the world's highest-ranking nations for maternal and child welfare; education, skills and literacy; business and innovation; gender equality and democratic principles.<sup>30</sup> Education is an integral part of the Finnish welfare state.<sup>31</sup> Equity and equality are key principles of the state education system,<sup>32</sup> which consists of Early Education and Care (ages 0 – 6); Pre-Primary (age 6) and Basic Education (ages 7 – 15); General Upper Secondary Education (16+); Vocational Education and Training (16+), and universities.<sup>33</sup>

Compulsory education has recently been extended from age six to eighteen.<sup>34</sup> The Basic Education Act legislates for a unified national core curriculum and subject time allocation determined by the government.<sup>35</sup> The Finnish National Agency for Education sets core content from which education providers develop their own curricula.<sup>36</sup>

During Basic Education, students study both national languages and at least one additional language. For 90% of students, the main – and often only – foreign language is English, with only one in five studying additional languages.<sup>37</sup> In upper secondary general education, 99.7% of students studied English and 91.9% Swedish in 2019. The figure for each additional language was less than 15%; falling to less than one per cent in vocational schools.<sup>38</sup> The Government Key Project for Languages aims to both diversify the language repertoire and to introduce language learning earlier.<sup>39</sup> From 2020, the first additional language will be introduced earlier in the curriculum, by first grade at the latest.<sup>40</sup>

## LANGUAGE LEARNING PROVISION: INSIGHTS AND INNOVATION

### ‘Language friendly’ curriculum

There are two key features of the Finnish curricula, which already create advantages for language learning. First, there is a focus on an integrative approach; i.e. one that prioritizes relationships and connections across different subjects.<sup>41</sup> Second, there is a prominently positioned focus on being language aware, recognizing the importance of language in education where all teachers are considered language teachers. As our interviewees discussed:

**“I think it’s quite amazing how much language is part of the Finnish curriculum, just across the board, that children would end up learning Finnish, Swedish and one foreign language. So, the fact that this is possible is quite incredible.”**

**“Learning languages is not something separate... But it’s part of everyday activities, and not only in the language class, but also other classes.”**

This need to be language aware and the enthusiasm for developing multilingual education is also evident in a study of over 800 Finnish teachers which reports that teachers hold mainly positive beliefs regarding multilingualism.<sup>42</sup>

### Creating early languages experiences to sustain language learning

In 2017, a number of state-funded regional projects explored approaches to early language learning and multilingual education, including language showering.<sup>43</sup> Used in Finland for over a decade, this is a language teaching method which offers a ‘lighter touch’ to language learning than immersion approaches in the early years. Its primary aim is to create positive experiences with languages for children and to set a clear path for positive attitudes towards subsequent language learning. Video resources of teachers discussing this method are available in English.<sup>44</sup>

Such approaches to early language education seem to increase and diversify the uptake in languages. One of our interviewees discussed a language showering programme in which children experienced a different language every seven-week period. This subsequently led to a marked increase in the uptake of new languages.

**“They [the children] would have seven weeks of Swedish, then French, German, Italian, Chinese, English. There were no reports of the children being overwhelmed or confused. I guess it was partly because they would do similar activities. So, they would do colours in all these different languages, and using routine activities means that the children can negotiate - understand what they’re doing, regardless of what language it is. But that actually had a fantastic effect. I think that up to 27% of children chose languages other than English as the first foreign language. It was a really nice development.”**

It is important to highlight such initiatives might be assumed to pose challenges, however, they can also run contrary to some expectations:

**“Teachers have been surprised by what the children can do. I think that many [teachers can be] a bit intimidated, “What can we do with the children?” and “Our language isn’t so good” and “We haven’t had any pedagogical training to do this.” But then they start to recognise, we can just do really basic things ... like, the weather, and greetings, and the menu for the day, and start to play with the language, and they realise they can do so much. And the children, usually, are quite enthusiastic about it. So, I think it’s taken the teachers by surprise, about how willing and able the children are. There’ve been hesitations about children who are learning Finnish as a second language, to include them. But I think there is also now the realization that these children usually manage pretty well when another language is introduced. It doesn’t make it more difficult.”**

Innovations and activities used in the Finnish education context are also evidenced in the research conducted through the ‘IKI project: the Innovative Map and Compass for Language Education’.<sup>45</sup> This includes a guide on language-aware teaching in non-language subjects and activities for student-teacher dialogue. The latter not only provides opportunities for students to reflect on their own language learning but also to support teachers with their language education planning.

### **Teacher professionalism and growing collaboration**

Teaching is viewed as a highly valued profession in the Finnish context and one in which frequent standardized testing does not occur. Teachers are trusted and encouraged to create materials and adopt novel approaches to the implementation of educational objectives in their own contexts.<sup>46</sup> Research demonstrates that language teachers in Finland take a very active role in attempting to address the issue of decreasing diversity in languages being studied, noting that the willingness and commitment of teachers has become essential in turning the tide and ensuring success in foreign language learning.<sup>47</sup> However, this can come at considerable individual cost as teachers work outside of their contracts, for free, to encourage uptake and maintain awareness of the languages they teach.

**“In principle, there are a lot of languages offered, and there are also languages offered at various levels and, and duration of learning. So, I think that this kind of richness is very good. It’s a richness of offering. But... does it get realized in the financial situation of municipalities that are responsible for education? Most often they don’t have the resources to offer a lot of language teaching.”**

In our interviews, participants also discussed examples of where language teachers worked together to tackle some of these issues by pooling resources to offer an enriched language provision or seeking new ways of matching resource to need:

**“For example, Russian is offered in the Finnish-medium school and French is offered in the Swedish-medium school, and they opened the courses for both schools. So, if a student from the Swedish-medium school wanted to study Russian, then they could go to the Finnish track to learn Russian and then the same with the other language from the other direction. I think that’s a nice example of using the resources; there are several languages offered and the students and parents can choose”**

**“[...] as this kind of distant teaching has been increasing, these (additional) languages could also be taught, so the pupils are in the school, but the teachers are somewhere else, and then they are, kind of, gathering online. It has been actually done already to some extent, but I think now the equipment is better than it used to be.”**

Growing collaboration between different language teachers was also discussed by our interviewees as an emerging feature of contemporary professional practice and teacher education - a development which was regarded as highly positive:

**“I think that there’s something of a shift in the way that teachers of different languages are seeing each other as language educators. So, it’s not just that I’m a teacher of French, or I’m a teacher of German, or oh look there’s English, but recognising that we can benefit from working together. I think there is far more collaboration between languages, rather than competition.”**

**“I hope that that would happen more in Finland, so that teachers of different languages would see that they are actually building something together, rather than building their own little pieces separately. You can kind of break the boundaries between subjects and spaces and between people and you can go collaborate and do new things together.”**

Working across subjects through an integrated approach is also evident in language teacher education, which incorporates multiple approaches to language education, with opportunities to observe and conduct teaching practice using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).<sup>48</sup>

The significance of collaboration also features prominently in language learning provision in the second case study: The Republic of Ireland.

# Republic of Ireland

## Policy Context

Situated in the North Atlantic Ocean, the island of Ireland has two geopolitical jurisdictions: the six counties of Northern Ireland form part of the United Kingdom and are not included in this study; the Republic of Ireland (ROI) progressed towards independence from the United Kingdom with the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, and has existed in its current political form since the Republic of Ireland Act 1948. It has been a member of the European Union since 1973 and operates a bicameral parliamentary democracy with a directly elected president as head of state.

Article 8 of the Constitution of Ireland establishes Irish as the 'national language' and the 'first official language' of the ROI, recognising English as 'a second official language'.<sup>49</sup> Although in principle Irish has been a full official language of the EU since 2007, a derogation has limited its use in practice. From 01 January 2022, Irish is to be accorded full working language status.<sup>50</sup>

The Official Languages Act 2003 ensures the provision of public services through Irish.<sup>51</sup> The Official Languages (Amendment) Bill enhances this provision with the objective that 20% of new public service recruits will be Irish speakers.<sup>52</sup> Areas where Irish is officially recognised as the main communal language are known as the Gaeltacht, as defined by the Gaeltacht Act 2012.<sup>53</sup> UNESCO lists the Irish language as 'definitely endangered'<sup>54</sup> and according to the 2016 census, only 21.4% of the Gaeltacht population speak Irish daily,<sup>55</sup> a decline of 11% in five years.<sup>56</sup>

Compulsory education is from age six to sixteen. Following six years of primary education, second level is divided into the three-year Junior Cycle and two or three-year Senior Cycle, with an optional Transition Year.<sup>57</sup> Most schools are English medium; however, Irish is the working language in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools, known as Gaelscoileanna.<sup>58</sup>

Irish and English are core subjects at primary and post-primary level, with syllabi offered for both Irish L1 and L2.<sup>59</sup> Post-primary schools are obliged to provide modern foreign language courses, but students are not compelled to study them. Although certification in English, Irish and other languages is not compulsory at any level, all degree courses at a National University of Ireland institution require a Leaving Certificate or equivalent in English and Irish. A third language is also required for many degree programmes.<sup>60</sup>

Languages Connect<sup>61</sup> is Ireland's strategy for foreign languages in education (2017-2026). With four key goals, its targets include: increasing language proficiency through improved learning environments; diversification of the uptake of languages learned; heightened awareness of the importance of languages; and enhanced employer engagement in language learning and the use of trade languages.

## LANGUAGE LEARNING PROVISION: INSIGHTS AND INNOVATION

### Normalizing language learning

The current languages-for-all policy and respective implementation arrangements seek to build on existing language foundations in the Irish context, i.e. a tradition of language learning, bilingualism in primary education contexts, and languages of new migrant communities. Research on perspectives of multilingualism in the ROI have found evidence of positive attitudes to growing multilingualism in urban settings<sup>62</sup> and there are examples of initial teacher education programmes preparing teachers for multilingual classrooms.<sup>63</sup> A recent survey conducted with parents on their views of their children's language learning found that parents would encourage their children to learn a foreign language and considered it a 'valuable life skill'.<sup>64</sup> With ongoing awareness-raising initiatives<sup>65</sup> and public commentary highlighting the many languages spoken in the ROI,<sup>66</sup> one of our interviewees observed of the Irish context:

**“I think we need to normalize language learning, so that it should be part of the curriculum from the very early years, the preschool years it should be... the idea of having a foreign language should be so normalized that it just should be part of the regular curriculum from the very beginning. I think, there needs to be an acknowledgement that every person involved in the education of our children needs to have a foreign language... if we look at even primary teacher education courses, they [student teachers] should all be learning how to teach a foreign language as part of their initial teacher education programme.”**

In the Irish public education system, exams and out-of-school-hours test preparation providers known as 'grind schools' or 'grinds' feature significantly in young people's lives.<sup>67</sup> Coupled with the non-mandatory nature of foreign language learning in the curriculum, there is the potential for language provision and uptake to decline. However, there are initiatives to encourage upper post-primary and college students to maintain their language skills. As our interviewees noted:

**“[...] we've been focusing more on the fun element of learning languages and trying to make available more information on the advantages of taking the, the language in college. So, we created a course finder, for example, where a student can find any course available in Ireland that offers a foreign language as part of the degree.”**

**“[...] you know maybe there's been this idea that if you don't take a pure language then you can't take any language and we've been trying to encourage the idea that learning a language with any course is actually useful.”**

The integration of languages and language learning into the everyday life of school settings contribute to the 'normalization' of language learning. One initiative discussed in our interviews was the organization of small local events to promote language uptake. These were held in school buildings, rather than larger fairs or conference venues, and as one interviewee commented:

**“We found that worked much better, because the students go into the event, didn't get on a bus and leave the school and nobody knew about it. Now they actually stay in their school and everybody else sees what they're doing.”**

A recent report on the quality of modern foreign language practice in schools<sup>68</sup> illustrates further examples of the promotion of language learning in schools and strengthening of home languages. In one such initiative, pupils are invited to create 'Think and Talk' books containing images of the topics they are studying in class. The pupils then take them home to facilitate parent-child discussion on the topic they are studying at school in their home language.

### Sustaining the diversification of languages provision

To increase the diversity of languages provision, in 2020 the Department of Education and Skills (now the Department of Education) enabled schools to access funding to upskill and refresh teachers' language skills.<sup>69</sup> Other funding initiatives have included additional teacher allocation for schools that want to offer a new language, and support for continuing professional development courses. For example, with an increased number of foreign language assistants in schools and classrooms, one of our interviewees discussed training for teachers on how to best support their foreign language assistants. This led to the involvement of language assistants in developing shared digital resources for the classroom.<sup>70</sup> Where there are incentives for diversification there is a clear indication that practitioners want to make the best of the resources for the long-term and to create access to languages for all. One of our interviewees commented:

**“We also got funding to do work on providing resources and support for teachers, tutorials on digital technologies, workshops on how to make the classroom environment more engaging... various tools for teachers to help them in their practice... how to implement the new languages. We're also introducing blended learning, so we're trying to look at opportunities for students who live in remote areas. Maybe they don't have access to a teacher.”**

In addition to sustaining the impact of incentives, there is also a clear emphasis on using those resources to build better for a wider community.

### Developing Communities of Practice (CoP)

One example of directly developing Communities of Practices comes from Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI), who in 2020 were able to link 600 teachers into Communities of Practice to share ideas and experiences of using resources.<sup>71</sup>



**Image 1: Teachers generate ideas at a Community of Practice in Republic of Ireland – Source: PPLI 2020:21**



Collaboration and/or the development of CoP are not always formally constructed external events. There are also instances, like those in the Finnish context, in which language educators, regardless of the language(s) they teach, come together to form connections with one another in the same school and create something greater than the sum of their parts. For example, as described in the Irish context:<sup>72</sup>

**“In one co-educational post-primary school a real strength was the consistency in practice across French lessons and the highly organised nature of the teachers in the French department. The lessons were characterised by purposeful, well-managed activities that encouraged deep levels of learning. Active learning was also encouraged through pair and group work, for example, classrooms were laid out in formations that allowed students to work easily with one another. In addition, the French teachers worked closely with the German teachers and a single MFL department was formed. That department also established links with the Irish subject department.**

[...]

**The teachers’ combined knowledge of their subject area, their willingness to learn from each other and collaborate led to the establishment of a highly effective subject department. In addition, the senior management team’s support for French, including an appropriate allocation of time to the subject and a good spread of lessons across the week, ensured regular contact time with the subject for students.”**

CoP, networking and the type of mentorship which nurtures both mentor and mentee also feature in some of the Irish language teacher education programmes:

**“There’s a mentoring system as part of it. So, when someone is doing the [teacher education programme], they are assigned a mentor, who visits their class and observes them teaching and records their teaching, and then helps them to analyse their own teaching and put together a development plan for their teaching, and so on. I think that’s the richest part of the program.**

**But it also has the effect of those people who are now as mentors on the programme, it keeps them fresh as well. So, there are lots of people who are teaching Irish at third level, [for whom] their involvement as mentors... probably has an impact on their own practice.**

**...and it has kind of created a network. That part, that’s important as well. You know, the, the network aspect of it. There are a lot of people who’ve gone through the programme who are connected now. The people who’ve gone through the course and have been really good, maybe they’d be asked back to be mentors, and so you’ve got this network of teachers, or kind of a community of practice, that’s building up over time.”**

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# Final remarks on Case Studies

In many of the different linguistic and cultural contexts across the world there are shared community expressions to depict the notion of collaborative working for social good. In Finnish, the expression is 'talkoo(t)';<sup>73</sup> in Irish, 'meitheal', as described by one of our interviewees:

**“[Meitheal] is the word used for that type of kind of selfless collaboration of a community coming together to do something, without actually getting anything from it, except that they're part of the community. It's an act of service, I suppose, of the community, for the good of the community.”**

Therefore, it would seem from the learning in both these different contexts that this element of 'talkoot' and 'meitheal' contribute to the success and resilience of languages provision and language learning in the face of challenging circumstances.

# Conclusion

In 2015, the first Language Trends Wales concluded that:

**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.**

While 2021 has seen some positive signs, with schools maintaining a steady engagement with international projects and a small increase in the A level entries for French, German and Spanish, those 2015 conclusions remain just as current.

This year's survey shows that, despite a stable population of 16-year-olds in Wales, between 2015 and 2021, GCSE entries for French and German have declined by almost half. This has been coupled with fluctuating numbers for GCSE Spanish over the same period. If current trends continue, it is possible that there will be less than one hundred GCSE entries in French and German in Wales by 2030, without an urgent intervention at system-level.

With just over one in five responding schools having no students studying international languages in Year 10, this will have an inevitable impact on an already fragile A level situation, as well as the pipeline to Higher Education.

And, while teachers are concerned about the complex interplay between international languages and English and Welsh, the Finland and Republic of Ireland case studies show that a multilingual approach at country-level is possible.

Through this 2021 Language Trends Wales Survey, teachers have requested funding for a national campaign on language learning, as well as students being given robust careers advice about the many doors which language learning can open.

Building on the evaluation of Global Futures that is currently underway, and in light of the Welsh Government's commitment to expanding the teaching of international languages in schools over the next five years, there is growing evidence and momentum which supports a full review of international languages at secondary and post-16 college level to develop a National Languages Strategy for Wales. Building on lessons learnt from existing initiatives such as the 2020 *Towards a National Languages Strategy for the UK*, this should include a long-term plan to invest in professional skills and resources for teachers.

Languages are vital for the future of Wales, as it recovers from the global pandemic and seeks to build and strengthen relationships across the world. Urgent, coordinated action is required and the new curriculum provides a once in a generation opportunity to develop a truly multilingual society.

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# Endnotes

1. See: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/towards-national-languages-strategy-education-and-skills/>
2. Welsh Government (2021)
3. Welsh Government (2020d)
4. Welsh Government (2021a:121, §8.275)
5. This analysis only compares the 'Big 3' – French, German and Spanish
6. Henderson and Carruthers (2021)
7. Jones (2019:5)
8. Welsh Government (2020b)
9. Arfon, E. (2020)
10. Currently, Qualifications Wales only provides GCSEs in the international languages French, German and Spanish (the 'Big 3'). 'Other languages' refers to languages other than English, Welsh and the 'Big 3'. Candidates in Wales may sit GCSE qualifications designed in England in up to 18 languages.
11. Gorrara et al. (2020)
12. Welsh Government (2017)
13. Qualifications Wales (2021)
14. Welsh Government (2021b)
15. Centre for Economic Performance (2021)
16. Welsh Government (2021c)
17. Welsh Government (2021d)
18. Braun and Clarke (2006)
19. See: [https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/global-business-communication-french-level-1-2/#tab\\_overview](https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/global-business-communication-french-level-1-2/#tab_overview)
20. See: <https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/activities/cymru>
21. See: <http://mflmentoring.co.uk/>
22. InfoFinland (2021)
23. Ministry of Justice (2019)
24. European Union (2020)
25. Ministry of Justice (2018)
26. Ministry of Justice (2003)
27. Basic Education Act 628/1998, §4.4
28. Ministry of Justice Finland (2018:4, §17)
29. Statistics Finland (2021:4)
30. Statistics Finland (2019)
31. Jungerstam and Wentjärvi (2019)
32. Finnish National Agency for Education (2017)
33. Ministry of Education and Culture (2021)
34. Ibid
35. Ministry of Education and Culture (no date)
36. Finnish National Agency for Education (2017:15-16)
37. Finnish National Agency for Education (2019)
38. Statistics Finland (2020)
39. Prime Minister's Office: Finland (2015:18,41)
40. Finnish National Agency for Education (2019:2)
41. Finnish National Board of Education (2016)
42. Alisaari et al. (2019:48-58)
43. Finnish National Agency for Education (no date, a,b)
44. Peda.net (no date)
45. University of Jyväskylä (2021a)
46. Bergroth (2016)
47. Criss (2021)
48. University of Jyväskylä (2017)
49. Irish Statute Book (2020, Article 8.1, 8.2)
50. European Commission (no date)
51. Irish Statute Book (2003)
52. Houses of the Oireachtas 2021 (§18C, 3b of Official Languages (Amendment) Bill 2019).
53. Government of Ireland (2012)
54. UNESCO (2017)
55. Irish Times (2017)
56. Government of Ireland (2018:8)
57. Citizens Information (2019) and Department of Education (no date)
58. Gaelscoileanna Teo (2021)
59. NCCA (2021)
60. National University of Ireland (2021)
61. Department of Education and Skills (2017a)
62. King and Carson (2017)
63. Liberio & Oliveras (2021)
64. PPLI (2021c)
65. Languages Connect (2021)
66. RTE (2018)
67. OUCEA (2015); Baird *et al.* (2015)
68. Department of Education and Skills (2020a)
69. Department of Education and Skills (2020b)
70. PPLI (2019)
71. PPLI (2020:21)
72. Department of Education and Skills (2020:15)
73. The Guardian (2018)





