



# Language Trends Wales 2023

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[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

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# Foreword from British Council Wales

British Council Wales supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in Wales and countries worldwide. We do this through our work in Arts, Education and English language. We connect Welsh leaders, students, youth, teachers, artists, and organisations with counterparts around the world and we ensure Wales is represented as a vibrant nation of the UK. British Council Wales enriches people's lives at home and abroad encouraging creativity and innovation through an interplay of ideas, skills, and experiences. We believe that speaking an International Language is crucial to understanding another culture, connecting with people, and for long term growth and prosperity. So, no matter how many people around the world speak Welsh or English, we still need to go to the effort of mastering International Languages ourselves in Wales to be a truly outward looking nation, with global connections.

**Ruth Cocks**

Director, British Council Wales

# Introduction

*Language Trends Wales* is an annual survey of schools and post-16 colleges, designed to gather information about the situation of language teaching and learning. The aims of this research are: (i) to track the trends of language learning over the years; (ii) to assess the impact of policy measures in relation to International Languages;<sup>1</sup> and (iii) to analyse strengths and weaknesses of the current context of International Language teaching and learning, based both on quantitative data and on views expressed by teachers. This year, *Language Trends Wales* also conducted interviews with three teachers of languages in order to celebrate the excellent practice going on in classrooms across Wales. The first *Language Trends Wales* survey was carried out in 2015 and it is part of a series of recurring studies which have taken place across three of the four UK jurisdictions: since 2002, there has been an annual survey in England, and since 2019 a biennial survey in Northern Ireland; previous reports can be found on the corresponding country's British Council website.<sup>2</sup> *Language Trends* shows general shifts in the teaching and learning of languages and provides a springboard for teachers, school leaders, academics, inspectors, policy makers, school pupils, and the public to consider aspects of International Language Learning more deeply.

Last year's *Language Trends Wales 2022* found that one in fourteen responding primary schools were not in a position to teach International Languages, a now compulsory requirement of the curriculum. At secondary level, we found an overall decline between 2021 and 2022 in GCSE and A-level entries in French, German and Spanish.

This year, British Council Wales contracted a team of researchers at Queen's University Belfast to conduct *Language Trends Wales 2023*. The team has previously worked on similar outputs for the British Council and includes members with experience of teaching languages in primary and secondary classrooms in the UK and abroad.

On behalf of British Council Wales and Queen's University Belfast, we would like to put on record our sincere thanks to the teachers who participated in our research. Without teachers' participation, our research would not be possible. We thank you for your continued support and time.

## HEADLINE FINDINGS FOR 2023

- Seventy-two per cent of responding primary schools reported that they taught an International Language within curriculum time in the 2022/23 school year, compared to 41 per cent in the 2021/22 school year.
- French remains the most popular language taught in primary schools.
- In primary schools, 67 per cent of respondents feel that staff proficiency in languages is the biggest concern in meeting the requirements of the New Curriculum.
- Despite declines in entries in GCSE French and German, teachers continue to persevere and showcase exemplary practices in International Language teaching.
- Entries in A-level French, German and Spanish have stabilised to pre-pandemic levels.
- Schools have excellent engagement with initiatives to promote language learning, for example Routes into Languages, Cerdd Iaith and MFL Mentoring.

<sup>1</sup> This refers to all languages other than Welsh and English.

<sup>2</sup> *Language Trends England* (2023), <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/language-trends-england-2023>; *Language Trends Northern Ireland* (2023), <https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/programmes/education/language-trends-northern-ireland>.

# Policy context and background

It is well documented that British Council (Languages for the Future, 2017) cited Spanish, Mandarin, French, Arabic, and German as the most important languages to learn for economic prosperity, with Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Japanese, and Russian also seen as important. As we reported last year, Ayres-Bennett et al. (2022) found that languages play a significant role in international trade and that not sharing a common language acts as a non-tariff trade barrier. Another key finding of the study is that investing in languages education in the United Kingdom (UK) will, most likely, return more than the investment cost, even under conservative assumptions. For example, the benefit-to-cost ratios are estimated to be at least 2:1 for promoting Arabic, French, Mandarin, or Spanish language education, meaning that spending £1 could return approximately £2 (Ayres-Bennett et al., 2022). It thus continues to be more important than ever that Wales has a workforce skilled in communicating in a wide range of languages in addition to Welsh and English.

*Language Trends Wales 2023* surveyed schools in an era of educational policy change, with the New Curriculum for Wales introduced in primary schools in 2022 now taking root. A fuller appraisal of the policy background can be found in *Language Trends Wales 2022*. In summary, the Welsh Government aspires to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills, and experiences to succeed in the future. The New Curriculum for Wales thus aims to establish shared expectations as to how schools should develop their curriculum, and it includes the renaming of ‘Modern Foreign Languages’ to ‘International Languages’ (Welsh Government, 2021). International Languages in Wales are now considered to be home and community languages, Modern Languages, classical languages and British Sign Language. The plurilingual approach that underpins the New Curriculum for Wales aims to support a lifelong love for languages, including Welsh, English and Other International Languages. The Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience of the New Curriculum thus envisions bringing languages together in order to foster creative and ambitious learners, while also developing invaluable communication and problem-solving skills that empower language learners in all walks of life.

The most popular International Languages in the Welsh school system continue to be French, Spanish and German. The lack of progression pathways to local universities in languages other than these three, coupled with the dearth of language provision in Further Education (see Collen et al., 2023),

make diversification of International Languages for certification in the school system a challenge. Despite these systemic issues that seem to stymie the efforts of teachers, we highlight in this report the excellent practices in International Languages going on in schools and classrooms across Wales.

## RESEARCH OUTLINE

Prior to data collection, 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 was conducted to the highest ethical standards.

The research question guiding the study was ‘What is the current state of International Language teaching in primary schools, secondary schools and post-16 colleges in Wales?’ To answer the research question, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, building on the previous *Language Trends Wales* reports and comparable with methodologies used in recent *Language Trends England* and *Language Trends Northern Ireland* reports. The research methods comprised three surveys, one for each school sector, and available in Welsh and English. The surveys comprised closed question items to be analysed quantitatively and included some open question items for qualitative commentary. In order to present best practice in International Language education, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three classroom teachers using purposive sampling.

Questions for the survey were developed by the research team in early 2022 and refined in consultation with a group of stakeholders, convened by British Council Wales. The surveys were emailed to 957 primary schools, 178 secondary schools and 11 post-16 colleges in Wales in the summer of 2023, and were addressed to the Principal (for primary schools) and the Head of Modern Foreign Languages / Head of International Languages (for post-primary schools and colleges). Not all primary schools in Wales (n=1213) were contacted, due to the lack of access to a publicly available list of primary school email addresses. Links to participate in the survey were also available for the first time on British Council Wales social media.

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 the dataset. For the survey, closed-

item responses were analysed using descriptive statistics and comments to open response questions were analysed using thematic analysis. Interviews were conducted online, transcribed, and analysed using simple content analysis.

Compared to previous years, the response rate is slightly down for primary (by 2 per cent) and slightly up for secondary:

	Base	Achieved	% Response rate
Primary School Survey	957	75	8%
Secondary School Survey	178	67	38%
Post-16 College Survey	11	8	73%

Table 1: Response rates

## PUBLIC EXAMINATION FIGURES

Prior to the 2023 suite of examinations, Qualifications Wales announced the intention for this year's results to fall broadly midway between the 2019 and 2022 results. The total number of GCSE entries decreased by 3.3 per cent from 2022 to 2023, but when compared to 2019, the overall number of entries in 2023 has actually increased by 0.7 per cent. The overall proportion of GCSEs in Wales marked at grade C/4 and above decreased from 68.2 per cent in 2022 to 64.5 per cent in 2023. However, in International Languages, performance in WJEC awarded qualifications at Grade C/4 or above was 83.3 per cent for French, 86.9 per cent for German and 74.8 per cent for Spanish, consolidating existing evidence that International Languages are taken by pupils who achieve higher than average grades.

Between 2022 and 2023, entries for GCSE French and German have dropped by 24.9 per cent and 26 per cent respectively; Spanish has continued an erratic pattern of entry not seen elsewhere in the UK. By comparison, entries for GCSE economics and business studies are up by 58.8 per cent and 30.3 per cent respectively. This change cannot be attributed to falling pupil numbers, but rather changes in pupils' preferences, coupled with systemic issues. It is important to note that the drop in German is similar in Northern Ireland (-23 per cent), so Wales is not immune in this phenomenon.

Figure 2 shows that entries in Other Modern Languages have almost returned to pre-pandemic levels; this is good news, and it shows that many speakers of other languages are able to achieve certification.

Figure 3 shows small yet pleasing growth in entries for A-level French, German, and Spanish. Numbers are too small to be statistically significant, of course, but it is a change in the tide and to be welcomed.

Similar to trends at GCSE, A-level entries in Other Modern Languages are also heading in the right direction; this is positive news and needs to be built upon strategically in the future.

Figure 1: GCSE entries in French, German and Spanish 2015 – 2023 (source JCQ 2015-2022 and Qualifications Wales (provisional) 2023)

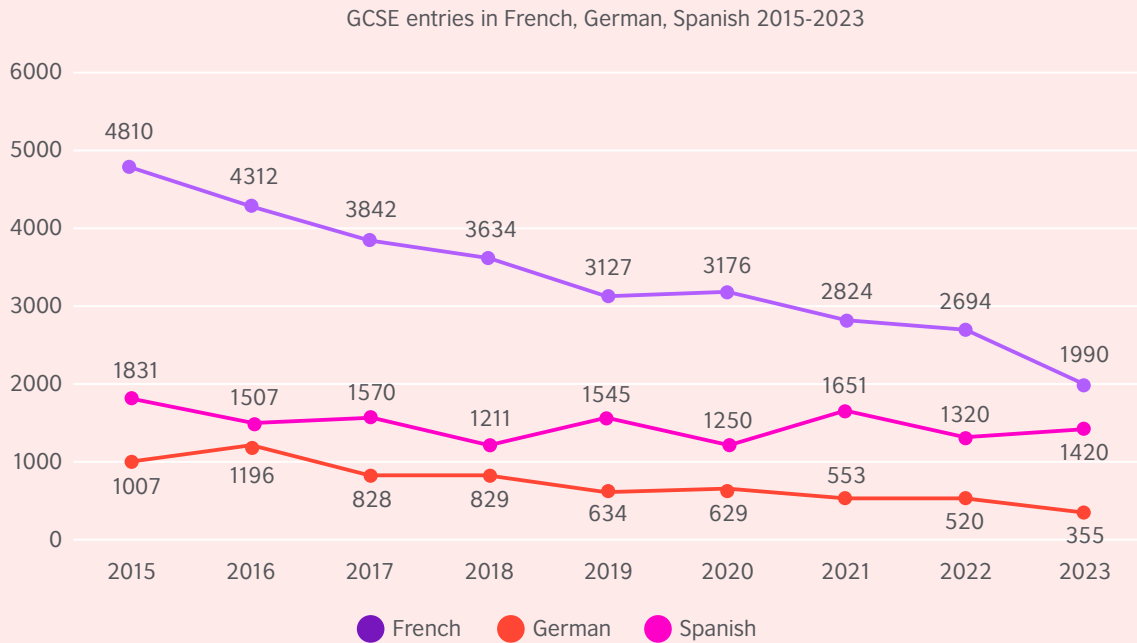


Figure 2: GCSE entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 – 2023 (source JCQ 2015-2022 and Qualifications Wales (provisional) 2023)

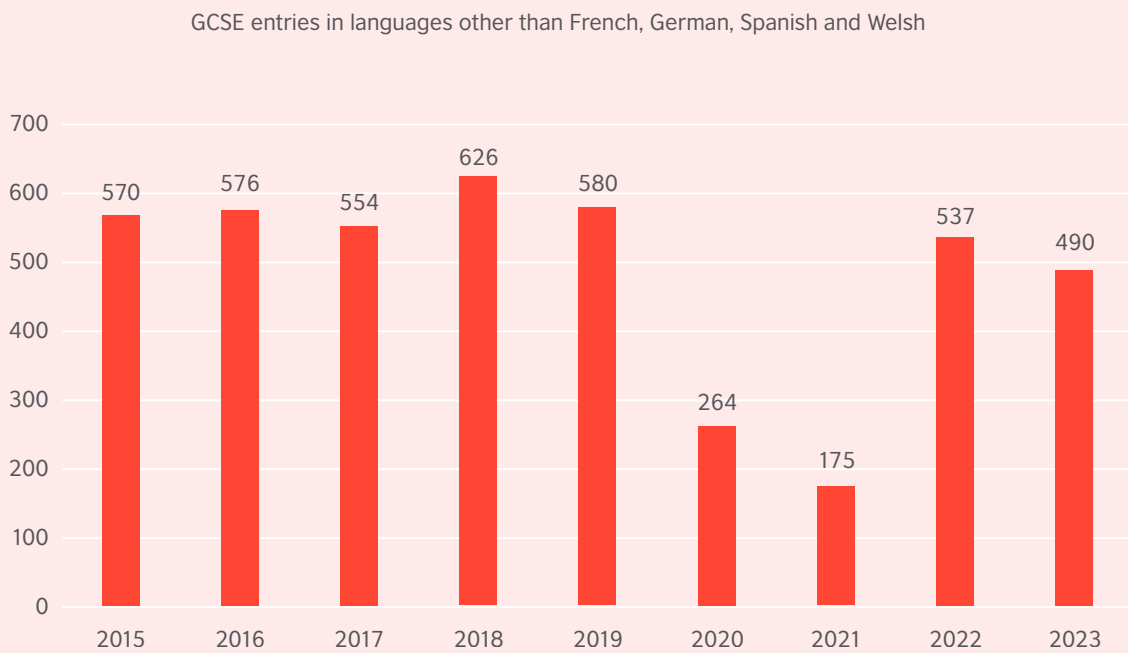


Figure 3: A-level entries in French, German and Spanish 2015 – 2023 (source JCQ 2015-2022 and Qualifications Wales (provisional) 2023)

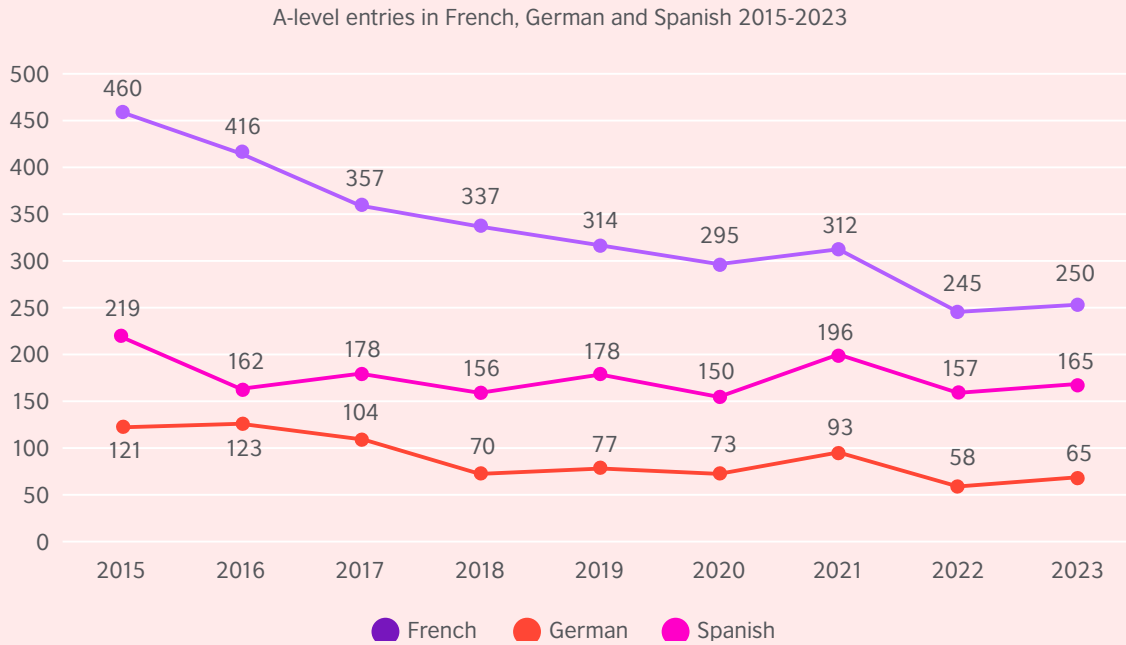
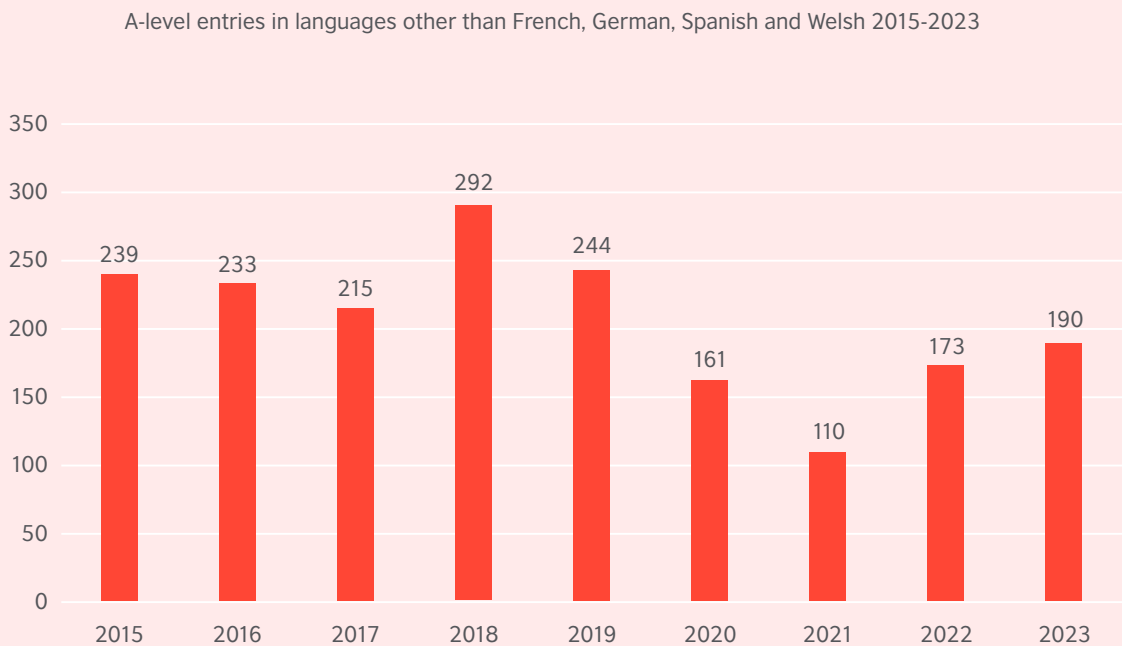


Figure 4: A-level entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 – 2023 (source JCQ 2015-2022 and Qualifications Wales (provisional) 2023)





# Findings from Primary Schools

## PROFILE OF RESPONDING SCHOOLS

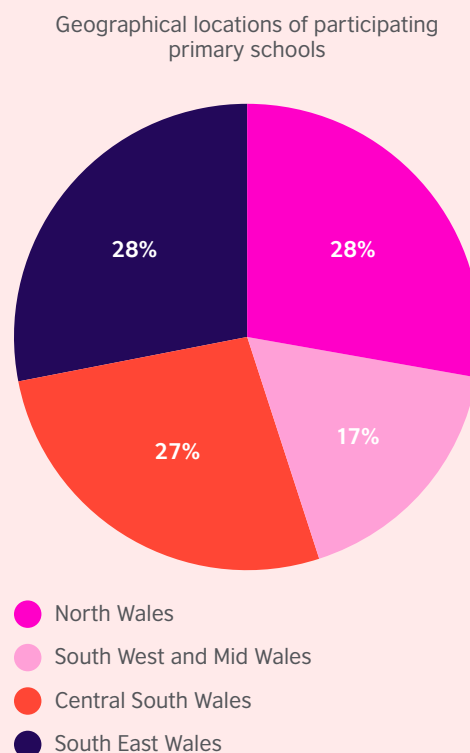
The 2023 schools' census reported that there were 1,213 state primary schools, with a pupil headcount of 262,666. Most schools in the Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion, and Carmarthenshire are Welsh medium schools. In the other 18 local authorities, most schools are English medium schools, with a combination of Welsh and English spoken.

After data sets were reviewed and duplicates removed, there were 75 usable survey responses, of which 11 were in Welsh and 64 in English. Most local authorities are represented in our resulting data set (see table 2).

Geographical Location	Includes local authorities of	Number of responding schools (total n=75)
North Wales	Isle of Anglesey Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham	21
South West and Mid Wales	Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot	13
Central South Wales	Bridgend, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff	20
South East Wales	Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport	21

Table 2: Geographical locations of participating primary schools

Figure 5: Geographical locations of participating primary schools



## Free school meals

The Welsh Government introduced a new transitional protection for free school meals policy in 2019 in order to ensure that pupils continue to receive free school meals during a roll-out period for Universal Credit. This protection applies to individual pupils and continues until the end of their current school phase, i.e., the end of primary school or the end of secondary school. Any pupil who was eligible for free school meals on the introduction of the policy on 1st April 2019 would also be transitionally protected. In addition, any pupil that had become eligible at any point during the Universal Credit rollout under the new eligibility criteria would also be transitionally protected.

In December 2021, the Welsh Government announced that free school meal entitlement would be extended to all primary school children. Implementation of this policy began in September 2022, with the youngest learners in primary schools

receiving free school meals initially (Welsh Government, 2021a). The Welsh Government have committed to providing free school meals to all primary pupils by 2024 (Welsh Government, 2023a).

According to the most recent data available at the time of writing, there were 102,391 pupils (26.9 per cent) aged 5 to 15 known to be eligible for free school meals or transitionally protected (Welsh Government, 2023b). This is an observed increase from 95,532 pupils (25.2 per cent) in April 2021. The Welsh government's reporting of this data in the 5 to 15 age range makes it difficult to compare the exact situation in our responding primary and secondary schools. Based on publicly available Census data, we calculated that our respondents fall into the following quintiles:

Quintile	Quintile %	% Response rate to survey
1 – least deprived	0 - 11.8%	27%
2	11.9% -18.7%	21%
3	18.8% - 26.3%	18%
4	26.4% - 37.4%	12%
5 – most deprived	37.5% and above	22%

Table 3: FSME quintiles for primary schools

In an ideal survey response, there would be 20 per cent representation from each quintile. The fact that schools where fewer pupils than average are entitled to Free School Meals are more likely to respond to the survey means that the data in this report may be more favourable than the reality in many schools.

## INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES ON THE CURRICULUM IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

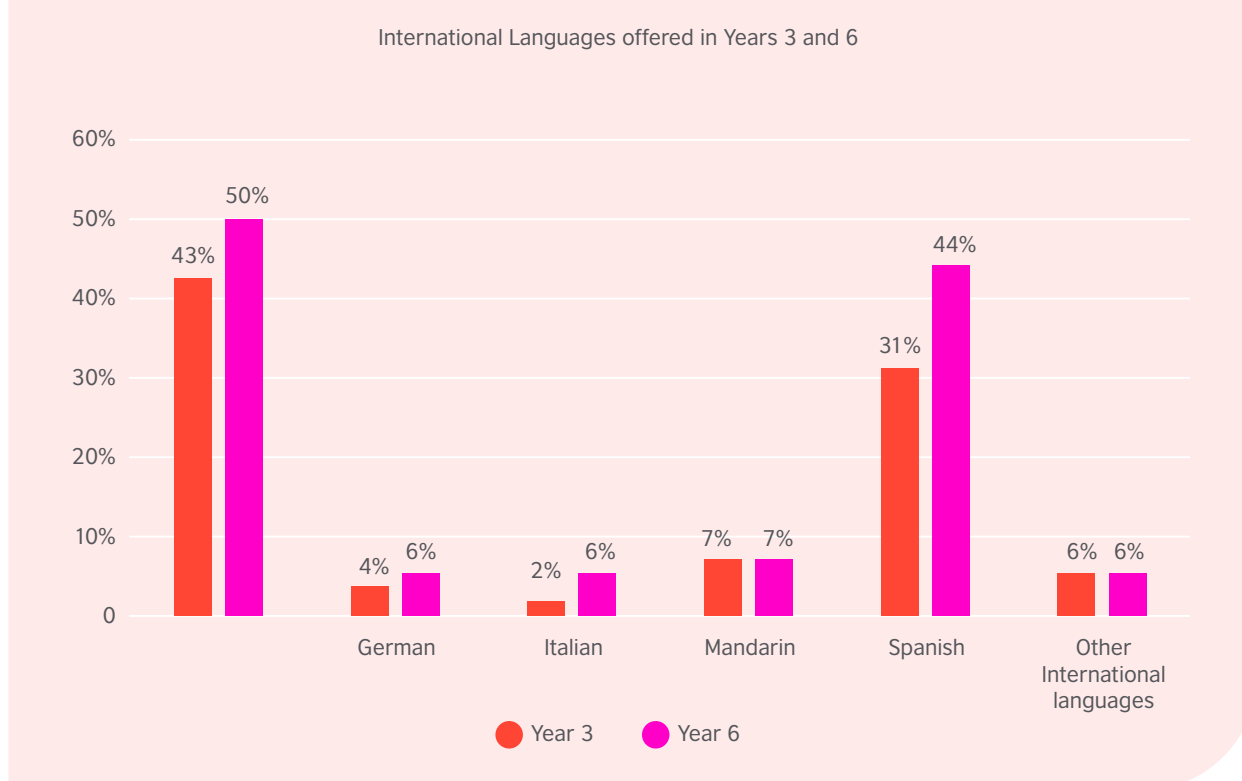
In the 2022/23 school year, 72 per cent of responding primary schools (n=75) reported that they teach an International Language within curriculum time. This is a considerable increase from last year's figure of 41 per cent (*Language Trends Wales, 2022*). Understandably, it will take time for all schools to implement these changes to their curriculum.<sup>3</sup> Of the 72 per cent of responding schools which are teaching languages, 57 per cent have just started teaching languages this school year, reflecting the impact of the New Curriculum for Wales that was introduced for first teaching in September 2022.<sup>4</sup> Only three responding primary schools have been teaching International Languages for more than 5 years, while 17 per cent began teaching languages 1-2 years ago, and 20 per cent started teaching languages 3-5 years ago.

As with previous iterations of *Language Trends Wales*, French remains the most popular language taught in primary schools, with Spanish close behind. In terms of Other International Languages, respondents from primary schools noted the teaching of Makaton, Ukrainian and British Sign Language.

<sup>3</sup> Support and guidance for primary schools integrating International Languages into their curriculum can be found at <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/languages-literacy-and-communication/>.

<sup>4</sup> The New Curriculum for Wales 2022 stipulates that all primary schools must teach an International Language.

Figure 6: Percentage of International Languages offered in responding primary schools (which teach International Languages) in Years 3 and 6



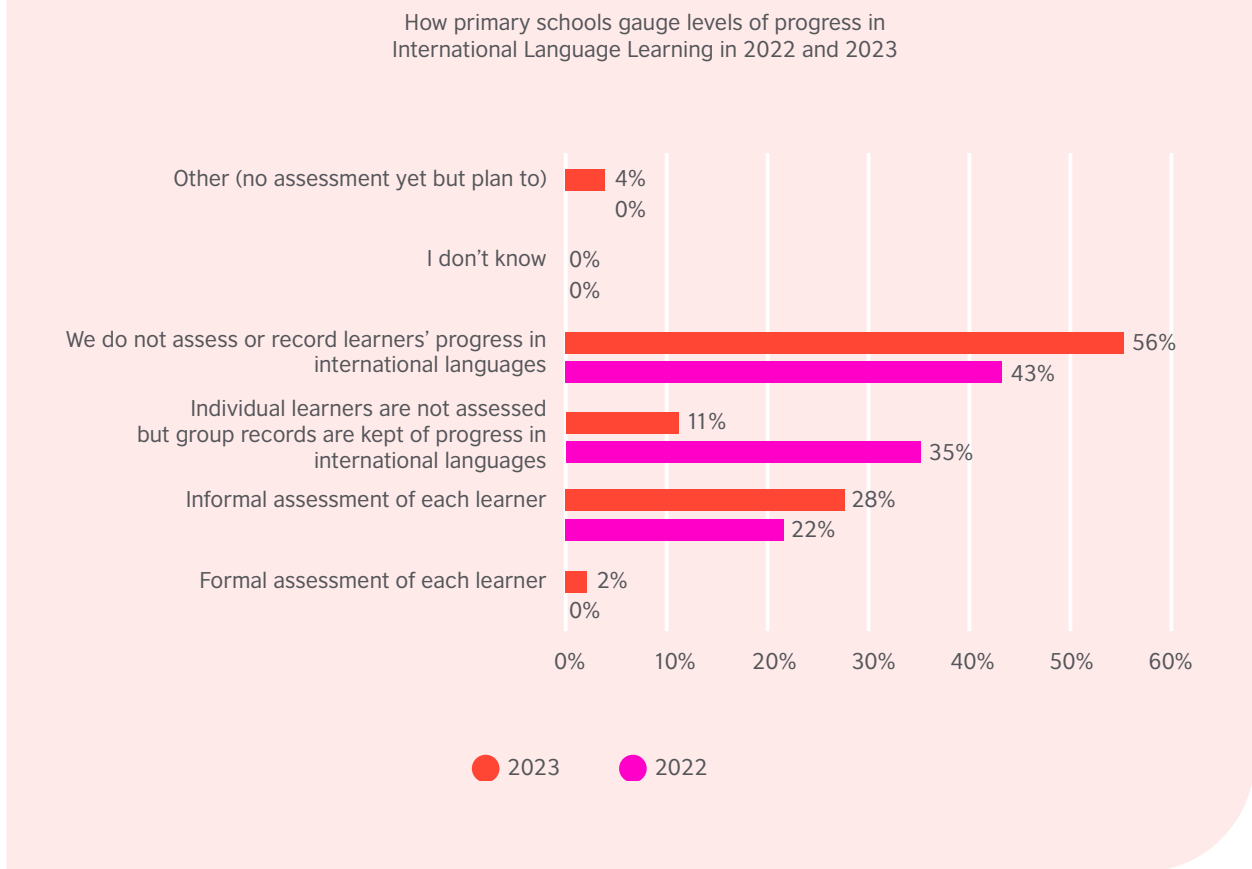
In schools where language teaching takes place, and in year groups within schools where language teaching takes place, responding primary teachers reported the following periods of time allotted for languages per week:

Year Group	No time	Less than 30 minutes	30 - 45 minutes	46 minutes - 1 hour	Between 1 and 2 hours	More than 2 hours
Early years	17%	66%	14%	3%	0%	0%
Year 1	17%	44%	31%	5%	3%	0%
Year 2	8%	42%	36%	11%	3%	0%
Year 3	2%	30%	42%	19%	7%	0%
Year 4	2%	25%	42%	22%	9%	0%
Year 5	0%	18%	41%	25%	16%	0%
Year 6	0%	19%	43%	24%	14%	0%

Table 4: Time for languages across primary year groups per week (% calculated out of respondents who answered by year group)

No schools reported more than two hours of language learning. Time for languages varies across year groups, with most year groups spending less than 30 minutes or 30-45 minutes on languages. As table 4 shows, by Years 4, 5 and 6, around a quarter of responding schools spend between 46 minutes to an hour on International Languages per week. Previous research by Graham et al. (2017) suggests that one hour of teaching per week is required in order for pupils to attain measurable progress in an International Language at primary level. Forty-three per cent of schools reported that their learners receive the full allocation of timetabled International Language learning each week in the 2022/23 school year. Learners do not receive the full allocation of timetabled language learning in 20 per cent of responding schools, a decrease of 5 per cent from *Language Trends Wales 2022*. The remaining schools did not know if their learners received the full allocation (24 per cent), while those teachers who responded in the 'other' category (13 per cent) told us that learners receive the full allocation when it is possible, or International Languages have not been timetabled yet.

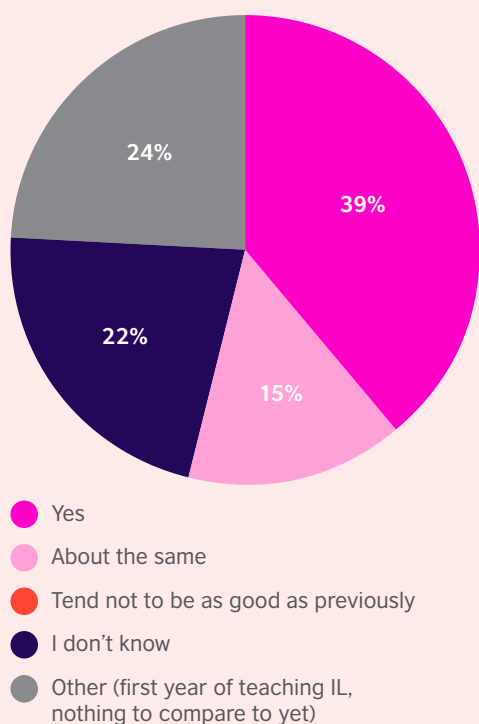
Figure 7: How primary schools gauge levels of progress in International Language Learning in 2022 and 2023



More than half of responding primary schools which taught languages in the 2022/23 academic year told us that they do not assess or record learners' progress in International Languages; this is an increase of more than 10 per cent from the figure reported in *Language Trends Wales 2022*. Just one school formally assesses each learner, while 28 per cent informally assess learners. Eleven per cent of schools do not assess individual learners, but instead keep group records of linguistic progression, signifying a marked contrast with last year's figure of 35 per cent (see figure 7). When asked if standards and competence for International Languages at the end of Year 6 are improving for successive cohorts of learners, 39 per cent of responding schools said yes, while 15 per cent believe that standards are about the same. However, several teachers noted that it was not possible to compare as this was their first year of teaching International Languages, and it will therefore be interesting to map the changes in future *Language Trends Wales* reports (see figure 8).

Figure 8: In your opinion, are standards (i.e. language competence) for International Languages at the end of Year 6 improving for successive cohorts of learners in your school?

Are standards for International Languages at the end of Year 6 improving for successive cohorts of learners in your school?



## THE TEACHER OF PRIMARY LANGUAGES

In those primary schools that were teaching International Languages in 2022/23, the subject is delivered in 74 per cent of responding schools by class teachers; this echoes the findings of *Language Trends Wales 2022*, in which almost two thirds of responding schools reported that class teachers delivered language classes. The remainder of responding schools rely on external specialists, secondary school links, teaching assistants and PPA teachers. Just over half of teachers who deliver International Languages have accessed language specific Professional Learning in the past school year, leaving 48 per cent of teachers who have yet to access such training.

## STATUTORY INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES

Following the introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales in primary schools in the 2022/23 school year, all primary schools are required to teach an International Language as part of the Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) 'Languages, Literacy and Communication' (Welsh Government, 2021b). All 75 responding primary schools (i.e., both

those which were teaching International Languages in 2022/23 and those who were not) answered two questions about their readiness for the New Curriculum and statutory teaching of International Languages from September 2022 (see table 5 and figure 9).

Firstly, we asked schools to choose the statement that best describes their planned approach to the teaching of International Languages in the 2022/23 school year (see table 5). Although only 7 per cent of schools felt that they were not in a position to teach International Languages, 40 per cent of schools were in the early stages of planning International Language provision (see table 5). This is similar to the data collected last year, according to which 7 per cent were not in a position to teach International Languages and 43 per cent were in the early stages of planning International Language provision (*Language Trends Wales, 2022*). Nearly a third of this year's respondents are planning for learners to make progress in one International Language that is aligned to the offer of languages at the local secondary school, while 15 per cent plan to introduce learners to multiple languages. For those teachers who responded in the 'other' category, they variously described their planned approaches as: teaching a combination of an International Language and British Sign Language; using After School Clubs to deliver languages; or choosing to teach languages which are not necessarily on offer at the local secondary school.

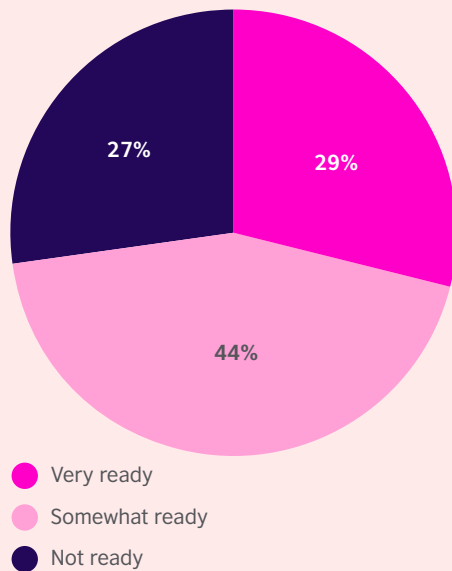
The survey asked schools how ready they were to include an International Language on the curriculum in September 2022 (see figure 9). This year, more schools reported that they were very ready to include an International Language on the curriculum (29 per cent compared to 17 per cent in 2022); however, the remainder felt either somewhat ready (44 per cent) or not ready (27 per cent) to deliver International Languages.

We are not in a position to teach International Languages	7%
We are in the early stages of planning International Language provision	40%
We plan for learners to make progress in one International Language and to align this with our local secondary school	29%
We plan to introduce learners to multiple International Languages	15%
We plan to teach British Sign Language	1%
I don't know	0%
Other (please specify)	8%

Table 5: In the current year 2022/23, which statement best describes your planned approach to the teaching of International Languages?

Figure 9: How ready as a school were you in September 2022 to include an International Language as a statutory part of Curriculum for Wales 2022?

How ready as a school were you in September 2022 to include an International Language as a statutory part of Curriculum for Wales 2022?



Early Years	27%
Year 1	36%
Year 2	44%
Year 3	60%
Year 4	65%
Year 5	77%
Year 6	77%
We are not in a position to teach International Languages to any year group in 2022/23.	13%

Table 6: With which year groups did you plan to teach an International Language from September 2022? Tick all that apply.

In *Language Trends Wales 2022*, we asked schools what languages they intended to teach in 2022/23; 66 per cent of schools planned to teach French, 13 per cent of schools planned to teach Spanish and 9 per cent of schools planned to teach British Sign Language as their main language. This year, when asked what International Languages were being taught in the 2022/23 school year, just over 50 per cent of schools responded French and 28 per cent of schools responded Spanish. Five per cent of schools were teaching one of German, Italian, Japanese or Mandarin as their main language. Only three per cent of schools were teaching British Sign Language, but no responding schools were teaching an ancient language as their main or additional language. Just

under 30 per cent of responding schools were also teaching one of British Sign Language, French, German, Italian, Mandarin or Spanish as an additional language.

### CHALLENGES TO MEETING THE NEW REQUIREMENTS OF CURRICULUM FOR WALES 2022 FOR INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES

For the second consecutive year, our survey asked teachers about the challenges they face in meeting the new requirements of Curriculum for Wales 2022 and compulsory language learning as part of the Area of Learning Experience 'Languages, Literacy and Communication' (Welsh Government, 2021b). Multiple responses were permitted, shown in table 7. Reiterating findings from *Language Trends Wales 2022*, the biggest concern remains staff proficiency in languages (65 per cent of respondents in 2022 and 67 per cent in 2023 cited this as a challenge), followed by competition for curriculum time from Welsh and English (52 per cent in 2022 and 57 per cent in 2023).

Staff proficiency in International Languages	67%
Competition for curriculum time from Welsh and English	57%
Insufficient curriculum time in general	53%
Need to focus curriculum time on 'catch-up' in other subjects due to Covid-19	39%
Funding and resources	39%
Finding teachers capable of teaching an international language	35%
Accessing language-specific Professional Learning	21%
Impact of Covid-19	15%
We do not experience any particular challenges	8%
Achieving support from parents	8%

Table 7: Challenges faced by teachers in meeting the New Curriculum for Wales 2022 (multiple responses permitted)

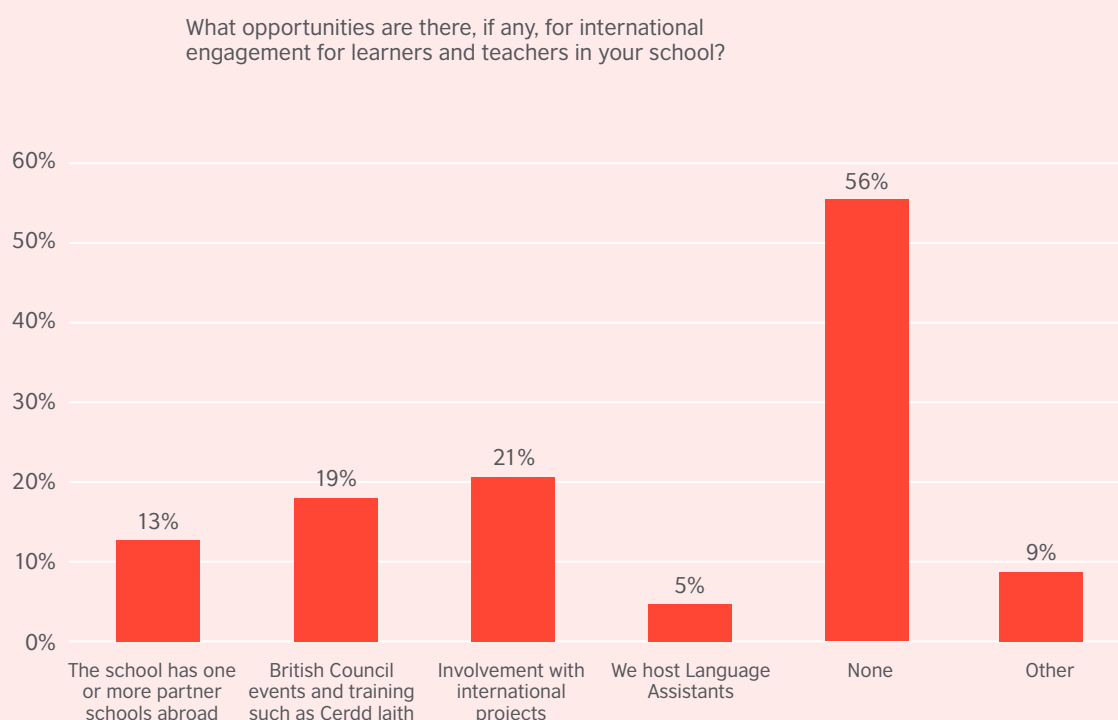
In the school year 2022/23, the teaching of International Languages was largely delivered by school staff, namely a Teacher (55 per cent), Senior Teacher (11 per cent), and Deputy Head or Head Teacher (10 per cent). Only 24 per cent of schools responded that the person with overall responsibility for International Languages held a GCSE qualification or equivalent in the language, a stark contrast to *Language Trends Wales 2022* in which 42 per cent of schools told us that the teacher responsible would be qualified to GCSE-level. Although 20

per cent have an A-level or equivalent, and 15 per cent have a degree in International Language(s), over a quarter of teachers responsible for languages education in responding schools have no formal qualifications. Other qualifications held by teachers in responding schools include a B1 Intermediate Certificate in French, a qualification in another language to what is taught in the school, a TELT or CiLT Cymru qualification. While over 50 per cent of primary schools have contact with one, some or all the main receiving secondary schools, there remains 47 per cent of primary schools who have no contact with the language departments of local secondary schools. Contact between primary and secondary schools has thus decreased by 7 per cent amongst respondents since the publication of *Language Trends Wales 2022*.

## INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

It is positive to note that the data collected this year reflect an increase in the number of opportunities for international engagement for learners and teachers in schools. Although there is work yet to be done as 56 per cent of schools reported having no international engagement, it is notable that this figure has decreased by 8 per cent since *Language Trends Wales 2022*. There has been a 10 per cent increase in engagement with British Council events and training (19 per cent in 2023 compared to 9 per cent in 2022), such as Cerdd Iait, a learning resource and teacher training course designed to provide further skills to teachers for delivering International Languages, alongside Welsh and English. Aside from the engagement listed in the chart (figure 10), some schools also reported engagement through other activities; this included Power Languages, transition projects with high schools, Erasmus+, and an annual visit to Normandy with Year 6.

Figure 10: Percentage of international engagement in primary schools (multiple responses permitted)



We also asked schools if they have links with any outside organisations to promote International Language Learning. According to responding schools, there remains a dearth in links with businesses that reiterates last year's findings in 2022. Connections with local secondary schools dropped by 11 per cent this year, from 47 per cent in 2022 to 36 per cent in 2023. While links with the former Regional Consortia have increased from 19 per cent in 2022 to 25 per cent in 2023, our data this year also show that links with universities and cultural institutes have yet to be further strengthened. To this latter point, we discuss one such example of how connections are taking place between schools and universities via a mentoring approach (see 'MFL Mentoring: Increasing Uptake' in the Celebrating Good Practice section of this report).

Business or other employer	1%
University	8%
Cultural Institute (e.g. Institut Français)	8%
Schools outside of Wales	8%
Other (please specify)	11%
British Council	11%
The Regional Consortium	25%
Local secondary school	36%

Table 8: Links with external organisations to promote International Language Learning (multiple responses permitted)

## RESOURCES FOR TEACHING INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES

This year, we asked all responding primary schools to tell us about the resources that they use to deliver International Languages. We received a variety of responses, with nearly a quarter of schools (24 per cent) stating that they use Power Language resources, an online International Language resource for teachers. As well as several respondents noting use of their own resources that they have created, teachers also avail of resources from Twinkl, Language Gym, La Jolie Ronde, Language Angels, Routes into Languages, the Consortia (e.g., Language Lead Schools), Lightbulb Languages, YouTube and Cerdd Iaitn.

## MOVING FORWARD WITH INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES AT PRIMARY

We asked survey respondents what is currently working well in International Language Learning in their schools, and it is encouraging to read the many examples of pedagogical practices currently at work that are fostering a positive learning environment for pupils and teachers:

*"A cross curricular approach - using language patterns and vocab across a range of contexts that link with our topic work. Resources such as Word Wall to create simple retrieval games. Using Power Language resources to support teaching. Using the Routes into Language resources to develop the learners understanding of culture and language acquisition."*

*"Dedicated time through timetabled sessions to deliver International Languages from Reception to Year 6. PPA cover staff deliver French and Spanish speaking, teacher delivers to 3 other classes in a skills swap arrangement. Support from EAS consortia. Opportunities for training and network meetings."*

*"French Friday - pupils are encouraged to use basic French on this day. I teach across the school whilst colleagues teach my class - no extra cost for the school."*

*"Having a partner school in Normandy, France to deliver purposeful learning in context. It is inspiring our children to want to learn French and communicate with their penpals. Introducing it early to our younger children who are enthusiastic and enjoy learning."*

*"The use of songs through media such as YouTube works well throughout the school. We have a Spanish assembly every fortnight and the children love to participate [...]. We don't have an allotted time for languages, but teachers try to fit a session in over a two-week period. I ran an after school club which was very popular. I work with the Welsh lead to try and teach the same or similar language patterns."*

However, many challenges remain to delivering International Language Learning at primary level and ensuring that teachers are supported to meet the demands of the New Curriculum for Wales 2022 and compulsory language learning. When asked about what support they would welcome to develop an International Languages curriculum, schools responded with the following suggestions:

*"More money to support training in house to a wider range of staff to build confidence, or external courses to attend. Resources developed in International Languages, Welsh and English."*

*"More staff training. More staff expertise, perhaps this could be through teaching of International Language(s) as part of PPA. We are currently*



*introducing Language of the Month but need extra resources to engage the children further and make it more meaningful. I think we would benefit from closer links with the secondary school, inviting them in to do model lessons for pupils and staff and really bringing the enthusiasm and buzz that comes from being a specialist. Access to a wider range of resources would also help the planning process as to date there is very little material available at a suitable level for beginners.”*

*“Link with a primary school in France. French books/resources - extra funding. Training for staff during insets. Links with businesses. More events to take part in during the year. Linking up with other primary schools.”*

*“More training, possibly in the style of the Welsh sabbatical courses, to help enthusiastic teachers gain more confidence in an area that is considered extremely difficult for some. Age appropriate resource packs. The provision of language assistants sounds too good to be true in a primary setting!”*

Further comments in addition to those above likewise emphasize the need for further training to support staff in schools, as well as a greater breadth of resources for teachers to access. Some teachers also noted the constraints of time for planning language classes, as well as tackling declining literacy skills following the Covid-19 pandemic. These key threads that run throughout the primary school responses highlight a need for more funding, resources and training to best help primary educators deliver meaningful teaching of International Languages.

# Findings from Secondary Schools

## PROFILE OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In the 2022/23 school year, there were 178 state secondary schools in Wales, of which 130 were English Medium, 7 were English Medium with significant Welsh, 17 were Welsh Medium and 24 were bilingual Welsh/English. This relative stability in school estate and in pupil numbers continues to mean that any decreases in International Language Learning are not the result of declining pupil enrolment, so other factors must be at play.

After data sets had been cleaned, a response rate of 38 per cent was achieved, up from 35 per cent in 2022 and 29 per cent in 2021. This year, we received 14 responses in Welsh and 53 responses in English. Each state secondary school in Wales is a member of one of 22 local authorities, based on geographical location. Given the response rate, and to protect the identity of individual participating schools in so far as possible, the report will draw comparisons between geographical locations where appropriate.

Geographical location	Includes local authorities of	Base	Number of responding schools (n=67)
North Wales	Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham	50	22
South West and Mid Wales	Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot	48	12
Central South Wales	Bridgend, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff	49	18
South East Wales	Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport	31	15

Table 9: Number of responding schools by geographical location

## Free School Meals

To ascertain any socio-economic differences in relation to language learning, the percentage of students in each school entitled to free school meals was examined.

Using data from the Wales School Census published in August 2022, the full complement of 178 secondary 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).

	Base (total = 178)	FSME known (total = 65)	% Response rate to survey
Quintile 1 – least deprived	36	21	32%
Quintile 2	35	12	18.5%
Quintile 3	36	12	18.5%
Quintile 4	35	11	17%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	36	9	14%

Table 10: FSME quintiles for state secondary schools

Table 10 shows that over 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 transitionally protected students entitled to free school meals). As in previous years, what follows may therefore be more favourable than the reality in many schools.

### LANGUAGE LEARNING AT KEY STAGE 3

Our survey asked teachers which International Language(s) students were learning at Key Stage 3. Table 11 shows the percentage of secondary schools that offer the 'big 3' of French, German and Spanish in each year of Key Stage 3. Of the 'big 3', French continues to be most common, and our data show it is even more secure than in 2022, though the lack of statistical significance with the sample size is noted. In relation to curricular International Languages other than French, German and Spanish, a minority of schools told us all pupils learn Mandarin.

	French	German	Spanish	Others
Year 7	79%	6%	21%	0
Year 8	75%	10%	25%	2% (Mandarin)
Year 9	57%	6%	24%	0

Table 11: International Languages at Key Stage 3 for all students

### Time for Languages

In terms of content time per week for International Languages, the majority of responding schools allocate 1 – 2 hours per week throughout Key Stage 3, and 2 – 3 hours in Year 10. Compared to 2022 data, the biggest decrease in time is noted in Year 10; last year 28 per cent of respondents told us more than four hours per week were allocated to International Language Learning, this year the corresponding figure is 13 per cent. Again, statistical significance is not assured, and more research would need to be done to understand this trend.

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Less than 1 hour	4%	4%	1.5%	0%
1-2 hours	79%	78%	71%	20%
2-3 hours	14%	15%	20%	57%
3-4 hours	1.5%	1.5%	4.5%	10%
More than 4 hours	1.5%	1.5%	3%	13%

Table 12: The total amount of class time per week allocated for International Languages at Key Stage 3 and in Year 10

### LANGUAGE LEARNING AT KEY STAGE 4

Of the 67 responding schools which offer Year 10 provision in International Languages, table 13 shows that 45 schools (i.e. 67 per cent) reported that none or less than 10 per cent of their Year 10 students were taking an International Language for GCSE or other Level 2 qualification. This data is used to predict changes in GCSE entries over the next couple of years and it is likely that further declines will be seen.

	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
2022	14	30	14	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2023	20	25	12	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 13: Proportion of students in Year 10 learning an International Language for GCSE or other Level 2 qualification (e.g., Level 2 Global Business Communication). Reported in raw numbers (2022 total n=64, 2023 n=67).

School-level policies in relation to International Language Learning understandably differ. Multiple responses were permitted, but responding schools told us:

All learners MUST take an International Language	0
Classes do not run if there are not enough learners	63%
Lower than average attaining learners are discouraged from choosing an International Language	24%
The school strongly recommends that all learners take an International Language	6%
The school strongly recommends that the most academically able take an International Language	3%
Timetabling means that not all learners are able to take an International Language	51%
Some learners may be advised by SLT not to take an International Language	18%
Other (please specify)	13%

Table 14: School policies as perceived by responding teachers in relation to International Language Learning at Key Stage 4 (multiple responses permitted)

Compared to *Language Trends Wales 2022*, the percentage of schools in which learners are unable to take an International Language due to timetabling has increased from 31 per cent to 51 per cent, hinting at the need to review language provision policies in Wales. Thirteen per cent of teachers selected 'other' and specified alternative school policies at Key Stage 4, including the following: International Languages are offered to all pupils, but they are not required to take a language; French is offered as an optional GCSE subject; or, it depends on pupils' choice of other options whether or not they take an International Language. Once again, our survey 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 15 corroborate the national statistics shown in the report's introductory section; for one in four there is no clear trend, with numbers fluctuating from year to year. This shift in perception may be an outworking of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, almost half of schools feel that fewer pupils now take an International Language at KS4.

	2021/22	2022/23
International Languages are compulsory for all pupils at KS4	0	0
More pupils now take an International Language at KS4	10%	7%
Fewer pupils now take an International Language at KS4	55%	49%
Similar numbers to before	16%	15%
No clear trend: numbers fluctuate from year to year	17%	27%
Other	2%	2%

Table 15: Teachers' perceptions of uptake at GCSE over past three years

## LANGUAGES AS EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

We asked teachers to report if their students are currently learning any of the following International Languages as extra-curricular activities. Data in table 16 show that the majority of schools responded 'None' throughout Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, and Post-16. It is interesting to observe that French is also the most popular International Language as an extra-curricular activity and that a wide range of languages other than the 'big 3' are offered in some schools. The most popular 'other' language was Italian.

	KS3	KS4	Post-16
Arabic	3%	3%	1.5%
French	1.5%	4%	0
German	3%	4%	1.5%
Mandarin	15%	3%	4%
Polish	4%	4%	1.5%
Spanish	14%	7%	3%
None	68%	73%	88%
Other	6% (Korean, Italian)	4% (Korean, Italian)	3% (Italian)

Table 16: Students currently learning any of the above International Languages as extra-curricular at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, and Post-16 (multiple responses permitted)

## INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Table 17 continues to show particularly good international engagement with both Routes into Languages Cymru<sup>5</sup>, a pan-Wales collaborative outreach project that promotes the visibility, uptake, and profile of languages in schools, and the MFL Student Mentoring Scheme<sup>6</sup>, which encourages the learning of International Languages at GCSE level and beyond via a programme of in-classroom mentoring and online mentoring.

The lack of Language Assistants in schools is reflective of the current economic climate. Our data show that in the minority of schools where there is a Language Assistant, more often than not this tends to be a Mandarin-speaking Language Assistant. Language Assistants are speakers of French, German, Italian, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish who can help students build their cultural capital by developing their linguistic and cross-cultural skills. A real-life International Language speaker is an additional resource in the classroom giving context to language learning, talking about their experiences in their home culture and inspiring students to develop their ability to communicate their own world views.

Insight shows that a foreign language speaking assistant makes a significant difference to language teaching, exam results and learning outcomes. In the British Council's 2020-21 programme review, 98 per cent of host schools saw improved standards in listening and speaking, and 99 per cent would recommend the programme.

Teachers were also given the opportunity to note other instances of international engagement in the 'other' category; several schools responded that they had no international engagement, two noted the use of pen-pals in France and a further two schools make use of UK-German Connection resources. Several schools organise school trips abroad, but one school told us that it is becoming too expensive.

	2021/22	2022/23
The institution has one or more partner institutions abroad	17%	18%
British Council international opportunities	6%	15%
We employ language assistants	8%	9%
We engage with cultural institutes (e.g., Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Consejería de Educación)	38%	31%
We take part in MFL Student Mentoring Scheme	56%	72%
We engage with Routes into Languages Cymru	78%	66%
Other		19%

Table 17: International engagement in secondary schools (multiple responses allowed)

## POTENTIAL IMPACT OF NEW CURRICULUM FOR WALES FROM 2022

Our survey again asked teachers to think about the likelihood that the New Curriculum for Wales, with International Languages forming part of the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience, will improve the situation for International Languages in Wales. Overall, there is a sense of growing positivity and every good reason for optimism, with more teachers sitting on the fence in 2022/23 than in 2021/22.

	2021/22	2022/23
Very likely	2%	2%
Quite likely	25%	24%
Not very likely	40%	28%
Not at all likely	25%	25%
I don't know	8%	21%

Table 18: 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?'

Table 19 shows that more than half of teachers consider their school to have 'already made some changes in preparation for Curriculum for Wales 2022' through collaboration within their AoLE.

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/activities/cymru>.

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://mflmentoring.co.uk/>.

	2021/22	2022/23
Already made some changes in preparation for this	50%	58%
Some plans which will be put in place later	22%	15%
Involved in discussions but no firm plans yet	22%	23%
Not been involved in preparing for this yet	6%	4%

Table 19: Teachers' responses to the question, 'To what extent has your International Languages department been collaborating within your Area of Learning Experience and across the whole school in preparation for Curriculum for Wales?'

## POST-16 PROVISION IN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES IN SCHOOLS

Trends in post-16 provision in International Languages in schools are consistent with *Language Trends Wales 2021* and *2022*: low pupil numbers mean that many classes do not run; there is inconsistency across Wales in the number of pupils required for a class to be deemed viable; and many teachers consider the specification content and mode of assessment to be off putting.

We asked teachers about their perceptions of post-16 provision over the past three years. Thirty-nine teachers responded to this question. Table 20 reveals some positive news against the less positive news, with some schools introducing particular languages as a new subject at A-level:

	French	German	Spanish	Other International Language
Introduced as a new A-level	2	0	2	0
Take-up has increased	3	3	0	0
Take-up stable	10	2	9	3
Take-up has decreased	18	5	6	0
Subject discontinued	2	3	2	0
Not taught in my institution	4	26	20	36

Table 20: Teachers' perceptions of what changes have there been, if any, in take-up and provision for International Languages post-16 in their school?

When we delved deeper, teachers told us:

*"Although we managed to maintain a regular number of four to five students studying Spanish for A-level, this year SLT decided to discontinue the subject after only five students showed interest."*

*"[The decline has been due to] post Covid-19 effects and the A-level in French and Spanish are very difficult and perceived to be a hard A-level to get, students want to get the grades to go to University."*

# Findings from Post-16 Colleges

## INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNING IN POST-16 COLLEGES IN FOCUS

Eight out of the 11 post-16 colleges that we contacted responded to our survey, which is one respondent less than last year. Given the small number, the figures in this section are reported as raw numbers.

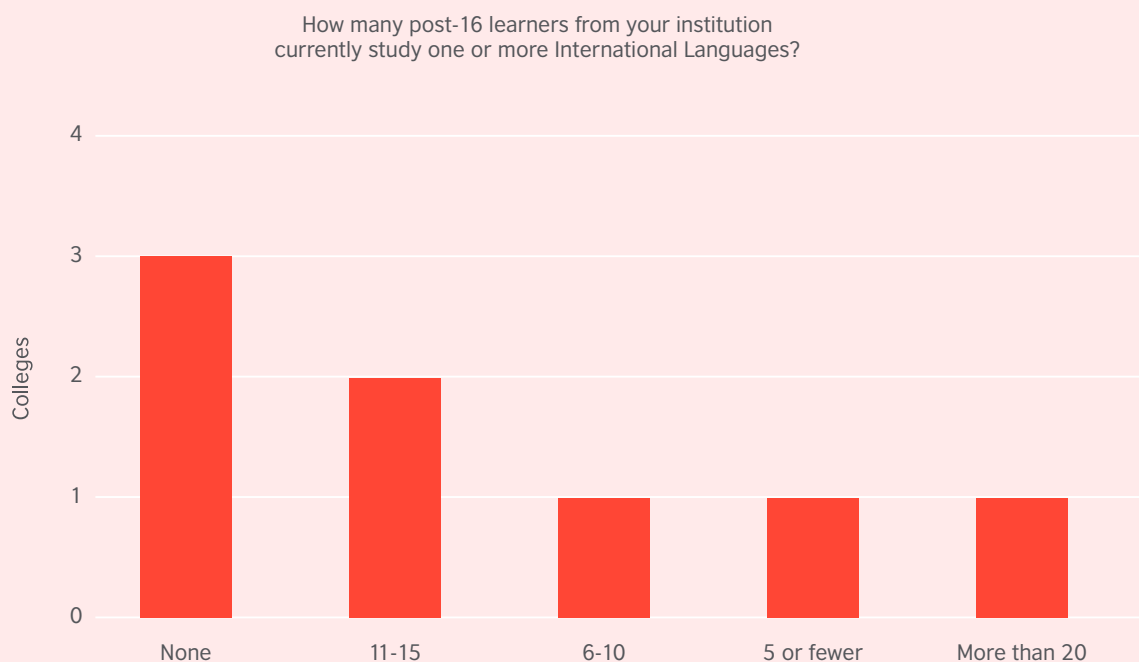
No responding colleges offer vocational qualifications in International Languages; however, one college offers a vocational qualification in Welsh. This year, one college told us that they offer GCSE or Level 2 qualifications in International Languages. As with last year, responses focus on A-level French, German and Spanish. No colleges offer resit opportunities in GCSE French, German and/or Spanish, although two schools offer resit opportunities for GCSE Welsh. Three colleges reported that no students were studying an International Language in the 2022/23 school year.

## LANGUAGES TAUGHT

A-level French is taught in five out of the eight responding colleges, Spanish in three and German in two. Compared to 2022, French was offered in eight of nine responding colleges, Spanish in six and German in three, indicating that the data collected in 2023 reflect a decline in the languages that are taught in post-16 colleges. Only one college reported an increase in take-up for A-level French, while one college reported a decrease. German was discontinued in one college, while figures decreased in another. Although one college reported a decrease in take-up for Spanish, two colleges reported stable figures.

With regards to the number of Year 12 students studying an International Language in post-16 colleges, the number varies between colleges (see figure 11).

Figure 11: Number of students studying one or more International Languages in Year 12 in post-16 colleges

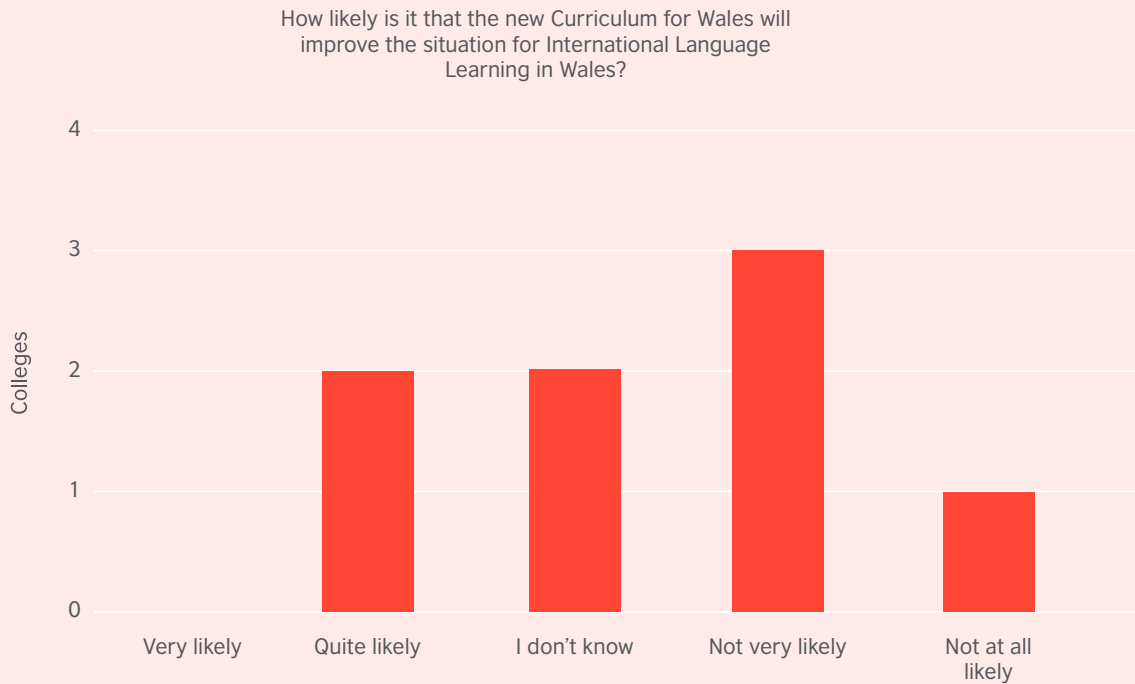


When only a few learners wish to study a language, there are various arrangements in place at post-16 colleges; two colleges reported that classes do not run, and one college has shared arrangements with another institution. In comments made about other instances, lecturers reported that classes are timetabled as normal, and efforts are made to allow the continuation of classes despite low enrolments.

### THE NEW CURRICULUM FOR WALES– THE POST-16 PERSPECTIVE

As with last year's iteration of *Language Trends Wales*, we asked post-16 colleges how likely it is that the New Curriculum for Wales 2022, with International Languages a part of the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience, will improve the situation for International Languages in Wales. Figure 12 shows that two colleges responded, 'quite likely', two responded 'I don't know' and the remaining four colleges responded, 'not very likely' or 'not at all likely'. Similarly, in *Language Trends Wales 2022*, one college responded, 'very likely' and one 'quite likely', two responded 'I don't know', while the remaining colleges responded, 'not likely' or 'not at all likely'.

Figure 12: How likely is it that the new Curriculum for Wales will improve the situation for International Language Learning in Wales?

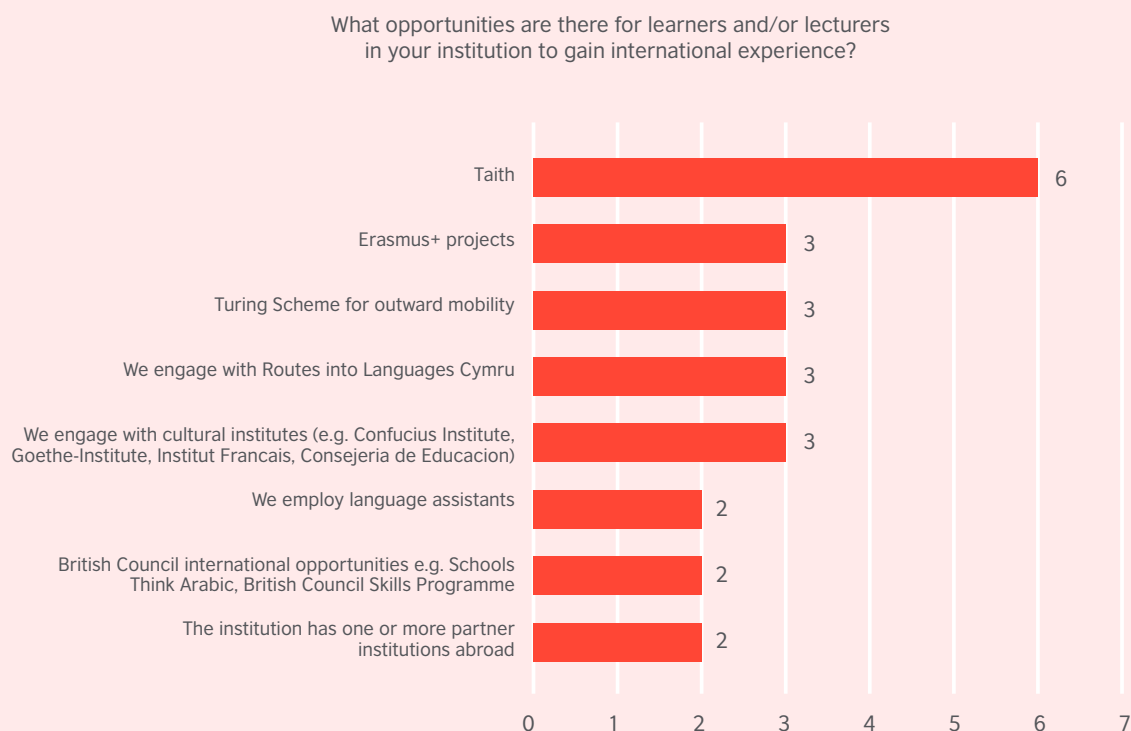




## INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Commensurate with the findings of *Language Trends Wales 2022*, all colleges reported at least one opportunity for their staff and/or students to gain international experience in the 2022/23 academic year. Figure 13 shows that six colleges engage with the exchange programme Taith; compared to last year's report, colleges reported lower engagement with Routes into Languages Cymru and fewer applications to the Turing scheme.

Figure 13: Opportunities for international experience in post-16 colleges (multiple responses allowed)



In the 2022/23 academic year, six out of the eight responding colleges did not employ language assistants. Of the six, two cited low numbers of language learners as the main reason why not to employ a language assistant:

*'We only have a limited number of learners studying languages.'*

*'The numbers are too low - Languages do not have a high enough profile in the curriculum.'*

Other post-16 lecturers noted the following in regard to language assistants:

*'We have bilingual champions to increase support and usage of the Welsh language. We have an ESOL team that work with learners from the community looking to improve their English language but there is little demand for a language assistant.'*

*'We have a statutory obligation to deliver Welsh. We do employ 5 Welsh Language support officers who work with learners to develop Welsh skills. Budget/time would limit other languages being supported.'*

## **MOVING FORWARD WITH INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES IN POST-16 COLLEGES**

We asked colleges what is working well in International Language Learning and, amongst the comments made, lecturers told us that their language students enjoy school trips, achieve high grades, and many continue with their language studies at university level. However, lecturers would like to see more learners study languages at A-level, and they expressed the need for International Languages to be taught in a meaningful way from Primary level onwards.

# Celebrating good practice

This year, *Language Trends Wales* also includes a focus on some of the language education initiatives undertaken in primary and post-primary schools. To highlight some of the exemplary practices found in classrooms across Wales, we conducted interviews with teachers engaged in the following areas:

- MFL Mentoring in a secondary school;
- Languages in a GCSE classroom;
- A plurilingual primary classroom.

Via online semi-structured interviews, we asked teachers to discuss their experiences of best practices in their school, the challenges that they have faced as language teachers, and their advice to other language teachers. Interviews were recorded for transcription and data analysis purposes. The aim of the interviews was to obtain rich descriptions of some of the good practices and their positive impacts so that the experiences of these initiatives can be recognised and shared with schools and teachers across Wales and beyond.

## MFL MENTORING: INCREASING UPTAKE

Modern Foreign Language Mentoring (<http://mflmentoring.co.uk/about/>) is a language education initiative aimed at improving motivation for language learning at secondary level. Drawing on the willingness and enthusiasm of university language students to become language mentors, the scheme enables schools to avail of mentoring sessions for their pupils aged 12-14, regardless of pupil language proficiency.

Our first exemplary practice comes from a dedicated teacher of French who first started teaching in 2002 and who currently teaches in a secondary school. This teacher discussed how their school's use of MFL Mentoring helped enrich the school language department:

*"We had an MFL mentor come in and he did two semesters with us. The first semester was a combination of face to face and blended learning with some online sessions. The second semester he did a series of sessions, and they were all one to one. He was really nice, and the kids really enjoyed their sessions with him."*

The teacher discussed how the content of the sessions engaged students not only in language development but also in interactive opportunities for thinking about how languages and cultures connect. In addition to language practice opportunities, pupils

were enabled to discuss the ways in which cultures and languages differ, and what they have in common. This aligned to the teacher's own classroom practices focused on cultural immersion through exposure to media and film, such as the beloved French film *Les choristes*, and through school trips to different countries.

In identifying the success of MFL Mentoring in their school, the teacher detailed how it had an observable positive impact on pupil perspectives:

*"The kids felt special .... that makes a massive difference. So, I think that was really helpful. They really liked talking to the mentor and it was lovely to have somebody from university, a student who is young and interesting, and they engaged really well with him."*

The teacher also noted the impact of the initiative on young people's motivation to continue to study more than one language in the face of socio-political narratives, lack of access to language assistants, and perceptions of overly challenging language examinations:

*"I would say we've seen an increasingly negative attitude towards languages in pupils since Brexit. I think there is a real feeling of what is the point of learning languages, which is why having the MFL mentoring sessions was really helpful."*

*"I think the GCSE is extraordinarily challenging, for example, there are 18 subtopics for the speaking exam. It's huge, and I think that puts pupils off too... it's understandably seen as a really, really hard subject and people feel that they can get a better grade, far more easily in other subjects."*

For this school, the MFL Mentoring scheme provided a counterbalance to these concerns. It helped to raise the profile of languages in the school where few language teachers are employed, and it contributed to an increase in the uptake of French at GCSE among those pupils who had experienced the mentoring methodologies.

Going forward, we asked the teacher what advice they would give to language teachers facing these challenges:

*"I would definitely recommend doing something like the MFL Mentoring project. I would definitely recommend taking pupils abroad as much as possible ...and if there was any way we could find funding to take those pupils who haven't got the financial means to get across to France and any country to experience cultural immersion, I think*

*that's the key...And then equally, having a really cool young foreign language assistant who comes in and talks about their life, that as well is worth its weight in gold, isn't it?"*

## GCSE CLASSROOM: MEANINGFUL AND AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE LEARNING

The following exemplary practices come from a multilingual teacher and leader with over 25 years' experience in a post-primary setting. Considered key to success at GCSE for this teacher is an approach which supports meaningful and authentic language learning. In this approach, teachers are language learning role models for their students. They work as a team to help each other improve their language skills and embody collaborative and lifelong language learning for their pupils. They develop their pupils' language awareness using whole texts and engage them in direct instruction of language learning strategies through learning organizers. There is also advocacy work undertaken to ensure frequent and consistent scheduling for language classes in the school timetable so that pupils have regular exposure to languages.

In discussing these exemplary practices, the teacher considers the impact that teacher role-modelling can have:

*"... modelling for students, to see that we are specialists and know our background, it is very important to share that with students, as role models, because you are their contact with linguists and we know that students sometimes see teachers as role models, good or bad. So, when they see the good, when they're passionate about a subject, they want to know what your experiences were. Seeing my team upskilling is good for students to see because I think with languages, we are all expected to be... perfection and it's not, it is a learning process and that's the important thing to realise even as teachers. And it's that innovation, isn't it? And that constant learning and drive that we have to have as teachers."*

In order to improve teacher language proficiency and confidence in using more than two languages, this teacher detailed some of the ways in which teachers are supported with language upskilling. These include an emphasis on collaborative teaching teams and an open-door policy for teachers in school language departments:

*"It's the support and encouragement that you give them as a team, not just individually. We're really fortunate because we collaboratively plan and we collaboratively review regularly, we have our weekly meetings. It's making sure that we can focus, that we have an open-door policy as well. Often after school, there'll be a teacher who will come in from my team and say I've only got one thing to say, but then they'll offload a few things.*

*But it's important that they have the opportunity to release and share those ideas. It's making sure that there are clear, consistent plans and that we collaboratively plan together.*

*We know we all have ownership of that. For example, if there are problems with pronunciation, whether it's new language, that we make sure that we provide that explanation. I sometimes record the audio into the PowerPoints for them, so they find it a lot easier and listen to it as a guide or use my audio as well with the students. They have that choice, and that's particularly important because we know that there are challenges of having non-specialists within your team."*

Facilitating these exemplary practices is dedicated time within the school schedule. With the New Curriculum, this teacher's school offers French, German and Spanish to GCSE and A-level. At KS3, the school has five 50-minute lessons per fortnight for languages. The teachers advocated for this time, described as 'little and often' at KS3, enabling them to offer a term of French, a term of German and a term of Spanish. Delivering this schedule consistently and consecutively over 2021/22 and 2022/23 is one strategy they use to offer a breadth of languages. It is hoped this will contribute to uptake over the course of the next few years and open up holistic progression pathways:

*"We are driving to an outcome, but we're driving just to progression in KS3 and although progression does fit into data and assessment, at the same time, progression is also much more; it's specifically what students are able to do and how they are aware of what they can do and building those confidence and motivation levels and creating an understanding of concepts within language and linguistic building blocks so that when they get into GCSE, they've got the firm foundations. We don't want to make it a measurement of progress about how many words they know. It's about the ability to be able to communicate. Can we have more spontaneous conversations? Can we build that confidence in how we're expressing ourselves, knowing that perhaps it's not always accurate."*

In terms of language teaching practices, the teacher in this context describes the use of a language awareness approach accompanied by direct instruction of language learning strategies. Formulating lessons around topics and the use of language organizers for vocabulary learning are some of the ways in which the teacher makes language learning engaging and meaningful for her students:

*"[There are] words we will use a lot within whatever context we're using, so whatever theme and they'll see them coming up in reading and listening. And at the end of the day, we want engagement of students in order to be able to*

*then get to that point of summative assessment and learning. Because if they're not engaged, if they're not doing anything, then they're not going to learn anything.*

*The more they engage, the more it becomes a repetitive kind of habit, they will build confidence, and therefore be able to succeed better in a summative assessment as well. We use deconstructing text for reading and listening. What words can you pull out from your listening? What words in the text can you pull out? How do you know that? What sounds?*

*We have to have that immersion really as well, and I'll give you an example of what we tend to do - so for our new curriculum for YR7, we're using fairy tales (at the very beginning of YR7). We use Snow White and one of the first things we give them when they've just introduced themselves is a little Snow White 'missing report', reported missing that she's wearing this, description of her, etcetera and they have no vocabulary whatsoever. And the whole point is, what can they understand, what they can create and then we build that by looking at a very short glossary and have vocab that can be a tool to understanding the gist or meaning and how we need to think about the context. We need to think about other clues as well, so it's all those reading strategies that we're building in and it's the same with listening."*

Discussing the rationale for the use of such activities, the teacher highlighted the ways in which these practices were needed in order to counter the challenges and repercussions of a loss of in-person learning from the pandemic, which have continued to impact pupil engagement and learning:

*"We know that to re-raise levels of speaking, competence and language, it is the conversation, the speaking, and it is those activities that you do, whether it be sentence stealers, speed dating, face to face questioning, running dictation, all of those little things they would not have had for 2 years as a basis in KS3."*

For this teacher, the impact of these practices can be evidenced in better language performance and in shifts in attitudes where there is recognition for what pupils 'can do' in their language learning:

*"We've seen a huge impact in KS3 of being able to write extended pieces, and even writing is a challenge sometimes for them.*

*Whereas having that shared outcome, being celebrated by their peers as well, being excited, the recognition of value of what they're producing as well, [is key to learner motivation]."*

In addition to engaging students in language learning, re-establishing levels of confidence in language use and celebrating progression also serve to combat parents' perceptions of languages as subjects which are 'too hard' to achieve high grades.

## PLURILINGUAL PRIMARY CLASSROOM: BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR A LANGUAGES-RICH FUTURE

In this section we discuss some of the exemplary practices from a primary school which identifies itself as offering a plurilingual school environment. We hear from a teacher who has been working in primary schools for almost a decade and who is the 'language leader' in their school. Supporting the future of languages requires meaningful language learning opportunities for pupils, teachers, and classroom assistants. This teacher also highlights a 'whole-school approach' to languages in the New Curriculum, where parental engagement, resources, and future planning are key.

In offering more opportunities for exposure to different languages and for language learning, the teacher discussed the implementation of "Tri-talk", an approach in which three languages are used in the classroom. The teacher describes the procedures for using multiple languages in class and the overall aim of doing so:

*"We started off where we used to do 20 minutes of Spanish oracy every week and then when the children became a little bit more confident with that, we then introduced Tri-talk, where in a Tri-talk session, they'll speak Spanish, Welsh and English, so if they're asked a question in Spanish, they will respond in Spanish, if they're asked in Welsh, they'll respond in Welsh and it was just to get the children to make these connections between different languages, look at the patterns in languages and really we're not looking for our children to be fluent in one language when they leave us. We want them to be language detectives. We want them to have a love of languages and really inspire them to go forth and, you know, take on a language at high school or A-level or even in their own time for enjoyment."*

The content of these Tri-talk classes can have a focus on speaking, for example, responding to greetings. They also offer opportunities to focus on the development of intercultural understandings such as different foods and mealtimes, and to extend cross-curricular knowledge of maps and weather. The teacher in this school noted the strong parental support for Tri-talk and family language learning initiatives:

*"All of our parents are really on board with languages. We've never had anyone question why we are teaching Spanish or the reasoning behind it. I ran an online course where I did beginners Spanish for families. So, children logged on with their parents and we taught the parents and the children the basics. We did things like singing the days of the week. We did the alphabet and a couple of spelling games. We did colours, numbers, bingo. And that was really good because I think the parents enjoyed it and they thought*

*like, oh, wow, this is great. I'm really happy that my child's learning this in school; we've never had anyone question why or have any kick back at all."*

In embedding language learning across the whole school, the teacher noted an effective strategy of teaching languages through stories. Purchasing familiar primary school stories in different languages were some of the resources needed to enable teachers and pupils to become more confident in their language learning:

*"Something that I've had really good feedback from my staff is teaching through story...I managed to pick up quite a few basic story books that you would expect were at nursery and reception level in Spanish, and then I brought them back to school. Every class does one story per year at various stages, and then the teacher will read them a page at a time in Spanish and they'll try and decode the words. They'll pick out the words that they know, they'll pick out the cognates that they know, they'll look at the picture. They'll try to infer meaning and actually it was really, really good because it was an authentic way of learning the language and it was stories like Hansel and Gretel, the Very Hungry Caterpillar, the Rainbow Fish, Cinderella, the Ugly Duckling. So, it's stories that they already are familiar with in English so that they could really, you know, have confidence to have a go and have a guess. And that's been really good."*

Dedicated and resourced languages spaces in schools enable greater access for pupils to develop their own language learning. In this primary school, existing language learning resources such as Cwtch Cymraeg are extended to develop language labs and include resources in different languages. Further practices which signal the whole-school approach to plurilingualism within this school include the alignment of teaching priorities, strong support for language development and the upskilling of all staff:

*"Because the whole school was new to Spanish, we started off where everyone was doing greetings, colours, numbers. But then when we moved on, we needed to show progression throughout the school."*

*"We now match our Spanish to what we're teaching in Welsh. So, for example, if in the autumn term when we come back in September, if a class is learning the weather in Welsh, they'll also be doing it in Spanish so that they can do those Tri-talk sessions."*

*"A lot of our staff have been to language lessons where we've done beginners Spanish and we've done intermediate ... we've just booked some teaching assistants and some newer members of staff to go on the training ... because now that we've got all our teachers trained, the next step is to improve the teaching assistants' [languages]."*

In the context of a New Curriculum for Wales, this teacher considered that the impact of plurilingual primary schools would be the building of solid foundations for a languages-rich future. As they conclude, "we want to teach it little and we teach it well", with the recognition that collaboration between primary and post primary in supporting transition and sustaining motivation for languages is key.

# Conclusion

Primary schools in Wales are off to a good start in embedding International Languages in their classrooms. More research is needed to understand the extent to which plurilingualism is truly being realised, but it is acknowledged that it is still early days.

Despite the fact that the narrative in the press and schools is that International Languages *are* important, it is not provoking positive change system-wide at secondary level. There is a need to reconsider what *does* motivate a child, because positive narratives are being challenged by systemic issues. We sense from our data there is a programme of work to be done in Careers Education to help young people see the value of International Languages for their future career and to make informed choices at key transition points; for example, our data collected on Key Stage 4 demonstrates that low numbers of pupils take an International Language for GCSE or other Level 2 qualification (see table 13); this trend continues at A-level, evidenced by the decrease in take-up for French in particular (see table 20). We also know from previous iterations of Language Trends that qualifications need to be appealing to young people. Progression pathways, for academic and vocational language learners, also need to be available, assured and accessible to all.

Our research has shown that there is exemplary practice in International Languages in many schools and classrooms. Teachers are working hard to encourage young people to continue with International Languages, but teachers' power to effect positive change in this area of the curriculum is constrained by the system in which they teach. Our interviews with teachers highlighted exemplary practices that tackle key issues in language provision, including the lack of consistent and frequent timetabling. For example, our GCSE classroom interviewee conducts their own advocacy work to ensure that pupils have regular exposure to languages. While all the interviews conducted with teachers exemplify several areas of best practice, the challenges that they identify, including access to funding for cultural experiences, trips and language assistants, further highlight the need for a systemic review of language provision in order to better support International Language teaching at primary and post-primary level, and take away the pressure from teachers to come up with creative solutions.

While there are many positive language learning practices, the 2023 data hint at the need for an interconnected approach to International Languages education across Wales. The Global Futures strategy, for example, aims to support multilingualism in the Welsh education system and encourage the study of languages by bringing stakeholders together and working coherently in an effort to tackle the declining numbers of those enrolled in languages education. Further key aims of the Global Futures strategy include supporting the development of International Language provision, enhancing support and training opportunities for teachers through collaborations (e.g. with regional education consortia, partnerships, and the MFL Mentoring Project), and tackling negative attitudes to languages.

Another recent initiative to further support and connect languages provision across the UK has been the launch of the Languages Gateway in 2023. This is a new website aligned to the latest evolving UK national languages strategy, intended to act as a portal for comprehensive information about languages in the UK. Its mission is to help increase language-learning across the UK by increasing awareness and facilitating access to existing opportunities and information, and by fostering links between different sectors. It aims to provide a one stop-shop for all matters connected with languages in the UK, facilitating links between all those interested in languages: learners, families, community groups, teachers, school leaders, academics, policymakers, subject associations. The site is intended to be open and inclusive, a tool for everyone to use and contribute to, building a collective sense of ownership and partnership across the public and private sphere. Recognising the range of actors across the UK's languages communities, the website is designed to gather information together in one place, and then to signpost visitors to content that is of interest to them, including content that is specific to International Language learning in Wales.

Overall, the *Language Trends* 2023 report notes a positive increase in the number of responding primary schools teaching International Languages since the introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales in 2022. The 2023 data indicate the need to address staff proficiency in International Languages, a concern for 67 per cent of responding primary schools. At secondary level, French is the most taught language at Key Stage 3 amongst responding schools, followed by Spanish and German. Although school policies differ amongst responding schools,

51 per cent told us that not all Key Stage 4 learners are able to study an International Language due to timetabling. In terms of post-16 provision, teacher comments noted the perceived difficulty of International Language A-level examinations, and how this can be off-putting to learners. It is clear from our data that teachers are working hard to teach and encourage the study of International Languages at primary and post-primary level. By continuing to work together to build a more cohesive approach to International Languages education, there is an opportunity to improve learning for all young people in Wales in the future.



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# Annex

British Council England: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/>

British Council Northern Ireland: <https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/>

British Council Wales: <https://wales.britishcouncil.org/en>

CSC – Central South Consortium: <https://www.cscjes.org.uk/>

Cerdd Iaith: <https://listeningtolanguage.com/>

EAS – Education Achievement Service: <https://sewaleseas.org.uk/>

Global Futures: <https://www.gov.wales/global-futures-plan-improve-and-promote-modern-foreign-languages>

GwE – North Wales Regional School Improvement Service: <https://www.gwegogledd.cymru/?lang=en>

Languages Gateway: <https://www.thelanguagesgateway.uk/>

Language Gym: <https://www.language-gym.com/>

La Jolie Ronde: <https://www.lajolieronde.co.uk/>

MFL Mentoring: <https://mflmentoring.co.uk/>

Neath Port Talbot: <https://beta.npt.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/>

Partneriaeth: <https://www.partneriaeth.cymru/>

Power Language: [https://powerlanguage.net/#custom\\_html-7](https://powerlanguage.net/#custom_html-7)

Routes into Languages Cymru: <https://routesintolanguagescymru.co.uk/>

Twinkl: <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/>

UK-German Connection: <https://ukgermanconnection.org/>



