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## Language Trends Wales 2022: Language Teaching in Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Post-16 Colleges in Wales

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# Language Trends Wales 2022

Language teaching in primary schools, secondary schools, and post-16 colleges

Survey report

by Ian Collen, Minchen Liu  
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November 2022



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# Introduction

## **British Council Wales brings the best of international education and arts to Wales, supporting Welsh students, teachers, artists, and others to make professional connections with people around the world.**

British Council Wales enriches people's lives at home and abroad encouraging creativity and innovation through an interplay of ideas, skills, and experiences. British Council Wales believes that speaking an international language is crucial to understanding another culture 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.

*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. Its aims are: (i) to assess the impact of policy measures in relation to International Languages; and (ii) 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. The first *Language Trends Wales* survey was carried out in 2015. With the exception of 2020 owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an annual survey of secondary schools and a triennial survey of primary schools. A bespoke section for post-16 colleges has also featured in recent years. *Language Trends Wales* 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. The *Language Trends* series is unique and significant in that it shows the general shifts in 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 2021* found that GCSE entries in French and German had declined by almost half between 2015 and 2021; and entries for Spanish were erratic. We noted considerable declines in other international language learning as learners in supplementary schools were unable to receive certification during the pandemic. Further, we ascertained that the Covid-19 pandemic had had a more negative impact on language learning in areas of social deprivation than in other areas.

This year, British Council Wales contracted a team of researchers at Queen's University Belfast to conduct *Language Trends Wales 2022*. 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, especially during a particularly busy and unpredictable school year as the country begins to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. Without teachers' participation, our research would not be possible. Thank you.

# Headline Findings for 2022

- Forty-one percent of primary schools in Wales taught an international language as part of the curriculum in 2021/22, up from 39% in 2018/19 and 28% in 2015/16. This means, however, that statutory International Languages in 2022/23 will be new to almost 60% of primary schools. One in 14 primary schools told us they are not in a position to teach an international language this school year, despite it now being a compulsory part of the curriculum.
- Sixty-four percent of responding primary schools (n=95) have no international dimension; links with partner schools abroad, international projects and hosting of language assistants are all absent. It is, however, pleasing that the international dimension continues to be healthy in secondary schools and post-16 colleges.
- Alarming decline between 2021 and 2022 in GCSE and A level entries in French, German and Spanish. Retention of pupils from GCSE Welsh to A level Welsh is almost non-existent.
- Just 520 students at GCSE and 58 students at A level sat German, the most spoken language in Europe in 2022. Wales had the lowest A level German entry of any of the UK jurisdictions; if this trend is to be reversed, all stakeholders need to work together to develop an intervention strategy. The knock-on effect to the pipeline of Germanists to Higher Education and the world of work cannot be underestimated.
- Provision for International Languages in post-16 colleges is patchy. Where International Languages are available, there is an over-emphasis on French and Spanish. Too few students in post-16 colleges are afforded the opportunity to either study a language or resit a previously failed GCSE. There is a lack of provision in relation to International Languages and vocational qualifications.



# Policy Context and Background

Autumn 2022 is a time of transition for schools as the new Curriculum for Wales 2022 takes effect. This curriculum aims to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills, and experiences to succeed in the future.

The Welsh Government's 'Programme for Government 2021-2026' explicitly commits to strengthening Welsh language education and provision across all stages of education, as well as expanding the teaching of International Languages in schools. Global Futures, a plan to improve and promote International Languages in Wales 2020-2022, aimed to (i) increase the number of young learners studying languages at all levels and across all sectors, (ii) provide clear guidance, principles and raise awareness in all sectors to support multilingualism in schools in Wales, and (iii) support excellent teaching and learning of International Languages for all learners. It was delivered by the Welsh government and a range of partners. An evaluation of the Global Futures 2020-2022 project ascertained that teacher professional learning and resources in some schools were of a high order, effecting high quality teaching and learning in International Languages. However, evaluators also recognised that it has not yet been possible to realise the strategic aims of the Global Futures project in full, noting a decrease in the number of young learners studying languages at all levels and across all sectors. It is against this multifarious backdrop that the *Language Trends Wales 2022* research is conducted.

This new Curriculum for Wales, effective from September 2022, establishes shared expectations as to how schools should develop their curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

Curriculum for Wales 2022 sees a renaming of 'Modern Foreign Languages' to 'International Languages'. As in times gone by, it is the linguists who have socially constructed languages and given them names and labels; it is hoped that this new label will also signal a transformation in outcomes for the discipline. International Languages in Wales are defined as 'home and community languages, modern languages, classical languages and British Sign Language'.<sup>2</sup>

These languages are now integrated with Welsh and English as one of six 'Areas of Learning and Experience' (AoLE) entitled: 'Languages, Literacy and Communication.' For the first time, schools are now required to ensure that learners make progress in at least one international language other than Welsh and English from primary school. There is an emphasis on promoting a holistic, multilingual, plurilingual approach to language education in the broadest sense. The other AoLEs are: (i) Expressive Arts, (ii) Health and Well-being, (iii) Humanities, (iv) Mathematics and Numeracy, and (v) Science and Technology.

When comparing the uptake of International Languages<sup>3</sup> at both GCSE and A level in Wales with England and Northern Ireland, Wales has the lowest uptake, even though at least one international language is currently compulsory at Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) and offered as an option at Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16). In contrast, the uptake of Welsh as a second language (Welsh L2) at GCSE has evinced rapid growth in recent years.<sup>4</sup> A contributing factor is the enactment by the Welsh government of statutory status to the Welsh language across the entire period of compulsory education (ages 3-16).<sup>5</sup>

- 
- 1 Welsh Government (2020a)
  - 2 Welsh Government (2019a, p.14)
  - 3 This analysis only compares the 'Big 3' – French, German, and Spanish
  - 4 Henderson and Carruthers (2021)
  - 5 Jones (2019)

## Impact of pandemic and post pandemic

The surveys for *Language Trends Wales* were last conducted with primary schools in 2019. Secondary schools and post-16 colleges were last surveyed in 2021, with the impact of Covid-19 a marked feature of the 2021 report. According to *Language Trends Wales 2021*, 42% of responding secondary schools expressed that a national lockdown between March 2020 and April 2021<sup>6</sup> and post lockdown between 12<sup>th</sup> April and 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021<sup>7</sup> had a ‘big negative impact’ on language learning, while a further 37% of schools reported a ‘small negative impact’. One of the important observations from those survey results showed that the pandemic was more acutely felt in schools in the most deprived areas in Wales. For example, teachers estimated that one in five students in Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) in deprived areas did not have regular access to the internet (even via a smartphone) in January and February 2021. This led to those students encountering difficulties in completing and uploading work for marking, as well as having an impact on their preparation towards GCSE, AS or A level qualifications and equivalent. Further, teachers reported that 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, particularly the negative impact on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, will need to be borne in mind for the near future, particularly when interpreting our 2022 data which follow.

## Welsh language

Following the Education Reform Act (1988) which included Welsh in the national curriculum, 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. Consequently, with this high status in education, Welsh has flourished and 23% of children in Wales attend Welsh-medium schools. As Gorrara et al. (2020) observe, the Welsh language 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>8</sup> after decades of decline. This growth in Welsh is, of course, to be celebrated.

According to the 2011 census, 562,000 of the then 3.1m population of Wales were Welsh speakers. The Welsh government envisions one million Welsh speakers by 2050,<sup>9</sup> and has the strategic aim that 70% of all learners will be able to speak Welsh by the end of statutory education.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, under the legislation by the Welsh government and Welsh-medium schools, the positive outcome is an uptake of Welsh as a second language (Welsh L2), with rapid growth evidenced at GCSE level in recent years.

## Wales on the world stage

International Languages remain strategically important for the future of Wales. A recent study (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 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. It is thus more important than ever that Wales has a workforce skilled in communicating in Welsh, English and International Languages.

<sup>6</sup> Welsh Government (2021a)

<sup>7</sup> Welsh Government (2021b)

<sup>8</sup> Gorrara et al. (2020)

<sup>9</sup> Welsh Government (2021c)

<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government (2017)

# Research Outline

To evidence the current state of language teaching in primary schools, secondary schools and post-16 colleges in Wales, research was undertaken within these educational institutions across Wales. 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 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.

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, 182 secondary schools and 13 post-16 colleges in Wales in the spring of 2022, 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=1219) were contacted, due to the lack of access to a publicly available list of primary school email addresses. Over half of all schools were also contacted by a member of the research team by telephone to support 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 the dataset. For the survey, closed-item responses were analysed using descriptive statistics and comments to open response questions were analysed using thematic analysis.<sup>11</sup>

Data were cross-referenced with the latest Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) from Stats Wales, captured on 15 February 2022 and published on 31 August 2022. The data capture and subsequent publication were later than usual due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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

	Base	Achieved	% Response rate
Primary School Survey	957	95	10%
Secondary School HoD Survey	182	64	35%
Post-16 College HoD Survey	11	9	82%

**Table 1: Response rates**

Although the response rate for primary schools (10%) is lower than what was achieved in 2019 (12.5%), the variety of challenges facing current school and college contexts must be borne in mind. Participation in this survey is optional and a response takes 15 minutes to complete.

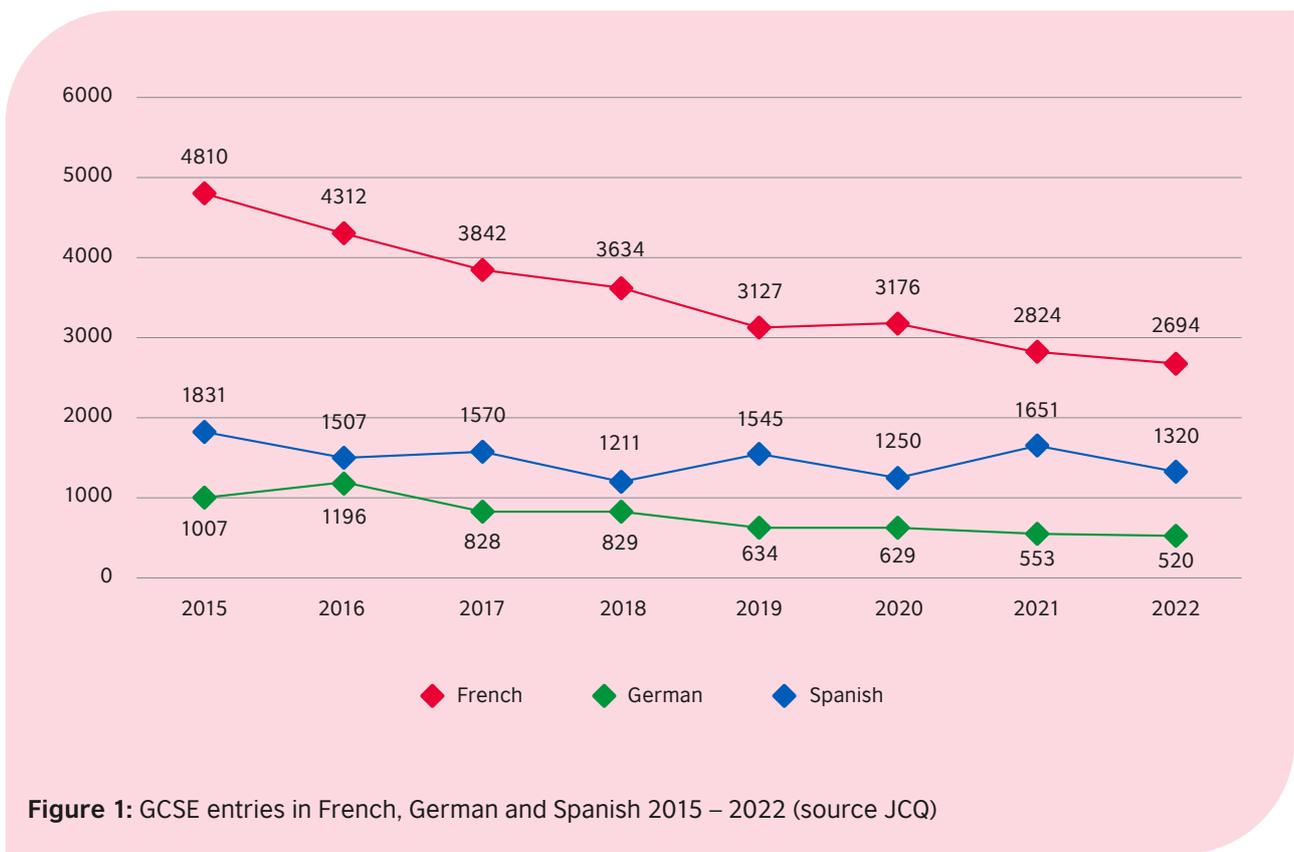
However, being able to secure both quantitative and qualitative data allows for breadth and depth of evidence upon which to draw conclusions with reasonable confidence. It must also be noted as a limitation to this work that schools more disposed to international language teaching may have been more likely to respond to requests for participation in the survey.

<sup>11</sup> Braun and Clarke (2006)

# Public Examination Figures

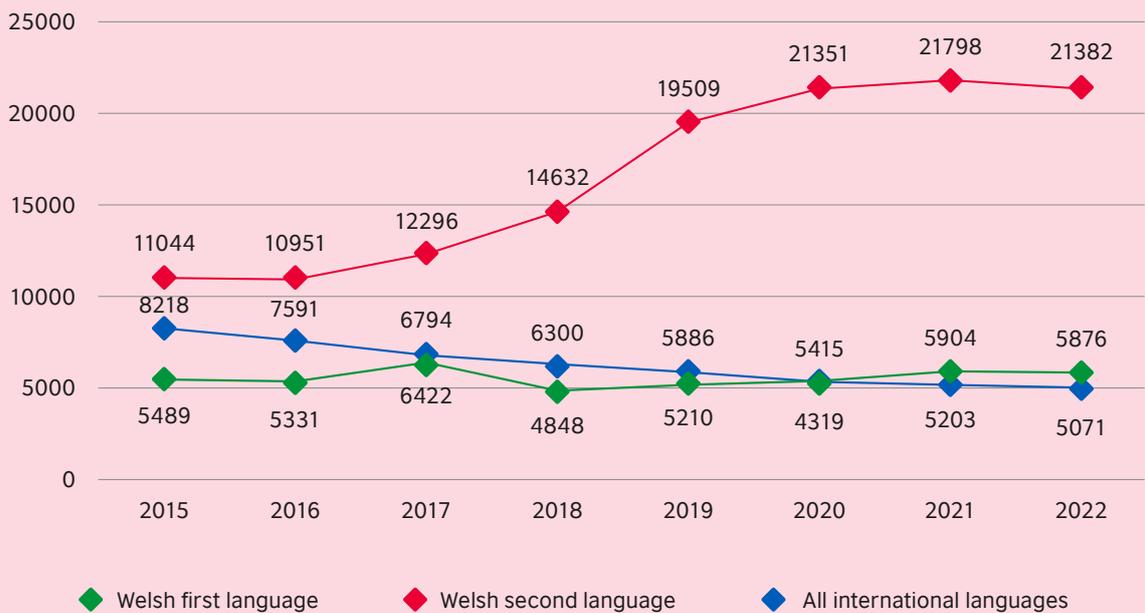
Within Wales, a worrying decline in GCSE entries for the 'Big 3' of French, German and Spanish is evidenced, which cannot be attributed to falling school enrolment. The 20% drop in entries for GCSE Spanish is of particular concern, as this does not replicate trends elsewhere in the UK where numbers of students taking Spanish are growing.

Indeed, Spanish entries have been erratic over the past five years and Wales is the only UK jurisdiction where this is the case. Figure 2 shows that entries in International Languages other than the 'big 3', sometimes referred to as 'home and community languages', have returned to pre-pandemic levels and this is to be welcomed.





**Figure 2:** GCSE entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 – 2022



**Figure 3:** Comparison of entries for GCSE Welsh (first and second language) and all International Languages 2015 – 2022

Figure 3 shows that entries for GCSE Welsh are high, not surprising given the compulsory nature for the subject. It also shows a correlation between compulsory Welsh and declining entries for GCSE International Languages.

**“Welsh is compulsory, therefore students are already studying another language in addition to English and often do not see the reason for studying an international language.”**

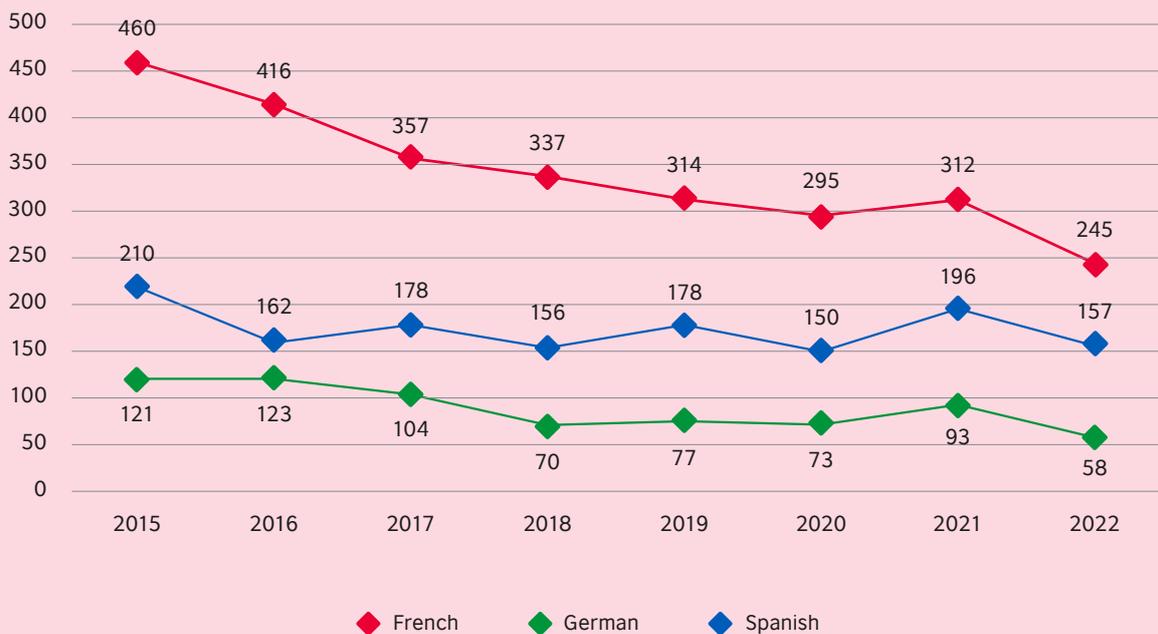
(Teacher comment)

**“In our school there is a lack of option columns for GCSE – pupils can only choose three options and Welsh (compulsory) is already seen as “one language”. This is likely the worst barrier when it comes to pupils opting for an international language these days.”**

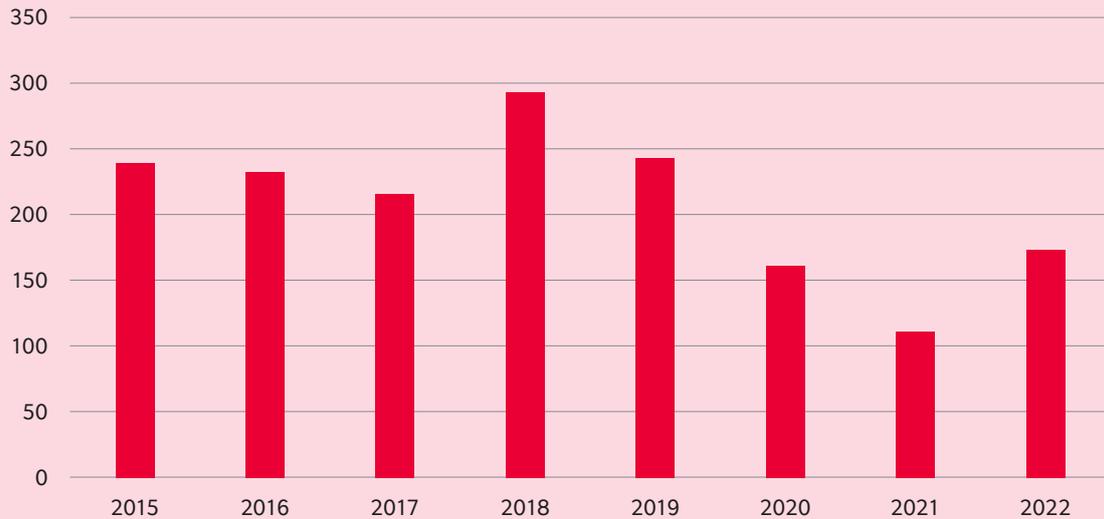
(Teacher comment)

Figure 4 shows an alarming decline in entries for A level French, German, and Spanish. With just 58 entries for German at A level in Wales, this language is most certainly in an extremely critical condition. If urgent, concerted, and financial effort is not strategically invested in German to reverse this trend, then this subject will likely disappear from the Welsh school system within the next ten years. With regard to Wales on an international stage, this would seem a highly significant blow as Germany is one of Wales’ most important trading partners; almost one in five Welsh exports are to Germany.

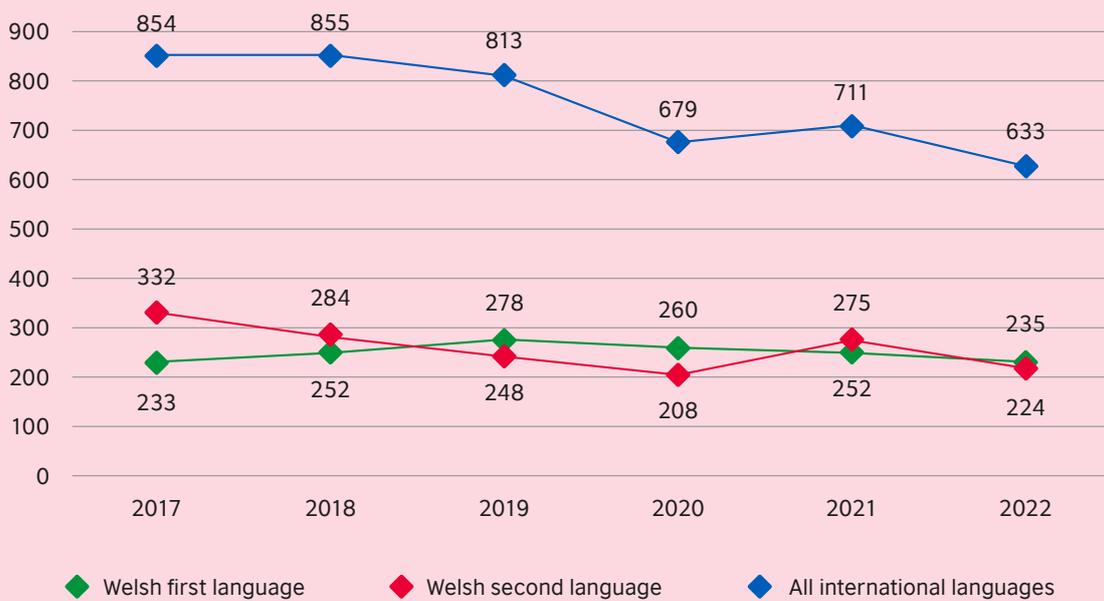
Figure 6 shows that retention from GCSE to A level in Welsh is very small, with approximately 1 in 100 learners continuing with Welsh to A level. By comparison just under 11 in every 100 learners continues with mathematics from GCSE to A level in Wales. The overall decline in entries for A levels in International Languages can only but cause great alarm.



**Figure 4:** A level entries in French, German and Spanish 2015 – 2022



**Figure 5:** A level entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 – 2022



**Figure 6:** Comparison of entries for A level Welsh (first and second language) and all International Languages 2017 – 2022

# Findings from the Primary Schools Survey

## Profile of responding schools

In the school year 2021/22, there were 1217 state primary schools in Wales (2 fewer than in 2021) with a pupil headcount of 266,574. 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 95 usable responses, of which 25 were in Welsh and 70 in English. Submissions in Welsh were translated into English to allow the Belfast-based research team to effectively analyse the data. The schools represented each of the four formal education consortia in Wales and all local authorities are represented in our resulting data set (see Table 2).

Education Consortia	Includes local authorities of	Number of responding schools
North Wales	Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham	23
South West and Mid Wales	Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot	30
Central South Wales	Bridgend, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff	22
South East Wales	Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport	20

**Table 2:** Consortia locations of participating primary schools

## Free School Meals

On 1 April 2019, the Welsh Government introduced a new transitional protection for the free school meals policy. This was introduced 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 1 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.

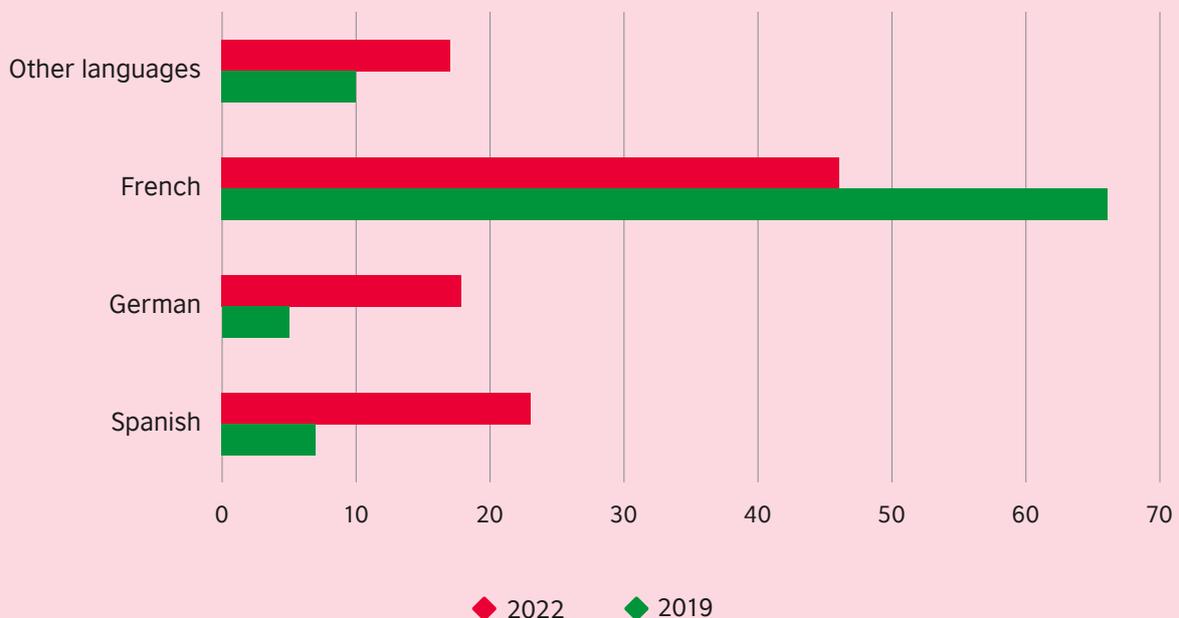
Given that policy context, there were 102,391 pupils (26.9%) aged 5 to 15 known to be eligible for free school meals or transitionally protected at February 2022. This is an observed increase from 95,532 pupils (25.2%) at April 2021. The Welsh government's reporting of this data in the 5 to 15 age range makes it difficult to compare the exact situation in our responding primary and secondary schools. However, from our data, the free school meals average for our responding primary schools is 26.8%, with a range up to 57%. When organised into quintiles, there is representation across the data set; we can thus have confidence that our responding schools represent a broad range of socio-economic factors.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On 17 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.

## Are International Languages on the Curriculum in primary schools?

Forty-one percent (n=39) of responding primary schools (n=95) told us that they taught International Languages within curriculum time in the 2021/22 school year. This is evidence of growth, up from 39% of schools in 2019, and 28% in 2016, showing the direction of travel is coherent with government policy of compulsory International Languages in primary schools from September 2022. However, 40% of these schools which were teaching International Languages in the 2021/22 school year had only recently started to teach International Languages. Ten percent of schools have been teaching International Languages for more than five years.

Although the survey showed that the proportion of schools teaching French in 2022 has decreased since 2019, it remains the most popular language taught in primary schools. Similar to the trend in other UK jurisdictions, we note a growth in Spanish at primary level. German also shows growth in our data set. In terms of other International Languages taught in the primary phase, a combination of British Sign Language, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Swedish and Mandarin is noted. There is no evidence in this dataset of any teaching of Ancient Greek, Arabic or Urdu.



**Figure 7:** Languages taught in primary schools and change over time

In Years 3 and 6, in those schools where language teaching takes place, primary teachers reported the following periods of time allotted for languages:

	Less than 30 minutes	30 – 45 minutes	More than 45 minutes but less than 1 hour	Between 1 and 2 hours	No language teaching
Year 3	43%	29%	11%	7%	10%
Year 6	32%	22%	36%	7%	3%

**Table 3: Time for languages in Years 3 and 6**

Previous research (e.g. Graham et al., 2017) suggests that in order for pupils to achieve measurable progress in an international language at primary level, at least one hour of teaching per week is required. While teachers’ language proficiency and experience of previous teacher training are fundamental in supporting the emergence of language proficiency, the length of time for instruction is strongly related to proficiency gains. It is thus disappointing that a quarter of primary schools which teach International Languages told us that pupils do not always receive their weekly allocated time for international language learning; this is often the area of the curriculum to be jettisoned when special events are held or when the normal rhythm of the school week is disrupted. Over 40% of these schools also told us that they do not assess or record pupils’ progress in International Languages and a further 35% of schools told us that they keep group records, but that individual pupils are not tracked for linguistic progression.

Therefore, to enable language learning at primary level to take root effectively, there needs to be sufficient and dedicated classroom instruction time for languages, embedded in a culture of ongoing linguistic and pedagogical development for language teachers.



## The Teacher of Primary Languages

In those primary schools which were teaching International Languages in 2021/22, almost two thirds delivered the subject by class teachers. The other third of schools relied on external specialist teachers, teachers from a local secondary school or a combination of these. Just a third of teachers delivering International Languages have received subject-specific Professional Learning in the past school year.

## Statutory International Languages from September 2022

**“Pupil voice is directing areas of the language they wish to learn, supported by the class teacher to ensure progression. We have found that pupils have taken to the international language learning much more eagerly than they have with the Welsh which is why we are also re-shaping how we deliver the Welsh curriculum to maximise pupil enjoyment. Offering three International Languages gives pupils exposure to several languages throughout their time in primary school, allowing them to see cognates and crossovers in the languages. We always offer the language(s) provided by the catchment high school. Use of blended learning is crucial in the delivery. [...] International Languages are also used to support literacy development (word classes, grammar, structure, tenses and so on).”**

Teacher, Central South Wales.

The Curriculum for Wales 2022 requires all primary schools to deliver an international language as part of the Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) ‘Languages, Literacy and Communication’. All 95 responding primary schools (i.e., both those which were teaching International Languages in 2021/22 and those who were not) answered two questions about their readiness for the new Curriculum for Wales from September 2022 (see Table 4 and Table 5).

The data show that half of primary schools are either not in a position to teach International Languages in Key Stage 2 or are only in the initial stages of planning to teach an international language. A quarter of schools are planning for progress in one language, which is similar to what is currently extant in England. However, one in ten schools are taking a different approach. They report that they are introducing pupils to multiple International Languages. This is similar to Ireland, as reported in the case study included in last year’s *Language Trends Wales 2021*.

**“We are at the very early stages of discussion and planning an International Language and its implementation across the school.”**

Teacher, South West and Mid Wales

Sixty-six percent of schools plan to teach French, 13% of schools plan to teach Spanish and 9% of schools plan to teach British Sign Language as their main language. Less than 5 schools (total n=95) responded that they plan to teach one of German, Japanese or Mandarin as their main language. No school responded that they plan to teach an ancient language as their main language or additional language.

Where schools plan to teach more than one language (n=41), over half of those schools are planning to deliver Spanish and 15% plan for German. The remaining balance of schools cite plans to teach British Sign Language, Italian and Mandarin.

**From September 2022, which statement best describes your planned approach to the teaching of International Languages?**

We are not in a position to teach International Languages	7%
We are in the early stages of planning international language provision	43%
We plan for pupils to make progress in one international language and to align this with our local secondary school	24%
We plan to introduce pupils to multiple International Languages	10%
We plan to teach British Sign Language	6%
I don't know / Other	10%

**How ready as a school are you to include an international language as a statutory part of Curriculum for Wales 2022?**

Very ready	17%
Somewhat ready	47%
Not ready	36%

**Table 4:** Primary schools' readiness for teaching International Languages from September 2022

**With which year groups do you plan to teach an international language from September 2022? Tick all that apply.**

Early Years	37%
Year 1	43%
Year 2	45%
Year 3	61%
Year 4	65%
Year 5	78%
Year 6	83%
We are not in a position to teach International Languages to any year group in 2022/23.	7%

**Table 5:** Year groups with which schools plan to teach an International Language in 2022/3.

## Challenges to meeting the new requirements of Curriculum for Wales 2022 for International Languages

Our survey asked teachers about the challenges they face in meeting the new requirements of Curriculum for Wales 2022, which stipulate that an international language must be taught at primary level as part of the Area of Learning Experience 'Languages, Literacy and Communication'. Just 2% of schools told us that they do not experience any particular challenges. Multiple responses were permitted and Table 6 shows that the biggest concern is in relation to staff proficiency in languages.

Forty-two percent of schools told us that the teacher responsible for International Languages would be qualified to GCSE-level. In 25% of schools the teacher responsible would have an A level and in 12% of schools the teacher would hold a degree-level qualification in International Languages. In one in five schools, the teacher would have no qualification in International Languages. Furthermore, 40% of primary schools reported that they do not have contacts with the International Languages department in a neighbouring secondary school.

Staff proficiency in International Languages	65%
Competition for curriculum time from Welsh and English	52%
Impact of Covid-19	48%
Finding teachers capable of teaching an international language	45%
Funding and resources	45%
Need to focus curriculum time on 'catch-up' in other subjects due to Covid-19	40%
Accessing language-specific Professional Learning	31%
Achieving support from parents	6%
We do not experience any particular challenges	2%

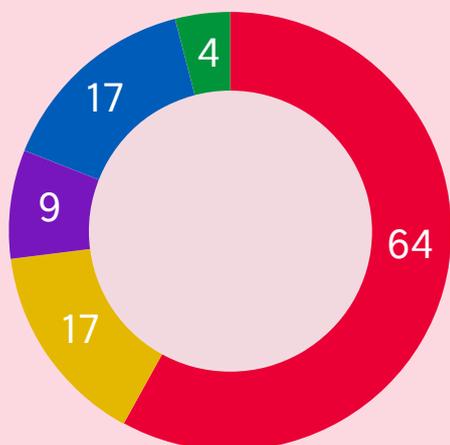
**Table 6:** Teachers' challenges to meeting the new requirements of Curriculum for Wales 2022

## International Dimension in Primary Schools

Sixty-four percent of primary schools told us they have no international activities, partnerships, or activities within their school. Where the international dimension is present and positive, teachers told us:

**“This year two members of staff have taken part in the Erasmus project – Innovative Language Teaching in a Bilingual Country. One visited Galicia, Spain and one visited Ireland.”**

**“This is the third year that we have had a Chinese Language student via the British Council. Despite the obvious impact of Covid, this has been very positive in the development of language skills along with multiculturalism in our pupils.”**



- ◆ None
- ◆ Partner school(s) abroad
- ◆ British Council events and training such as a Cerdd laith
- ◆ International projects
- ◆ Host Language Assistants

**Figure 8:** International Dimension in Primary Schools

Our survey also asked schools if they had any links with external organisations (not necessarily international organisations) to promote international language learning. Table 7 shows that according to the schools who responded, links with the business and commercial sector are non-existent. They also report that links with cultural institutes and the Regional Consortia in relation to international language learning could be further developed.

**“Good support from local council and secondary school.”**

**Do you have links with any external organisations to promote international language learning? (multiple responses permitted)**

University	9%
Business or other employer	0
Cultural Institute (e.g., Institut Français)	4%
Local secondary school	47%
The Regional Consortium	19%
Schools outside of Wales	9%
British Council	8%
Other	9%

**Table 7:** Links with external organisations

## What could be improved?

Primary teachers have consistently reported that in order to improve international teaching and learning they require more funding, resourcing, and access to subject-specific professional learning. Many teachers acknowledge the support available for Welsh, and would like to see similar support for International Languages:

**“It would be good to get some lesson ideas/ support. We work with the EAS with the delivery of Welsh in our school and the ideas and support we gain from meetings with them is great. It would be lovely if there was a similar platform to check in with. It would also be lovely if experts could come in and team teach us in what makes an effective French/International language session.”**

(Teacher comment)

**“The school wishes to work in partnership with cluster schools to agree on the introduction of either French or Spanish at PS3. The school would also welcome access to case studies which promote good practise in this area and any consistent CPD/ Cluster support/training from local High Schools. Identified teachers in each school must have access to excellent training courses to enable them to reach the requisite standard of proficiency to teach French or Spanish consistently and effectively as an international language to pupils at PS3.”**

(Teacher comment)

2022 is a seismic moment for international language learning in primary schools in Wales. There is every reason to hope for transformational change at system level. It will be interesting to follow trends in our subsequent reports as many primary schools navigate International Languages for the first time.



# Findings from the Secondary Schools Survey

In the 2021/22 school year, there were 182 state secondary schools in Wales, of which 130 were English Medium, 8 were English Medium with significant Welsh, 27 were Welsh Medium and 27 were bilingual English/Welsh. Pupil numbers in secondary schools grew from 174,133 in 2020/21 to 175,957 in 2021/22. This stability and growth in pupil numbers means that any decreases in international language learning are not the result of declining pupil enrolment, so other factors must be at play.

A response rate of 35% was achieved, up from 29% in 2021. Each state secondary school in Wales is a member of one of 22 local authorities (councils), based on geographical location like at primary level. Local authorities are grouped into four education consortia to facilitate school improvement, raise standards, improve the quality of teaching, school leadership and achieve efficiencies. Given the response rate, and to protect the identity of individual participating schools in so far as possible, the report will draw comparisons between consortia where appropriate.

Education Consortia	Includes local authorities of	Base	Number of responding schools (n=64)
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	17
Central South Wales	Bridgend, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff	49	16
South East Wales	Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport	32	17

**Table 8:** Number of responding schools by education consortium

## 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 182 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). (Please see the previous primary school findings section for information on transitional protection).

Table 9 shows that, as in our 2021 survey report, 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 transitionally protected students entitled to free school meals). What follows may therefore be more favourable than the reality in many schools.

	Base (total = 182)	Achieved (total = 64)	% Response rate to survey
Quintile 1 – least deprived	36	19	29%
Quintile 2	37	11	17%
Quintile 3	36	14	22%
Quintile 4	37	10	16%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	36	10	16%

**Table 9:** FSME quintiles for state secondary schools

## Language learning at Key Stage 3

Our survey asked teachers which international language(s) students were learning at Key Stage 3. Table 10 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. In relation to curricular International Languages other than French, German and Spanish, there is no evidence from responding schools of diversification, other than Mandarin being offered in Year 8 in a minority of schools.

Table 11 shows schools which offer two International Languages to some students at Key Stage 3. Our data show that this is increasingly the exception rather than the norm; where two International Languages are offered, it tends to be in Year 9.

Of these responding schools who offer two languages to some students, French and Spanish remain the most popular second International Languages in Year 7 and Year 9, while French and German are equally popular in Year 8; the small sample size means that this is not generalizable across the whole school population. In relation to curricular International Languages other than French, German and Spanish, one school makes timetabled provision for Mandarin in Year 8.

Two schools make timetabled provision for Italian, two schools offer Mandarin and one school offers Latin in Year 9.

**“We have pioneered an internal arrangement where a selected few can study French and Spanish in one option column thereby allowing them to gain an extra GCSE. We accommodate home languages [French /Spanish] by preparing pupils for an early GCSE/A level if appropriate. Latin in year 8 and year 9 as extracurricular exam classes raise the status of language learning and increase multilingual capability. We have responded to other home languages [Italian and German] by offering basic exam preparation and entry for GCSE. All of these elements create a vibrant language learning community. We also have our own internal systems for raising awareness of the importance of languages in future careers which creates a good Year 9 take up. Our Senior Management recognise our success and although we do not have any special dispensation, neither do we have any obstruction to our development needs. Multilingual Literacy is a core element of our teaching strategies.”**

Teacher comment

	French	German	Spanish	Others
Year 7	72%	5%	25%	0
Year 8	70%	9%	31%	2% (Mandarin)
Year 9	58%	6%	25%	0

**Table 10:** International Languages at Key Stage 3 for all students

	French	German	Spanish	Others
Year 7	11%	5%	3%	0
Year 8	8%	8%	5%	2% (Mandarin)
Year 9	28%	14%	20%	8%

**Table 11:** International Languages at Key Stage 3 – schools offering two International Languages to some 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.

**“Pupils only get three hours per fortnight to study Spanish, a subject that has only been on offer for the last two years. It’s difficult to get them to the necessary level in order to successfully study at GCSE.”**

(Teacher comment)

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Less than 1 hour	6%	8%	11%	6%
1-2 hours	78%	77%	66%	13%
2-3 hours	13%	9%	17%	45%
3-4 hours	3%	6%	6%	8%
More than 4 hours	0	0	0	28%

**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 64 responding schools which offer a Year 10 provision in International Languages Table 13 shows that 30 teachers (i.e. 47%) reported that only 10% of their Year 10 students were taking a language for GCSE or other Level 2 qualification (30 responses). There were no schools in Year 10 of the survey where more than 50% of the cohort were taking an international language, a statistic which resonates with the findings of *Language Trends Wales 2021*.

Furthermore, Table 14 shows that teachers reported that the majority of pupils who are studying a language in Year 10 are following a GCSE specification, while only a handful is studying for WJEC Level 2 Global Business Communication. The figures suggest that both GCSE and WJEC Level 2 Global Business Communication are offered in five of our 64 responding schools.

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
14	30	14	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Table 13:** Proportion of students in Year 10 are learning an international language for GCSE or other Level 2 qualification (e.g., Level 2 Global Business Communication). Reported in raw numbers (total n=64).

GCSE	98%
Level 2 Global Business Communication	9%
Other	0

**Table 14:** Accreditation(s) students use for Level 2 International Languages

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. Fifty-five percent of teachers perceived that 'Fewer pupils now take an international language at KS4', but it is pleasing to see 10% of responding schools reporting more pupils taking a language; in our 2021 report, this figure was 0.

Table 16 shows schools' approach to take-up for International Languages in Key Stage 4. Almost two-thirds of schools report that classes do not run if there are not enough pupils. Minimum numbers for classes to run vary from school to school, but this data provides evidence that the progression pathways for learners can be closed because of school-level decision making.

International Languages are compulsory for all pupils at KS4	0
More pupils now take an international language at KS4	10%
Fewer pupils now take an international language at KS4	55%
Similar numbers to before	16%
No clear trend: numbers fluctuate from year to year	17%
Other	2%

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

Classes do not run if there are not enough pupils	63%
Lower than average attaining pupils are discouraged from choosing an international language	13%
The school strongly recommends that all pupils take an international language	2%
The school strongly recommends that the most academically able take an international language	2%
Timetabling means that not all pupils are able to take an international language	31%
Some pupils may be advised by SLT not to take an international language	14%

**Table 16: School's approach to take-up for International Languages in Key Stage 4 (multiple responses permitted)**

## 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 17 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.

Not all schools are in a position to offer extra-curricular languages. Resourcing and financial cost can be prohibitive. One teacher commented:

**“Cost: as a small department (1.5 staff) it is difficult to juggle workload with additional enrichment activities. School cannot afford to run additional language courses or have an assistant. School leadership is reluctant to allow us to participate in external events.”**

	KS3	KS4	Post-16
Arabic	0	1	1
French	20%	19%	17%
German	2%	2%	2%
Mandarin	6%	2%	6%
Polish	6%	4%	2%
Spanish	8%	5%	2%
None	60%	63%	75%
Other	6%	7%	5%
	Japanese		
	Latin	Latin	
	Korean	Korean	Korean
	Italian	Italian	
		Portuguese	
		Russian	

**Table 17:** Students currently learning any of the following International Languages as extra-curricular at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, and Post-16 (multiple responses permitted)

## International Dimension

Table 18 shows particularly good international engagement with both Routes into Languages Cymru<sup>13</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>14</sup>, which encourages the learning of International Languages at GCSE level and beyond via a programme of in-classroom mentoring and online mentoring.

Thirty-eight percent of responding schools engaged with their partner cultural institutes abroad, and 17% schools have one or more partner institutions abroad. However, only 8% of schools employ a language assistant and we consider that 22% of schools told us that they have no international activities in school.

<b>The institution has one or more partner institutions abroad</b>	17%
<b>British Council international opportunities</b>	6%
<b>We employ language assistants</b>	8%
<b>We engage with cultural institutes (e.g., Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Consejería de Educación)</b>	38%
<b>We take part in MFL Student Mentoring Scheme</b>	56%
<b>We engage with Routes into Languages Cymru</b>	78%
<b>Assumed none</b>	22%

**Table 18:** International engagement in secondary schools (multiple responses allowed)

<sup>13</sup> See: <https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/activities/cymru>

<sup>14</sup> See: <http://mflmentoring.co.uk/>

## Challenges in International Language Learning

We asked teachers about perceived challenges to providing high quality language learning experiences for students in their institutions. Of 64 responding schools, teachers perceive 'The nature and content of external exams' as the main challenge and second challenge. 'The way external exams are marked and graded' is ranked third and 'Languages not promoted at whole-school level as a careers option' is ranked fourth. The perception of 'Global English (i.e., the importance of English as a world language)' is ranked fifth in relation to challenges to providing high quality language learning experiences.

## Potential impact of new Curriculum for Wales from 2022

Our survey 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. 21 teachers expressed 'Not very likely', followed by 'Not at all likely' and 'Quite likely' with 13 responses, respectively.

Table 20 shows that half of teachers consider their school to have 'already made some changes in preparation for Curriculum for Wales 2022' through collaboration within their AoLE.

Very likely	1
Quite likely	13
Not very likely	21
Not at all likely	13
I don't know	4

**Table 19:** 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?' Reported as raw numbers.

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

**Table 20:** 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

Table 21 shows that close to half of respondents reported that their schools do not have post-16 provision in International Languages. A third of teachers reported that they do have post-16 provision in International Languages delivered wholly in their school.

In our data set there was no evidence of the teaching of any International Languages post-16 in schools other than the ‘big 3’ of French, German and Spanish. Ninety-seven percent of those responding with post-16 provision offer French, with 48% of schools offering German and/or Spanish.

**“International Language A level is perceived as being a difficult qualification. The experience of the GCSE exams can be off putting even for a capable pupil gaining a top grade. The unpredictability and sometimes unfortunate content of the exams does not build confidence in pupils and discourages them from taking a further risk with A level. Science and Maths have a far stronger profile in persuading pupils they need to study their subjects.”**

Teacher comment

**“German has not been offered at A Level for the last eight years due to the absence of sufficient take-up. French has been offered due to circumstances (students working on a very reduced timetable for French (2 hours a fortnight) and having extra lessons given in my free periods and/or after school. Spanish has not been offered at A Level yet due to lack of take-up but will be made available as soon as enough GCSE pupils express the desire to carry on at A Level.”**

Teacher Comment

We asked teachers of the students studying an international language or International Languages for A level, how many plan to study an international language at university. The most frequent answer was one student in the class. This teacher’s comment encapsulates how many responded to our space for open comments and reflects the frustration that many classroom teachers feel:

**“If better uptake at post-16 is to be achieved, we need funding provided to schools to employ British Council Language Assistants every year. Language examinations [need] to be designed and marked fairly compared to other subjects. A comprehensive programme of careers related talks funded and organised by local consortia. Teachers in schools do not have the time/ resources to do this themselves, especially in view of the extremely heavy burden we have shouldered for the past 2 years. We have had to deal with online learning provision, catch up provision for all year groups, Centre Determined Grades for the past 2 years, confusing and ultimately unhelpful exam changes for 2022, having to take on AS International Language examining ourselves, all while planning for the new Curriculum for Wales. If this seems like a lot then it has been, international language teachers are continuing to work extremely hard to promote our subjects.”**

Teacher comment

Yes, delivered wholly in my school	36%
Yes, delivered between my school and another school	3%
Yes, but delivered wholly by another school	5%
No	47%
Other	9

**Table 21:** Teachers’ responses to the question, ‘Does your school have post-16 provision in International Languages?’

# International Language Learning in Post-16 Colleges in Focus

Nine out of a possible 13 post-16 colleges responded to our survey. Given the small number, figures in this section are reported as raw numbers.

No colleges offer vocational language qualifications and responses focused on A level French, German and Spanish. Two colleges offer resit opportunities in GCSE French and/or German and/or Spanish to those pupils who may have failed a language in the school system. One of the nine responding colleges reports no international language learning on offer in the 2021/22 academic year.

## Languages Taught

A level French is taught in eight of the nine responding colleges, Spanish in six colleges and German in three colleges, including one which has recently introduced German. Colleges were more likely to report that take-up of languages had decreased over the past three years, with two colleges pleasingly reporting that their numbers in A level Spanish have increased.

**“We noticed a sharp decrease in our take up in September 2019. This coincided with the first cohort having sat the new GCSE which might have been perceived as more challenging. In addition, our institution made the study of the Welsh baccalaureate compulsory. This meant that when in the past we used to have learners doing 3 sciences and a language these students have had to replace the language study with the Welsh baccalaureate.”**

Post-16 college lecturer

In terms of the number of students studying an international language in Year 12 in post-16 colleges, respondents told us of varying numbers between colleges.

Where there are 5 or fewer students, lecturers told us that classes often run on a reduced timetable. Our data suggest there is appetite from senior leadership teams in colleges to allow International Languages to run where there is student demand.

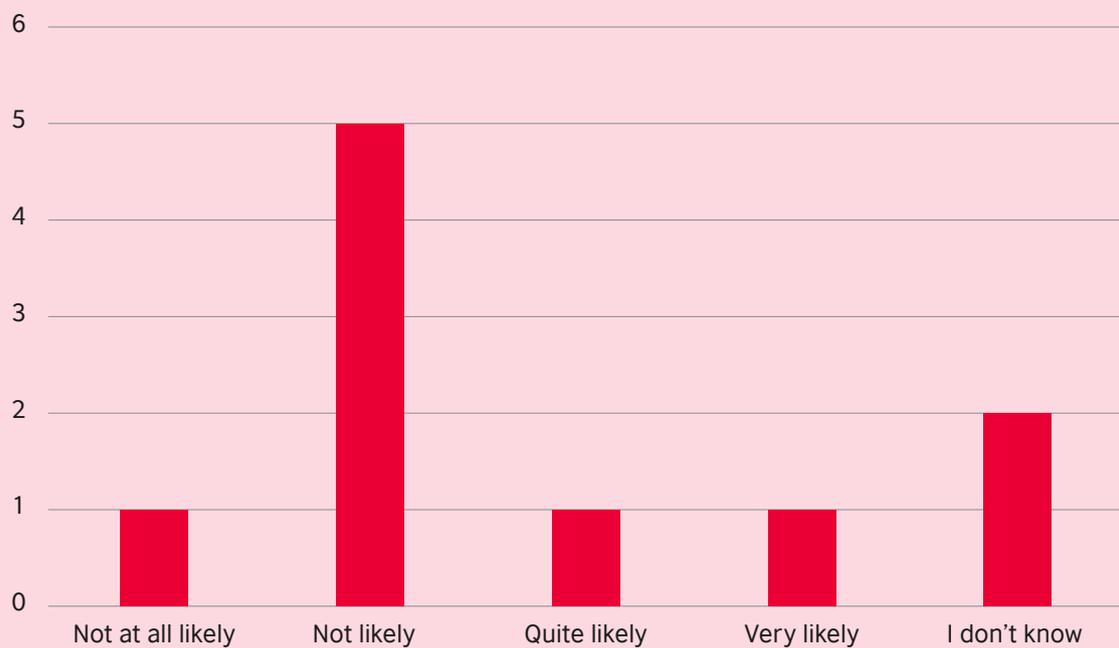




**Figure 9:** Number of students studying an international language in Year 12 in post-16 colleges

## The New Curriculum for Wales 2022 – the post-16 college perspective

We asked lecturers in post-16 colleges 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:



**Figure 10:** How likely it is the new Curriculum for Wales will improve the situation for international language learning in Wales

## International Dimension

All colleges reported at least one opportunity for their students and staff to gain international experience. Figure 11 shows that engagement with Routes into Language Cymru and applications to the recently established Turing Scheme for outward mobility are of a high order.

Six colleges do not employ a language assistant. The main reasons cited for this decision were low learner numbers and lack of fundings. One respondent commented:

**“Restore Modern Language Assistants throughout the school system and overhaul International Languages at KS2,3,4 to provide a pool of students at post-16.”**

In Language Trends 2021, we reported on the considerable investment in Modern Language Assistants in Ireland, a school system where both Irish and English are compulsory, similar to Welsh and English in Wales.

**“The focus in Wales has been on the development and delivery of the Welsh Language with an aspiration of creating a truly bilingual Wales. This has been to the detriment of international language development in my view. Any new curriculum would need to place International Languages in higher regard right from Primary Education and through Secondary. The standard of teaching of Welsh is not consistently high throughout Primary education in Wales and any poor experience of Language Learning will reduce enthusiasm for Learning of other Languages, thus by the time International Languages are introduced in secondary school, the damage is often already done. Linking good MFL deliverers in Universities and FE colleges with local Primary and Secondary Schools is vital.”**  
FE lecturer



**Figure 11:** Opportunities for international experience in post-16 colleges

# Conclusion

Knowledge of languages has long been key to enriching lives and contributing to growth and prosperity in Wales. From this year's post-pandemic *Language Trends Wales* survey, there is a need now more than ever to listen to teachers and learners about what is happening to the language learning opportunities in their schools and classrooms.

From our survey of primary schools, there is positive evidence of growth in language learning opportunities as the number of schools who report teaching an international language as part of their curriculum has increased from 28% in 2016 and 39% in 2019, to this year's figure of 41%. The introduction of compulsory international language learning in primary schools as part of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 is a most welcome step. However, it is essential to highlight in this report that for the majority of primary schools in Wales, embedding an international language is uncharted territory. The further discovery that a majority of schools have no international connections with partner schools abroad, no international projects nor do they host language assistants is unfortunate, given that these links could support schools in navigating this terrain. Moreover, support through connections with neighbouring secondary school languages departments does not appear to be in evidence for all primary schools. This is a missed opportunity for many primary schools to learn from others, share knowledge and best practices, particularly as this year's survey evidences secondary schools' positive engagement with both Routes into Languages Cymru, and the MFL Student Mentoring Scheme.

For those primary schools that successfully offered International Languages in 2021/22, only a third of teachers teaching languages received subject-specific professional learning during the last school year.

This lack of training for class teachers is also reflected in our finding that for one in five schools, the teacher designated for the future delivery of languages would have no qualification in International Languages. Therefore, while the introduction of languages as compulsory in the primary curriculum is to be celebrated, it is not, on its own, going to reverse the trends in language learning. It is essential that, working in tandem with curriculum policy, there is significant support to assure pupil progress in early language learning at primary level through dedicated and protected time for language learning of no less than one hour per week and innovative resourcing for and sharing of linguistic and pedagogical expertise. Furthermore, there is an opportune moment in post-pandemic discussions to reinvigorate both the variety of International Languages taught and the local and global connections that facilitate language learning. Many teachers took the time to acknowledge the support available for Welsh, and would welcome similar support for International Languages.

For post-primary contexts, the alarming decline in GCSE and A level entries in French, German and Spanish between 2021 and 2022 should be interpreted as a highest-level warning. With this year's further decline in the number of students taking GCSE and A-level German, it is even more likely that our 2021 *Language Trends Wales* statistical prediction of less than 100 pupils sitting GCSE German in Wales by 2030 will materialise. Unless there is a collaborative approach taken to tackle and reverse this trend, this subject will likely disappear from the Welsh school system within the next ten years. This would seem a highly significant blow to Wales on an international stage, as Germany is one of Wales' most important trading partners, with almost one in five Welsh exports made to Germany.

There is now an overwhelming need for strategic investment to enable opportunities for all pupils to learn languages and to forge pathways for International Languages in secondary and post-16 colleges. Almost two-thirds of schools report that languages classes do not run if there are not enough pupils enrolled. While minimum numbers of pupils required to provide classes varies from school to school, it is nonetheless evident that progression pathways for language learners are blocked because of school-level decision-making. Not all schools are in a position to offer extra-curricular languages, citing resourcing and financial costs as prohibitive. Almost half of schools responding to this year's *Language Trends Wales* do not have any post-16 provision in International Languages. Too few students in post-16 colleges are afforded the opportunity to either study a language or resit a previously failed GCSE. This evidence at post-primary level not only paints a bleak picture of the present, but also suggests that the nourishment needed to maintain the groundwork for International Languages in the primary sector is not being provided.

To find a positive way forward entails investment and creativity in identifying best practices in those post-primary institutions where international languages are healthy, and then developing a means through which to share and indeed replicate those systemically. A better and shared understanding of the needs of employment and industry in relation to languages could open new avenues for the promotion of languages, together with an examination of the possibilities to include international languages in vocational courses in post-16 colleges.

*Language Trends Wales 2022* is an urgent call to action for collaboration and creativity for International Languages in Wales.



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