

## Routes into Languages Cymru

### Evaluation of the 2016-2018 phase

#### Key findings

- The activities organised by Routes into Languages Cymru are greatly appreciated and have achieved a wide range of positive impacts in partner schools and colleges:
  - Three quarters of schools/colleges involved report a change in perception by pupils of the importance of language skills in their future lives.
  - More than a third report that take-up for MFL at GCSE has already increased.
  - Nearly half report that pupils are more enthusiastic in their MFL classes and 27% even report higher attainment.
- The scheme has raised the profile of MFL both within and beyond schools and has provided conduits through which a wide range of partners are contributing, or contributing more intensively, to the objectives of *Global Futures*.
- The low priority given to MFL within the curriculum and among senior managers in some schools has limited opportunities for pupils and teachers to engage with Routes Cymru activities. In some cases, school policies (e.g. on option choices) have proved a barrier to improved take-up of MFL, despite an improvement in pupil perceptions of the value of the subject.
- The Routes Cymru scheme has provided a mechanism for increased community engagement by universities, has contributed to their widening access agendas and provided valuable employability experience for the undergraduates involved.
- The Routes Cymru model of partnership working provides a foundation on which the Higher Education sector can build to contribute more broadly to Welsh Government policy initiatives such as the Donaldson curriculum and the Cymraeg 2015: A Million Welsh Speakers strategy.

## 1. Introduction

Routes Cymru supports the uptake and visibility of modern languages across Wales through school-based activities intended to generate enthusiasm and interest in modern languages, above all in the secondary school sector. Since 2014, it has been funded by 5 Welsh Universities, all 4 Welsh regional education consortia, the British Council and the European Commission Wales. It is organised around two hubs located in the Schools of Modern Languages at Cardiff University and Bangor University. Its core mission is to:

1. provide impartial information about the benefits of modern languages for Welsh society and the Welsh economy,
2. generate enthusiasm and interest in modern languages and ultimately increase the numbers of modern language learners in Wales at all levels of education
3. improve the employability skills of modern languages students at all levels of study.

Its main activities include:

**Pupil Language Ambassador Training:** school pupils in year 8 and 9 are recruited by their teachers and trained to work with younger pupils to raise awareness of the importance of MFL.

**Student Language Ambassadors:** undergraduates studying modern languages degree courses are recruited and trained to go into schools to talk about their own experiences and plans for the future. Some SLAs are in their final year and have recently returned from their year abroad, others are in their second year and currently preparing to go abroad to work or study.

**Spelling Bee:** an annual, national competition which provides a forum for Year 7 pupils in schools throughout Wales to practise and improve their vocabulary, spelling and memory skills in another language (French, Spanish, German and Welsh second language).

**Masterclasses:** Film and Literature Days for AS and A level students and their teachers. They offer an opportunity for the students to widen their understanding of a film or book they are studying and extend their vocabulary. University language students assist with the workshops and talk about their experience of studying languages and visiting other countries.

## 2. Aims of the evaluation exercise

This evaluation exercise covers the 2-year period from September 2016 to September 2018, during which Routes into Languages Cymru has been devolved to the university sector. Its objectives are:

1. To evaluate the impact of Routes Cymru activities on partner schools over the 2-year period. Which activities have generated greatest uptake? How far can these activities be

said to correlate to uptake at GSE and AS/A level in these partner schools? How far has Routes Cymru supported raising aspiration for languages and further study in Wales and beyond?

2. To evaluate the impact of Routes Cymru on the MFL policy-making context for Wales and the UK. How far can Routes Cymru be said to have influenced and/or supported the aims and objectives of the Welsh Government's 'Global Futures' programme and strategy (2015-2020)? What role has it played in the vision for MFL in Wales as part of the Donaldson 'Successful Futures' curriculum reform?

3. To evaluate the impact of Routes Cymru on the HE sector in Wales. How has Routes Cymru supported and/or generated partnership? What have been some of the accrued benefits for HE departments and schools of modern languages and/or universities and their civic mission in working in such a configuration?

4. To make recommendations on how best to develop the Routes Cymru project and activity to deliver maximum support for languages in schools in Wales, working with government and HE for the future.

The research on which this evaluation report is based took place between April and October 2018.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Methodology and sources

The report is based on data from the following sources:

- Project management data provided on 160 schools.
- Cross-referencing with data on 76 of these schools who responded to the Language Trends Wales survey in 2018.<sup>2</sup>
- On-line survey of partner schools (89 unique responses).
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers, policy-makers and HE stakeholders (7), plus informal conversations with a range of other stakeholders (see Appendix).
- Questionnaires completed by 6 Student Language Ambassadors.
- Ongoing feedback received from the project coordinators at Cardiff and Bangor universities.

All responses have been anonymised.

### 4. Impact in partner schools

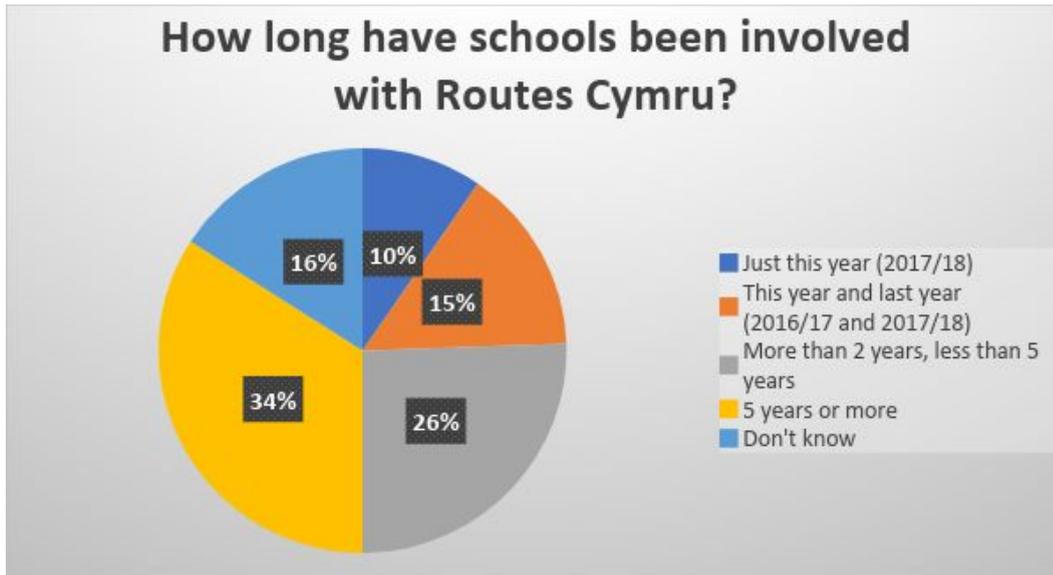
#### 4.1 Extent of involvement with Routes Cymru

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<sup>1</sup> This report has been kindly supported by a small grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council Leadership Fellow for Modern Languages.

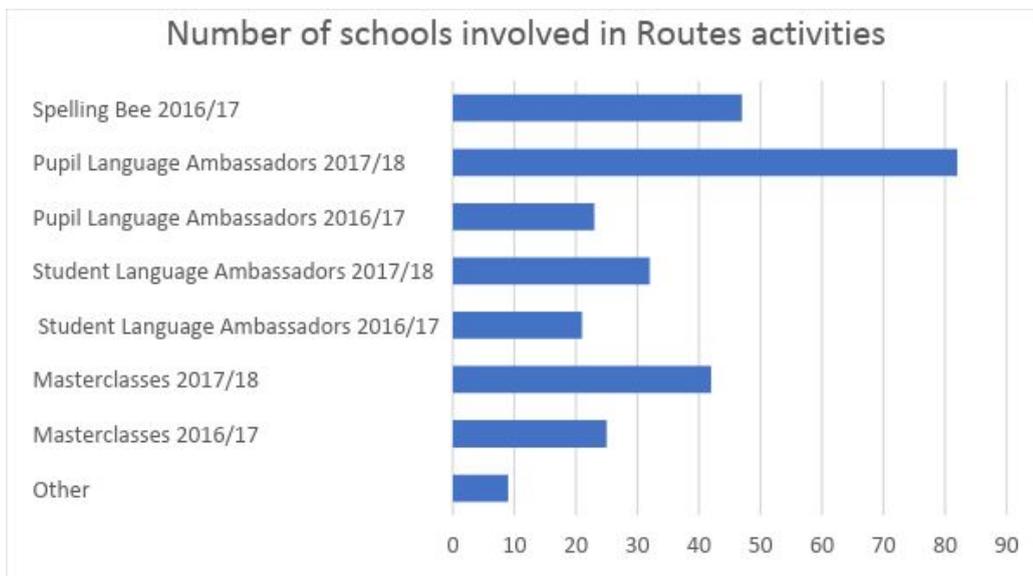
<sup>2</sup> Data from Language Trends Wales 2018 by kind permission of the British Council Wales. This data has been anonymised in line with data protection requirements.

About a third of the schools responding to the online survey (34%) have longstanding involvement with Routes Cymru in its different phases, while around quarter (24%) were new to this phase of the scheme, having had less than 2 years' involvement at the time they completed the survey:



Source: Teacher survey

Schools also differed in terms of the extent of their involvement in all the various activities offered through Routes Cymru:

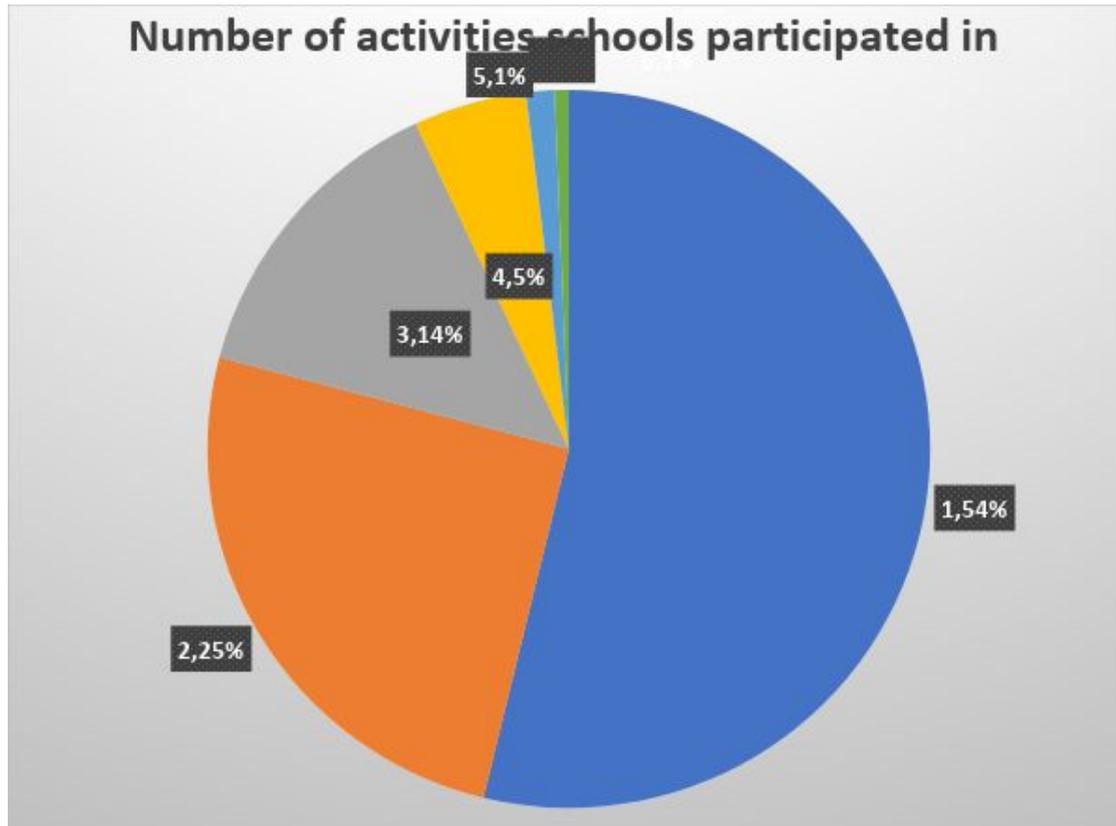


Source: Management data

A majority of partner schools (54%) were involved in just one activity, although a quarter had taken part in two, and three schools had participated in five or six of the activities

offered. One of the MFL leads interviewed commented that it was important that schools should 'buy in' to as many activities as possible, targeting different groups of pupils:

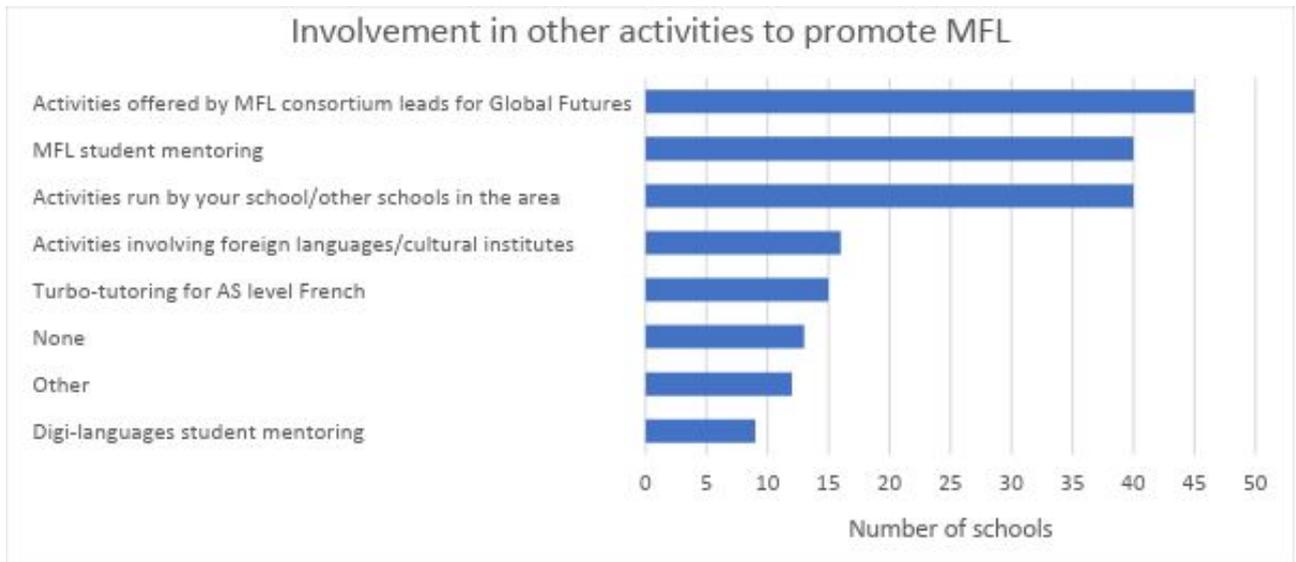
*The more you buy in, the more you get out of it.*



*Source: Management data. Participation in the same activity in different school years is counted as two.*

Both of the above factors – how long schools have been involved and how many activities they have taken part in – have implications for the conclusions which can be drawn as regards the impact of the scheme. This is especially so regarding the impact on take-up, because of the inevitable time lag between the activity and its hoped-for outcome (for example, the Spelling Bee is targeted at Year 7 pupils).

Partner schools also take part in other activities, in addition to those provided through Routes, which are designed to boost take up and enthusiasm for MFL and this is an additional factor making the specific impact of Routes difficult to track. The vast majority of schools (86%) have taken part in at least one additional activity:



Source: Teacher survey

Teachers commented:

*Over the past 3 years we have been running extensive projects and schemes to promote languages and these seem to have a positive impact.*

*We are working hard to raise the experience of MFL and take advantage of everything offered*

*Big emphasis on the importance of languages in future careers in KS3 teaching started last year and has had a positive effect on uptake.*

The evaluation exercise was planned to overcome these obstacles by identifying impacts beyond raw take-up figures and by gathering qualitative evidence from teachers, student ambassadors and MFL leads on impacts which could be specifically attributed to Routes Cymru.

#### 4.2. Profile of schools/colleges involved in the project

Schools taking part in the scheme represent a very wide range of circumstances across Wales, including Welsh and English medium schools, with and without Sixth Form provision, and, crucially, different levels of take-up for MFL.<sup>3</sup> One school, a very recent recruit to the scheme, has no pupils studying MFL in Key Stage 4, while in another, with longer involvement with Routes, take-up is above 50%.

Take-up in Year 10 was 10% or below in of the 24 schools for which data is available, 34 had take-up of 11-24%, and 14 had take-up of 25-49%. In four schools, take-up in Year 10 fell

<sup>3</sup> Data from Language Trends Wales 2018.

into a lower band than take-up in Year 11, reflecting the national picture of declining numbers.<sup>4</sup>

Three FE Colleges also participated in the project.

*Take-up for MFL in participating schools (number of schools)*

Take-up band	Year 10	Year 11
0	1	1
1-10%	24	24
11-24%	30	26
25-49%	14	18
50-75%	1	1

*Source: Language Trends Wales 2018*

In response to the Language Trends survey, 13 of the participating schools said they had fewer pupils taking MFL than in the previous year in both years 10 and 11, 8 had fewer numbers in Year 10 but similar numbers in Year 11, 3 had more pupils in both years, while 21 had more pupils in Year 10 but fewer or similar numbers in Year 11. These figures also roughly reflect the national picture and highlight the difficulties in attributing a clear impact on take-up in a situation where many other factors are at play within schools.

Schools participating in Routes Cymru where take-up had not improved commented:

*Reduction in options columns due to Welsh Bacc and also more vocational subjects to push out academic subjects*

*The number of subjects available for pupils to study is wide ranging and problematic issues between subjects are huge. Pupils tend to choose Triple Science rather than French if it is in the same choice column.*

For these reasons, in addition to the quantitative and qualitative data presented below, this evaluation presents a number of case studies of schools where the relationship between take-up and the varied factors influencing it can be described in greater detail.

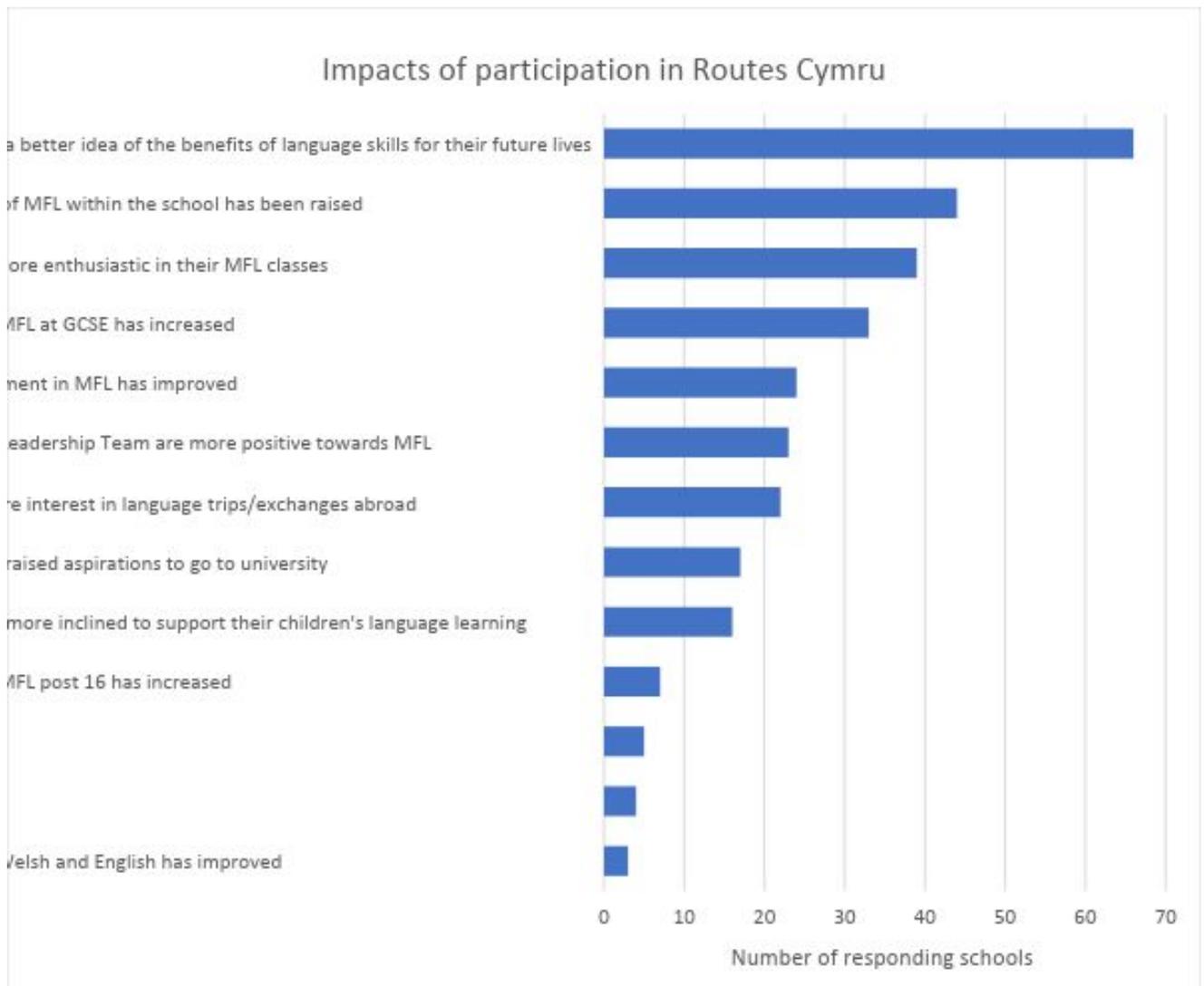
#### 4.3 Impact in partner schools

Schools were able to report a wide range of positive impacts as a result of their involvement in the project, with more than a third (37.5%) reporting that take up at Key Stage 4 had increased. However, by far the most widespread impact – reported by three quarters of schools – was a change in perception by pupils of the importance of language skills in their future lives. Half of responding schools said that participation in the scheme had raised the profile of MFL within the school, and a smaller proportion (26%) said that it had made Senior Management more sympathetic towards MFL. Approaching half (44%) reported that

<sup>4</sup> Language Trends Wales 2018, pp. 29-30.

pupils were more enthusiastic in their MFL classes and more than a quarter (27%) even reported higher attainment.

The small number of schools reporting impact on take-up post 16 needs to be understood in the context of the relatively few activities targeted at this age group, and the fact that many schools in the scheme do not have post-16 pupils. The increase in take-up post 16 in 7 schools should therefore be seen as a very positive outcome. Schools report little impact on parents or on literacy in English/Welsh and this again must be related to the particular focus of the activities organised. These areas could perhaps be specifically targeted in future phases of the project.



Source: Teacher survey

Five schools were unable to report any impact at all from the project. Of these, two had only recently joined the scheme and said it was too early to judge impact. Another had had very little involvement with the scheme and had been unable to participate in teacher events because of 'cover issues'. Another reported:

*Despite all sorts of initiatives, MFL is still not seen as a priority by many of our pupils. SLT are supportive of "easy" fixes such as trips - things we can organise within the MFL department but MFL still does not have a particularly high profile: the focus is very much on English, Maths, Science.*

#### 4.4 Impact in FE Colleges

Three FE Colleges took part in Routes Cymru activities (in one case this involved students on two different sites). These activities were on the one hand, the Masterclasses for AS/AL students and, on the other, College Language Ambassadors who were trained to go out into schools in their areas. Both activities received very positive feedback.

One college whose students had attended Masterclasses reported that they had raised aspirations to go to university and that they had developed exam techniques such as essay writing. She commented:

*More events/ masterclasses at A level would help to enhance students' skills and would hopefully help towards increasing uptake at University level.*

#### 4.5. Examples of impacts specifically attributed to Routes

When asked to provide an example of impact which could be specifically attributed to participation in Routes Cymru activities, the largest number of schools (14) reported an impact on take-up:

*Our GCSE take up has doubled this year which we put down to all the work we have done to raise the profile of MFL and a lot of this has been through Routes into Languages activities. On the post visit feedback forms, more pupils are considering taking MFL for GCSE.*

*Pupils who had not considered taking a language at GCSE have opted for one*

*In the two years I have personally been involved in the project, take-up of French GCSE has increased from 10 in 2016, 14 in 2017 to 19 in 2018. Almost 100%!*

There were also two others who commented about potential impact in the future on take-up:

*On the post visit feedback forms, more pupils are considering taking MFL for GCSE.*

The majority of these comments referred to take up at GCSE, but some also mentioned interest beyond:

*Students who attended a class at Bangor University are now considering it as an option for HE.*

Eleven respondents reported an impact on the quality of their pupils' response or attainment in MFL:

*Pupil Language Ambassadors now have more confidence in MFL lessons.*

*The Spelling Bee enables pupils to make a direct link between sound and spelling patterns, increases their memory techniques and boosts their confidence in speaking in front of others.*

Seven of these 11 comments related to post-16 pupils:

*On return from their A-Level Masterclass, pupils' practice essay attainment jumped at least 2 grades due to a fuller understanding of the text and the requirements.*

Nine responses to this question highlighted the impact of Routes on pupils' attitudes towards MFL and their future aspirations:

*Pupil Language Ambassador training has inspired pupils and raised the profile of MFL greatly*

*When outside visitors have come into school to discuss why languages are useful in the 'real' world it has created a 'buzz' and got pupils seriously thinking about opting for an MFL at GCSE level.*

*I think all have had an impact on certain individuals, but no real change will happen until languages become a priority for LEA attainments.*

An MFL consortium lead commented in interview that it was important to 'go into schools' to see the qualitative impact on the enthusiasm of pupils, because 'promotion may not help in final take up of numbers'. This view was echoed by other interviewees who confirmed that their impression was that pupils were being greatly enthused and engaged through the different strands of the scheme.

Another impact, identified by five school respondents as directly attributable to Routes Cymru was on raising the profile of MFL:

*External events naturally make parents, teachers and pupils aware of language events and what they are and therefore raise the profile, e.g. Spelling Bee.*

*Parents show more interest in the linguist education of their children whenever they are involved in activities such as Spelling Bee.*

Three respondents highlighted how Pupil Ambassador Training had acted as a stimulus for additional activities:

*Our team of Pupil Language Ambassadors are working hard to raise the profile of MFL in the school and in our feeder schools. They have run the first "Great French Crepe Off" for Year 7 and will attend their primary schools' summer fayres and hold a language stall.*

*Following training, our language ambassadors have set up a languages club and there is keen interest from the lower years.*

#### 4.6. Which activities have generated the most impact?

These responses from teachers were also analysed according to which particular activity they referred to. The most commonly-mentioned activity was the Pupil Language Ambassador training, cited by 8 respondents. This is not surprising, given that, along with Student Language Ambassadors, it was the activity in which the largest number of schools had participated. The impacts reported were about how the activity had inspired pupils, given them confidence and raised the profile of MFL within the school:

*Pupil Language Ambassador training has inspired pupils and raised the profile of MFL greatly.*

Second in importance came the Masterclasses, mentioned by 6 respondents. Given that a much smaller number of schools participated in this activity, this indicates that it achieved a high degree of effectiveness and appreciation by teachers. Comments tended to focus on the impact on student learning, e.g.:

*Increase in quality of pupil response after attending A Level Masterclasses.*

*A Level film workshops were a massive help to inexperienced teachers delivering film and gave pupils a clearer understanding of the themes addressed.*

The importance of these two activities – the Masterclasses and the Pupil Ambassador training – was echoed by MFL leads. The ‘strong peer effect’ of the Pupil Language Ambassadors was deemed to be ‘very powerful’.

Five respondents mentioned the Spelling Bee – an activity which had, at least at the time of the survey, involved a relatively small number of the responding schools. Since the activity was aimed at Year 7, the timing of the evaluation exercise meant that it was too early to detect any potential future impact on take-up. Again, the impacts noted were about the quality of learning and enhanced enjoyment among the pupils who took part:

*The year 7 love the Spelling Bee challenge and it helps so much their spelling attainment in French in the long term.*

MFL leads too felt that this was the activity which had had the most impact, and with more promotion it could be even more effective and engage more schools.

Six respondents mentioned external visitors and Student Language Ambassadors in response to this question:

*We improved uptake following a visit from undergraduates.*

*Increased numbers at GCSE after Tim Penn's visit.*

MFL leads interviewed highlighted the complementary approaches of the careers talks and the input of the Student Language Ambassadors, both of which are helpful in 'drip-feeding' messages in different ways. One spoke of the visit of the Student Language Ambassador as being 'a game-changer' in that it had had a 'massive impact' on the Year 9 top set. The school had particularly asked for a male student and thought it good if such individuals could provide models of combining language skills with Maths or Science. Another stakeholder pointed to the importance of hearing about students' experiences on their Year Abroad. This is exciting for pupils and widens their horizons.

In addition, 7 respondents mentioned the MFL mentoring project, and one the Turbo-tutoring - neither of which were funded through Routes:

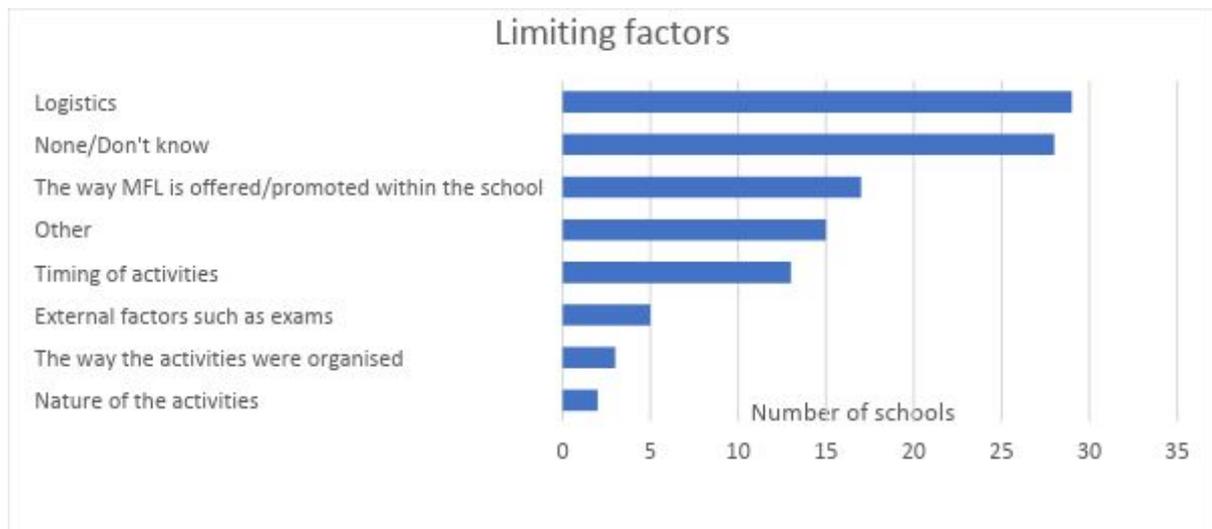
*Student mentoring project made parents more supportive.*

*Mentoring has really raised aspirations of the pupils involved.*

The mentoring and the visits were the activities named by schools where there had been an impact on take-up, the Masterclasses and Pupil Language Ambassador training had more impact on pupil response in classes, while the Spelling Bee appears to have been effective both for pupil response and for raising the profile of MFL more widely.

#### 4.7. Factors limiting the success of the scheme

Schools identified relatively few limiting factors and about a third (32%) said that they were not able to name any at all. A similar number (33%) said that logistics, particularly travel constraints, had been the main limiting factor. Only very small numbers thought that the nature of the activities or the way that they were organised had been a constraint. One in five respondents said that the impact of the project had been limited by constraints within the school such as the way MFL is organised and promoted.



Source: Teacher survey

Respondents gave examples of factors within their schools which had constrained involvement in the scheme:

*Budget restraints in schools have prevented teachers from attending and making use of the excellent events available.*

*It is sometimes difficult to organise time off timetables - reluctance of some to release pupils from their lessons if not a language lesson.*

*Unfortunately, our SLT will not let pupils out of school during school hours for MFL events.*

There was also an awareness of unused potential to exploit the Routes offer more fully:

*As a school, we need to make more use of Routes activities.*

A number of interviewees commented that the attitude of school senior management is fundamental and that 'there has to be a shift in thinking' for take up to improve substantially. In their view, MFL should be timetabled in ways which guide pupils into choosing the subject and sufficient time needs to be allocated to the subject. This shift would involve a greater understanding of how MFL contributes to core literacy: there were opportunities with the development of the new curriculum to achieve this.

One stakeholder pointed out that, although nationally take up for MFL had not risen, the decline might have been even steeper, had the Routes scheme not been in place. He described it as a 'small lifeboat', extremely important, but not the answer to the decline of MFL in Wales.

### Perceived constraints from the university perspective

One school-based respondent noted:

*Student Ambassador scheme was not a success due to the limited availability of the student concerned.*

From the university perspective, there was a keen awareness of the scheduling difficulties in matching the availability of students with the times when schools want to receive them. Organisationally, there were also constraints related to the very short funding cycle and the need to start implementing activities almost immediately after confirmation of funding. This issue was understood by other stakeholders too, who noted that a 5-year funding cycle would enable much more strategic planning – and formative evaluation.

Universities have a limited number of students to draw on (a constraint of the supply chain), few have their own transport and many schools are far-flung. Some schools cannot be reached at all and others only at certain times of day. University respondents felt that their efforts were sometimes hampered by lack of support from within the wider school – heads of department were often lone enthusiasts. They confirmed that teachers were sometimes not allowed to attend events and that MFL courses did not run when there were too few pupils. In response to this situation, Routes Cymru developed a leaflet for school governors, setting out the importance of MFL. This had been sent to all schools; however, this activity was relatively recent and no feedback was available on how it had been received and whether it had been effective.

Universities were aware that because modern language students often come from England (for example, only 5% of Bangor language students are Welsh-speaking), the project is currently limited in its ability to promote Welsh alongside MFL – despite positive efforts to recruit Welsh-speaking MFL Student Language Ambassadors.

## 5. Case studies

The schools presented in this section have been anonymised, for data protection purposes:

### 5.1 11-16 English medium school in Carmarthenshire

This school has been involved with Routes Cymru for between 2 and 5 years (i.e. since before the beginning of the current phase). In the last two years, pupils have taken part in the Spelling Bee and the Pupil Language Ambassador training and the school has received visits from a Student Language Ambassador. The school also took part in the MFL mentoring project and in activities organised by the Regional Consortium and local schools. It reported a wide range of positive impacts including a doubling of GCSE numbers:

*Our GCSE take up has doubled this year which we put down to all the work we have done to raise the profile of MFL and a lot of this has been through Routes into Languages activities.*

## 5.2 11-19 Welsh medium school in Torfaen

The school has low educational attainment generally and participation in MFL at GCSE around the average for Wales (11-24%). It reports that it is working hard to promote MFL and takes advantage of the full range of activities and support on offer including Masterclasses, Pupil and Student Ambassadors, and MFL mentoring. The MFL teacher reports that pupils have a better idea of the importance of language skills in their future lives and are more enthusiastic in their language lessons. However, despite better than ever results at GCSE and A level this year, she reports that numbers are falling and that the school has taken the decision to withdraw French from the curriculum – this appears to have been driven by the desire to save money by offering only one language. The teacher reports that the most able pupils still tend to choose sciences and that the Welsh Bacc has also impacted on numbers. The teacher reports difficulties in obtaining permission for pupils to miss other lessons to take part in MFL activities, and suggests that:

*It is necessary to make sure that Headteachers understand the long-term importance of MFL and give MFL a greater priority on the curriculum.*

## 5.3. 11-16 English medium school in Flintshire

This school has less than 10% take up for languages at GCSE and has been involved in Routes into Languages Cymru for both years it has run in its present form. Pupils have been involved in the Spelling Bee and received talks from Student Language Ambassadors. The school has also taken part in MFL activities organised by the cultural institutes and reports a wide range of positive benefits, including a 100% increase in take up for GCSE languages.

## 5.4. 11-19 English medium school in Powys

This school has high overall educational achievement, low numbers of pupils eligible for Free School Meals and more than 50% take up for MFL at GCSE. It has taken part in Masterclasses and Pupil Language Ambassador training and has received visits from Student Language Ambassadors. The teacher's comments reveal the multiple efforts required to keep take up for MFL at this level:

*We are very pleased that we have maintained over 50% uptake of MFL (French and German) in KS4. There has been a slight decline overall in uptake in Year 10 and the number of double linguists has continued to decline. In fact, double linguists are becoming a rarity (in single figures in both year groups). We have really pushed the Global Futures agenda and pupils have been well informed about the benefits of language learning. Pupils are really interested in studying languages on the whole, but when it comes to options, languages often clash with other popular options. As mentioned above, pupils are enthusiastic in language lessons and want to take their languages further, but when it comes to options time it is often not possible for them to do their preferred combination so we lose pupils to Computer Science and History. Triple Science is now in an options block too so that has an adverse effect. Last year, our numbers were about to take a nose dive (uptake would have been 35%), so an appeal*

*was made to Leadership with parental support to run an extra French class. This ensured that our uptake remained over 50%.*

#### **5.5. 11-19 bilingual school in Ceredigion**

This school has been involved in Routes Cymru for between 2 and 5 years and in the current phase has taken part in the Spelling Bee and both Pupil and Student Language Ambassador schemes. It has widespread involvement in other activities too including MFL Mentoring and Digi-mentoring and reports a trend towards increasing numbers at GCSE:

*In the two years I have personally been involved in the project, take-up of French GCSE has increased from 10 in 2016, 14 in 2017 to 19 in 2018. Almost 100%!*

It also reports a wide range of other impacts from participation in Routes Cymru and requests:

*More of the excellent activities that are already provided please, as well as grant funding for resources such as dictionaries or iPads.*

#### **5.6. 11-16 bilingual school in Gwynedd**

This school has longstanding involvement with Routes Cymru and has participated particularly in the Student Language Ambassadors programme. It reports the positive impact of:

*Listening to the experiences of real people who have lived abroad or are involved in overseas businesses.*

Although she praised the student for his efforts to speak Welsh, the teacher commented on the irony of the situation in which

*[...] someone encourages young people to respect and learn other languages but cannot communicate with them in their first language.*

#### **5.7 11-16 English medium school in Rhondda**

This school has less than 10% take up for MFL at GCSE and high numbers of pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals (35%). It has been involved with Routes Cymru since before the beginning of the current phase and has taken part in both the Pupil and Student Ambassador schemes. It also took part in the MFL mentoring project. It reports that, as a result of these efforts, pupils have a better idea of the benefits of language skills for their future lives, take-up for GCSE has increased and that the senior leadership team are more positive towards languages. However, the effectiveness of the scheme is limited by the way MFL is promoted and offered within the school, and by logistical concerns. The teacher suggests that Routes Cymru should organise a careers fair:

*Pupils would be able to see the relevance of language learning by listening to people who have benefited in various lines of work by having a language qualification.*

She would also like to see:

*Greater links with careers advisors and support to set up links with employers who can support the importance and benefits of language learning.*

### **5.8 11-19 English medium school in Torfaen**

This school has long-standing involvement with Routes Cymru - 5 years or more. It has received Student Language Ambassadors and also been involved in the MFL Mentoring project. It reports that pupils have a better idea of the benefits of language skills for their future lives and that parents are more supportive as result of student mentoring project. Effectiveness is limited by the way MFL is offered/promoted within school:

*Despite excellent interest in options' evening, uptake is still low; unless students choose a language as their first option, they don't always succeed to study the language of their choice or a language at all!*

### **5.9 11-19 English medium school in Swansea**

Another school with more than 5 years' involvement with Routes Cymru. It has taken part in the Spelling Bee, Masterclasses, Pupil and Student Ambassador schemes, and French AS film study, as well as other activities offered in support of MFL in the area including MFL mentoring. It reports a wide range of benefits, including increased take up, raised ambitions to go to university and increased parental support for their children's language learning. It highlights particularly:

*Greater understanding of the benefits of studying a Modern Foreign Languages for the Welsh economy.*

It reports that the effectiveness of these efforts is limited by the dominance of core subjects in Key Stage 4 and by logistical concerns and comments:

*It is increasingly difficult to take pupils out of lessons when MFL is viewed as not essential.*

## **6. Feedback on impact from Student Ambassadors**

Student Ambassadors who shared feedback all confirmed the impression that their intervention had been effective:

*I think it was very effective! Not only did it start a dialogue, it got people thinking about languages in a new way and I hope instilled an excitement about them. From my experience, just going and giving a talk about my language journey and the skills you develop through learning languages sparked interest in the pupils. You could see it in their faces.*

*I think it was very effective, as lots of students said that they had no intention of studying a language and after we showed them the opportunities it can provide them, they re-thought their options.*

*I think it was very effective and we even had students come up to us at the end of the session to ask us further questions about language learning, this made me feel like we were doing our job correctly and promoting language learning.*

One commented that the reason it was effective was the credibility that students have with pupils compared to their teachers, whom they may see as merely trying to promote their subject: 'students are more relatable'. Another noted that there had never been a negative comment on evaluation forms completed by pupils following the visit – although some had been 'neutral'. Another made the observation that although it opened some students' eyes, others were less engaged, and a more interactive approach might suit them better.

When asked if they could point to a specific activity or piece of information that had been particularly effective, students commented:

*From talks I've given, it always seems to be pictures and talking about experiences from when I was living abroad that have the greatest impact. There's the wow-factor I think, and pupils realise that by starting languages younger they could do something similar. It really gets them thinking.*

One Student Ambassador, who was studying sciences, reported that he had given pupils scientific demonstrations using a foreign language, and commented:

*[...] stressing to the kids how often I use MFLs within my daily life as a scientist made them realise the potential benefits of learning MFLs.*

Another felt that celebrity role models were particularly effective in raising awareness:

*We often show pupils pictures of celebrities who they admire and make them guess which languages they speak, they are usually extremely shocked when we show them popstars and footballers whom they admire. It shows them that it's not pointless and they can get far in life with more than one language.*

Another student described a counting competition organised using numbers in Galician (a Spanish regional language) and commented:

*The students got very competitive and remembered the Galician numbers themselves in the end, without reminders. This was very rewarding.*

Another student cited the example of a particular pupil who had said he had no interest in languages but, when it came to questions, showed keen interest and afterwards said that he would definitely be choosing a language. Another student felt that a careers fair at her local college had had the most impact. She said she had spoken there to many students who had another language in their background, and commented:

*Many of these students didn't realise how much of an impact their language skills would have on their future prospects and hadn't considered the importance of keeping up an developing these skills.*

*I think some of the conversations we had really opened these pupils' eyes to the significance of knowing a foreign language in today's job's market.*

## 7. Impact beyond schools

### 7.1. Impact on the policy-making context

Routes is delivered in close collaboration with the MFL leads on the Welsh Government's *Global Futures* plan, who are members of its advisory group. It forms part of a suite of activities offered to schools to promote MFL. Routes Cymru is appreciated as a 'go-to' source of support and is judged to be highly responsive to the developing context and in adapting to feedback from schools/MFL leads. One major stakeholder described this situation as 'all being on the same page'. He thought that Routes was making a major contribution to the *Global Futures* programme, albeit that the impact on take-up was limited by systemic barriers.

One interviewee thought that there had not been a strong recognition in the past that the project aligns with the objectives of *Global Futures*, but that this was now much more widely understood. Through Routes Cymru, the university sector (and Cardiff University in particular) is now represented on the *Global Futures* Steering Group. This collaboration should provide a channel through which the HE sector can contribute creatively to policy objectives such as the Donaldson curriculum, for example through teacher training or the development of innovative degree courses. Routes Cymru is also seen to be supporting the Welsh Government policy of Global Citizenship making the world more accessible to pupils and enabling them to interact internationally.

Routes Cymru activities have raised the profile of MFL in and beyond schools through news reports on school and university websites, tweets and Facebook posts, e.g.:

Pupil Ambassador Training:

[http://www.eirias.co.uk/cymru/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1660:pupil-language-ambassador-training-event&Itemid=616](http://www.eirias.co.uk/cymru/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1660:pupil-language-ambassador-training-event&Itemid=616)

Spelling Bee:

<https://www.ysgolrhiwabon.co.uk/national-spelling-bee-competition-2/>

Routes Cymru has engaged a wide range of partners, including the British Council, the European Commission, the Goethe Institute, Spanish Embassy, Airbus, *Centro Galego en Bangor*, Careers Wales, Europe Direct, Centre of Sign-Sight-Sound and the Confucius Institute. Its suite of activities have provided conduits through which these organisations can contribute, or contribute more intensively, to the objectives of *Global Futures*. These organisations have reported very favourably on the impact of Routes:

*It was great to see so many young people excited about learning languages and realising the great benefits that it brings not just to them personally and in their careers but also for the benefit of the wider economy. Thanks to Routes into Languages for hosting a fantastic event.*

Europe Direct

*Thank you for allowing us to be part of this fantastic opportunity; we thoroughly enjoyed teaching and interacting with the students and staff who showed such enthusiasm to learn British Sign*

*language, we are excited to work together in the future and create more fun and memorable learning experiences.*

Centre of Sign-Sight-Sound

Routes Cymru also received unsolicited feedback from a person acting as a photographer at one of the events:

*Congratulations on a wonderful event! All the bits I heard/saw were truly inspiring and I could see that the pupils were enjoying it too, you ought to be very proud.*

Tim Penn, a Business Language Ambassador who has been visiting schools in Wales to promote the uptake of MFL at GCSE for 6 years, commented:

*I have had the pleasure of working closely with the Routes into Languages Team who have integrated my role into their student activity (SLA) in the promotion of MFL across schools so that there has been the opportunity to integrate our activity for "joined up" thinking around MFL from schools to FE/HE and to the World of Work. This has provided powerful examples for high school pupils of the pathways available to them through MFL.*

Tim was particularly complimentary about the enthusiasm and expertise of Routes Cymru staff.

## 7.2. Impact on the HE sector in Wales

Routes Cymru supports the civic mission of the universities involved in engaging with their local communities, providing a mechanism whereby teachers and pupils can come into universities, as well as university students going out into schools. Through press coverage and reports of Routes activities posted online, the universities are able to provide examples of the benefits they offer to the local community, raising the profile of the Welsh university sector in general and its Modern Languages Departments in particular. The partnership working which is a feature of the Routes project is particularly valued in this respect.

Routes' work in highlighting the opportunities available for students – particularly those from deprived backgrounds who may not have considered applying for university – provides a close fit with universities' widening access agendas. It was acknowledged that this is valuable even when students who do not go on to study MFL at GCSE or A level: they are made aware of the opportunities to pick up a language later during their university career.

There is a recognition that Routes also contributes to student mobility and to universities' global citizenship agendas.

## 7.3. Impact on Student Ambassadors

There are in addition, multiple benefits for the Student Ambassadors themselves. The experience is recognised as contributing to their employability and helping to develop transferable skills useful in a wide range of careers. Feedback from the undergraduates who acted as Language Ambassadors showed that they had enjoyed the experience and gained a great deal of satisfaction from it:

*In a word, fantastic! It was a great opportunity to speak to people that you might ordinarily not come into contact with and offer your own and listen to alternative views.*

*I have found it to be more engaging and more worthwhile than I thought it would be. Students were truly engaged and I feel they actually took away a new insight into the value of language in the modern world and in the work place.*

## 8. Future development

All stakeholders who contributed to the evaluation report were asked what further measures Routes Cymru might take in support of language learning in Wales. The responses from different groups have been summarised below:

### 8.1 Schools

Respondents from schools provided a rich array of suggestions which were coded and quantified as follows:

- **Further work with employers and careers advisors**

This was the most frequently-cited suggestion (10 comments). Respondents called for more external speakers and help liaising with businesses and employers who use languages:

*A careers fair. Pupils would be able to see the relevance of language learning by listening to people who have benefited in various lines of work by having a language qualification. Greater links with careers advisors and support to set up links with employers who can support the importance and benefits of language learning.*

- **Activities for different target groups**

This also had 10 comments, though a wide range of different audiences were mentioned, from primary to sixth form, e.g.:

- *A Spelling Bee for beyond Y7.*
- *More events/Master classes at A level*
- *It would be great if we could have visitors promoting languages to year 8/9 during their assemblies.*
- *Target a younger audience*
- *KS2 activities across Wales.*

- **Targeting senior management in schools**

The 7 comments here included:

*Bombard SLT with information about the benefits of studying a Foreign Language. Invite each school to have a designated link member of SLT to liaise with Routes Cymru which can be passed on to Welsh Education Minister.*

*Training for SLT and staff on the benefits of MFL and promotion on a whole school level.*

- **Other suggestions**

Other suggestions included:

- Providing authentic language-learning experiences. There were 6 comments along these lines, highlighting the need for speaking practice and ‘putting the usefulness of languages into real life contexts’. The lack of funding for Foreign Language Assistants was also raised as an issue.
- Suggestions relating to locating the activities more conveniently for the schools concerned (5 comments)
- Policy-related measures (4)

Among the policy-related measures suggested were:

*We need to make a GCSE in a foreign language one of the things a school is measured on in order for SLT to give it the support it deserves. This needs to change at government level so perhaps Routes Cymru could campaign to this effect.*

*Work with WJEC to make the exams more appealing to students.*

*Challenge the government to review policy to make sure that MFL is not squeezed out of the curriculum because of all the other demands being made on the timetable. Challenge the government to send out the message about the importance of MFL. Most parents still feel that ICT is more use for the long term than a language, despite constant messages from us about the benefits of MFL.*

## 8.2. Student Ambassadors

Student Ambassadors were first asked whether there was anything that could be done to make the scheme even more effective. Two suggested targeting younger age groups. Another suggested having pupils in smaller groups and having special sessions for parents and carers. One said that timing the intervention to coincide with the point when pupils were making their GCSE or A level choices would make it even more effective. Another made a cogent point about the style of the intervention, which he said should be more interactive:

*I believe that more direct student interaction as opposed to passively listening in would engage the students more. Whilst the presentation and the info given is valuable, it doesn't necessarily connect that much with certain students and certainly doesn't capture their attention for prolonged periods of time.*

A sixth student made a comment about the process of signing up to participate in events, which she said had not been clear at first, but had been improved in the second half of the year.

Student Ambassadors were also asked what else might be done to improve attitudes and take up for MFL in Wales. Ideas put forward included Town Twinning ('because then you could send the kids on exchanges as I know first-hand that this creates passion for languages'), school trips and buddy schemes with schools abroad, and teaching other subjects through the medium of a foreign language. Another suggested language work placements – not for actual work experience but as a venue for interventions 'which could be similar to the presentations given in the schools but be in a lab setting or other work places settings'. Two students called for more widespread promotion of the value of foreign languages:

*Schools put too much emphasis on the importance of subjects such as maths, English and sciences causing languages to be considered 'lesser' subjects that aren't worth taking. I think everyone with any influence on children's academic decisions whilst at school needs to create more awareness of the importance of MFL.*

### 8.3. Project partners

University respondents said they would like to develop engagement with business partners, and with the Welsh Government Business department. They would also like to extend the scheme to undergraduate students in Welsh Departments, and to involve more universities.

As the development of the Donaldson curriculum progresses, MFL leads highlighted the forthcoming need for input in support of primary schools. Routes may be able to develop activities such as basic language workshops or input focussing on cultural and intercultural matters which could be of value in this area.

In the context of Brexit and threats to EU funding streams, there was a call from some partners for Routes Cymru to become more strategic in engaging with the political scene. It was seen as particularly important that the UK should continue to benefit from Erasmus + which, in addition to providing strong motivation for those aspiring to a year abroad as part of their university course, also allows vocational learners to benefit from overseas experience including an element of language learning. There was a call for Routes Cymru to develop activities aimed at encouraging contextualised language learning for those who will not go on to A level or university – for example in catering, welding or other vocational pathways.

On project partner felt that one of the most significant contributions Routes Cymru had made was in developing an effective model for promoting language study. In the context of the new curriculum in Wales and the Cymraeg 2015: A Million Welsh Speakers strategy, this could provide the basis for a more coordinated approach to promoting Welsh alongside other languages. If individuals could not be found with knowledge of Welsh plus another language besides English, perhaps students could go into schools in pairs. Students studying degree courses in Welsh are a potentially valuable resource, but they do not have the

hands-on experience of the Year Abroad, which is an important factor in enthusing pupils. It was observed that MFL is – literally, in funding terms - a ‘poor relation’ in comparison to Welsh and that the unified vision of Languages, Literature and Communication as envisaged in the Donaldson curriculum, is not yet a reality and that different voices are ‘fighting their own corner’.

## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

There is widespread agreement that the Routes into Languages Cymru activities have been well targeted, aptly tailored to policy objectives, and very professionally delivered. The training, partnership-building and quality assurance offered through Routes Cymru is highly valued by school-based partners as the project fulfils a role which schools would not be able to undertake themselves. In the words of one interviewee: ‘we wouldn’t know where to start’. The core appeal of working with higher education is not only in the partnerships that it is able to forge, but that the students provide role models which ‘show pupils the next step’.

There is evidence of a wide range of very positive impacts attributable to Routes activities during this latter phase, including increased take-up in more than one third of schools. The most widespread impacts have been on the attitudes and enthusiasm of pupils and on the wider profile of MFL within schools. The project has also shown a positive impact on attainment and the quality of learning. However, the potential impact of the scheme has been limited by contextual factors relating to the status of MFL in the curriculum and the relatively low importance given to it in many schools.

The evaluation exercise has uncovered a rich array of suggestions for future development which can be considered, costed and prioritised. Among these, partners and funders may perhaps wish to consider the following:

- In the context of the new curriculum in Wales, developing activities which specifically focus on developing core literacy and highlighting the links between first, second and third languages pupils are learning.
- Activities, including recommending policy measures, which address the comparatively low status of MFL has for school management. This evaluation exercise was unable to gather feedback on the recent leaflet produced for school governors, but it has underlined the importance of targeting this audience.
- Extending partnerships already developed with business and employers. Seeking to arranging for careers events to take place on their premises might be a useful first start.
- Messages and pathways available for pupils who will not necessarily go on to university, and the engagement of parents generally.
- Further activities which provide opportunities for pupils to practise the language they are learning in realistic contexts.

The evaluation was carried out by Teresa Tinsley and this report was submitted on 27 November 2018

## Appendix 1: List of schools/colleges responding to the online evaluation survey

Name of school	Regional consortium
Barry Comprehensive	CSC
Bishop of Llandaff	CSC
Brynhafren	CSC
Brynteg School	CSC
Cardiff High School	CSC
Coleg Cymunedol y Dderwen Comprehensive	CSC
Corpus Christi Catholic High School	CSC
Cowbridge Comprehensive	CSC
Hawthorn High	CSC
Porthcawl Comprehensive	CSC
Radyr Comprehensive	CSC
St John Baptist	CSC
Tonyrefail School	CSC
Whitchurch High School	CSC
Willows High School	CSC
Ysgol Gyfun Bro Morgannwg	CSC
Ysgol Gyfun Llanhari	CSC
Ysgol Gyfun Plasmawr	CSC
Ysgol y Pant	CSC
St Davids Sixth Form College	FE
Abersychan School	EAS
Bassaleg Comprehensive	EAS
Blackwood Comprehensive	EAS
Caerleon Comprehensive	EAS
Caldicot Comprehensive	EAS
Chepstow School	EAS
Croesyceiliog School	EAS
Ebbw Fawr	EAS
Idris Davies 3-18 School	EAS
John Frost	EAS
King Henry VIII Comprehensive School	EAS
Llanwern Comprehensive	EAS
Monmouth Comprehensive School	EAS

Newport High School	EAS
Risca Community Comprehensive School	EAS
St Alban's RC School	EAS
Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni (Gwyndy)	EAS
Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw	EAS
Bishopston	ERW
Brecon High School	ERW
Bryngwyn School	ERW
Coedcae	ERW
Crickhowell High School	ERW
Dylan Thomas	ERW
Glanymor School	ERW
Gowerton	ERW
Llanidloes	ERW
Morrison Comprehensive School	ERW
Pontarddulais	ERW
St John Lloyd	ERW
St Joseph's Catholic School and Sixth Form	ERW
Trallwn Primary School	ERW
Ysgol Dewi Sant	ERW
Ysgol Dyffryn Aman	ERW
Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron	ERW
Ysgol Gyfun Bryn Tawe	ERW
Ysgol Penweddig	ERW
Ysgol y Preseli	ERW
Ysgol Ystalyfera	ERW
Coleg Cambria (Deeside site)	FE
Connah's Quay High school	GwE
David Hughes Consortium	GwE
St David's High Saltney	GwE
Ysgol Aberconwy	GwE
Ysgol Botwnnog	GwE
Ysgol Bryn Elan	GwE
Ysgol Clywedog	GwE
Ysgol David Hughes	GwE
Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle	GwE
Ysgol Eirias	GwE
Ysgol Friars	GwE
Ysgol Gyfun Glan Clwyd	GwE

Ysgol Gyfun Llangefni	GwE
Ysgol Rhiwabon	GwE
Ysgol Rhyl	GwE
Ysgol Tryfan	GwE
Ysgol Uwchradd Bodedern	GwE
Ysgol Y Grango	GwE
Christ College Brecon	Independent
St Michael's School, Llanelli	Independent
Westbourne School	Independent

## Appendix 2: List of interviewees

With grateful thanks to all those who completed questionnaires or gave time to provide feedback in other ways.

### Semi-structured interviews:

Kate Barber, Engagement and International Officer, University of Cardiff  
 Walter-Ariel Brooks, Education Manager, British Council Wales  
 Rubén Chapela, Routes Cymru coordinator, Bangor University  
 Sian Holleran, European and International Coordinator, Colleges Wales  
 Sioned Harold, EAS Consortium Lead  
 Ciara O'Neill, Head of Student Experience, HEFCW  
 Amy Walters-Bresner, CSC Consortium Lead

### Informal discussions:

Penny Lewis, Estyn  
 Chris Lewis, Director of Education, British Council Wales  
 Tim Penn, Business Language Champion  
 Meleri Jenkins, Routes Cymru Project Coordinator  
 Professor Julian Preece, Swansea University