Supporting Modern Languages in Your School

A Guide for Governors

routes into LANGUAGES
Llwybrau at ieithoedd CYMRU

The British Council's Language Trends Wales Report 2019

"In order to sell itself to the world effectively, Wales needs young people with good language skills to do business with and positively influence the rest of the world. This is all the more pressing in the context of Brexit, which creates a new imperative for Wales to reach out to the rest of the world. The continued decline of MFL in our schools could harm Wales' ability to do that in the long term."

Jenny Scott, Director, British Council Wales

Industry's opinion:

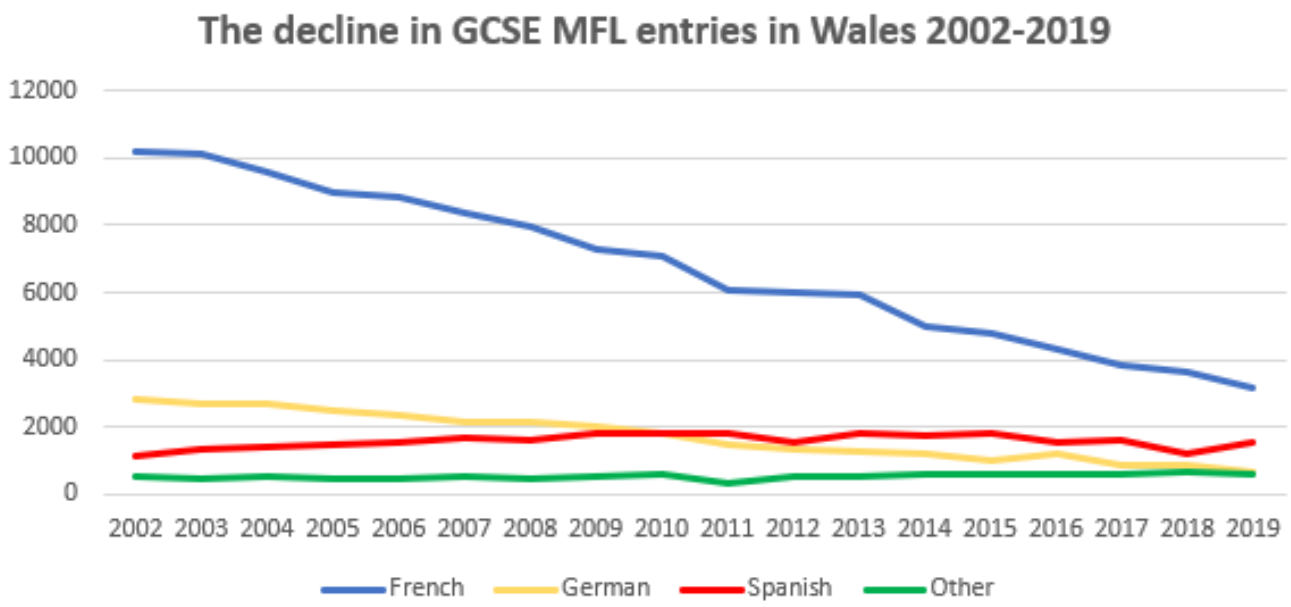
John Cope, Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Head of Education and Skills policy 2019

"To meet the Government's vision of 'Global Britain', uptake of modern foreign languages must increase, or the UK will be left behind."

"Employer demand for French, German and Spanish skills have significantly increased over the last few years. The decline in language learning in schools must be reversed, or else the UK will be less competitive globally and young people less prepared for the modern world."

Do you know what's happening in your school?

Modern Languages in Wales: the current situation



The number of entries for GCSE MFL has declined by 57% since 2002 and the number of entries at A Level has halved in that same period.

Challenges for Modern Languages departments

STAFFING: many Modern Languages departments do not have the full complement of staff and 14% say that it's difficult to retain high quality staff.

CONTACT HOURS: on average pupils experience fewer than two hours per week of Modern Languages.

REDUCED OPTION BLOCKS AT GCSE: changes to the option blocks in Wales means that the proportion of schools where less than 10% of pupils are taking a language in Year 10 has increased to 43%.

FINANCIAL CONTRAINTS: low take-up at GCSE and post-16 means Modern Languages are not being considered viable in some schools.

ATTITUDE: the introduction of new GCSE and A Level courses has reinforced the perception that Modern Languages are a difficult subject only suitable for the most able.

Source: **Language Trends Wales 2018 British Council Wales**

However...

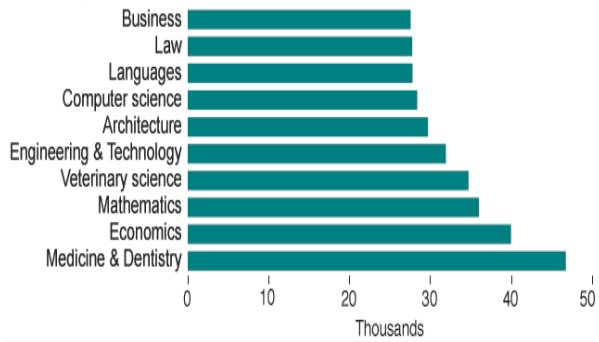
Attainment in MFL subjects at GCSE and A Level is higher than in other subjects. **79% (French), 84% (German) and 73% (Spanish) of Welsh pupils achieved A*-C grades at GCSE in 2019 compared to 49% in Mathematics and 55% in English**.

A recent study by Gorwel, an independent Welsh think tank, strongly recommends that the study of modern languages among pupils and the wider population is "**essential if Welsh businesses and commerce are to remain competitive in world markets in the post Brexit period**".

Five languages have been identified as having the most to offer the UK post Brexit.
Three are taught widely in our schools: **French, Spanish and German**.

Which graduates earn the most?

Median annual earnings (£) by subject, five years after graduating.



Source: Institute for Fiscal Studies / BBC

How can you support your ML department?

Some key questions to consider:

1. Does your school consider languages a key subject? Is the senior management team communicating this effectively to pupils, staff and parents?
2. Do you know the trend for the numbers of pupils studying Modern Languages over the last four years at GCSE, AS and A2 in your school?
3. Do you know how pupils taking Modern Languages have performed the last four years—including at KS3?
4. What has your school done to reverse a decline in Modern Languages take-up, if there is one? What has been the impact?
5. Has the senior leadership team undertaken a review of Modern Languages take-up? What were the outcomes?
6. Are you aware of the current staffing for Modern Languages? Is support being given for subject-specific continuous professional development training and does this form part of the Performance Management review dialogue?
7. Do you know what pupils say about taking languages? Has a survey been undertaken and the findings used to shape school strategy? Are Modern Languages included in the School Improvement Plan?
8. Are you sure that international languages will feature in the delivery of the New Curriculum – will all have the opportunity to study a language?

ESTYN in 2016 recommended that headteachers and senior leaders should:

- 'Improve learners' uptake of at least one modern foreign language at examination level through reviewing their curriculum planning and timetabling arrangements'.
- 'Make sure that their modern foreign language teachers are able to take advantage of the "Global Futures" continual professional development to improve the quality of learning and teaching of modern foreign languages'.

Have you discussed these with ML teachers and as a governing body?

Estyn: Modern Foreign Languages (July 2016)

Possible ways of helping your Modern Languages department:

- Restructuring the curriculum to encourage pupils to choose a modern language.
- Ensuring the appropriate number of hours for language teaching at KS3 and KS4.
- Promoting the importance of Modern Languages, e.g. language summer schools/days that stimulate, enrich and broaden horizons.
- Developing relationships and effective transition with primary schools to promote Modern Languages.
- Liaising with local universities, language institutes, regional consortia, local authorities and businesses.
- Making use of student and pupil language ambassadors through Routes into Languages Cymru and past pupils to promote and support language learning.

Professor Neil Kenny FBA, The British Academy:
'Languages are vital for effective trade, diplomacy and soft power, all of which will be essential to the UK's future success.'

Professor Catriona Seth, Fellow of the British Academy:
'Learning languages broadens the mind, increases tolerance, enhances professional and personal development, has long-term beneficial effects in one's health and is fun.'

Two successful ways of supporting your pupils:

1. Routes into Languages Cymru Language Ambassadors (SLAs)

Our own personal language journeys are all different and unique, and this is where lies the power of the support that our undergraduate Student Language Ambassadors provide. From learners to facilitators, by telling their unique stories or delivering language or cultural taster sessions, our students provide young learners with role-models they can relate to, and being multilingual themselves, are able to embody how being bilingual and multilingual can open doors in the future. These sessions will be delivered virtually this year providing opportunities for pupils from primary to secondary to use international languages in a purposeful context.

Contact Meleri Jenkins: info@routesintolanguagescymru.co.uk

2. The Modern Foreign Languages Student Mentoring

This project connects trained undergraduates from four Welsh universities with local secondary schools, with the aspiration of inspiring young people to consider choosing a modern foreign languages for GCSE. We therefore target pupils in Years 8 and 9. This year the programme is becoming fully digital, using an exciting combination of tools to provide an inspirational virtual experience for pupils. The project doesn't target a specific language, but instead encourages pupils to see all languages as important and valuable. We can therefore work with any school and welcome schools to contact us for more information.

Contact Lucy Jenkins: jenkinsl27@cardiff.ac.uk