

# UCML Winter Plenary 2020

**Friday 17 January 2020 10.00–16.00**

The Reading Room, British Academy,  
10–11 Carlton House Terrace,  
London SW1Y 5AH



## BUSINESS MEETING

### Item 5c: Report on Wales

This report focuses on the findings of the *Languages Trends Wales research report 2019*  
[https://wales.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language\\_trends\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://wales.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_trends_report_final.pdf).

The *Languages Trends Wales research report* is compiled by the British Council Wales to gather information about the current situation for MFL teaching and learning in Wales.

Data was gathered between March 2019 and May 2019 from 155 primary schools (12.5% of the total) and 114 secondary schools (55% of the total).

Three key issues, also present last year, continue to dominate:

- The continuing, long-standing decline in the teaching and learning of MFL in secondary schools, which Global Futures 2015-2020 is seeking to address.
- The aspiration to introduce the teaching of 'international languages' into the primary school curriculum, articulated in the new curriculum for Wales as well as the Global Futures ambition of building a 'bilingual plus 1' system.
- The vast potential for synergy between the teaching of Welsh, English, and international languages offered by the new curriculum, which conceptualises all languages systems as integrated.

#### GCSE

The decline in take up of MFL at GCSE continues. From 2015-19 there has been a 28% decline in entries for GCSE languages (French 35%, German 37%, Spanish 16%).

Between 2018 and 2019 there was an overall decrease in MFL GCSE entries (French 14%, German 24%, Spanish rose 28% recovering some of the decline from the previous year).

#### A Level

There has been a substantial decline in A level take up over 20 years: a 70% decline in French, 80% decline in German and 22% decline in Spanish (Spanish initially grew then fell back).

Between 2018 and 2019 there was an overall 5% decrease in entries for MFL, with small increases in Spanish and German offset by a decrease in French.

## **Secondary**

The new GCSE has been welcomed, but it is believed to be too challenging in terms of the scope of content covered, especially for less able pupils. The difficulty of the GCSE papers will inform A Level take-up. Schools have welcomed support from Global Futures, but feel they need more support from SLTs. Teachers believe MFL needs to be made compulsory, and metrics on performance measured, for there to be a real attitudinal shift. The main barriers to a high quality MFL experience were listed as:

1. The nature and content of external exams (73%)
2. Insufficient curriculum time (69%)
3. Timetabling of option in Key Stage 4 (68%)
4. MFL not seen as a careers option (62%)
5. Lack of opportunities for learners to practice their language (52%)
6. MFL a low priority for senior management (44%)
7. The way external exams are graded and marked (42%)
8. The implications of Brexit (41%)
9. Lack of access to CPD for teaching staff (22%)
10. Difficulty recruiting MFL staff (8%)
11. Difficulty retaining MFL staff (2%)
12. Other (15%)

Base =106, multiple responses permitted.

## **Primary**

39% of the schools responding currently provide some teaching of international languages. This is higher (52%) in the Welsh-medium schools who responded. Of those who offer an international language, French is the most popular choice. International languages are usually provided to pupils in year 5 and/or year 6, and the ways of delivering the languages vary from lessons by teachers in the school, transition activities with the local secondary school, links to external partners (e.g. The Goethe Institute), peripatetic specialist teachers, student teachers, lunchtime clubs.

Currently, international languages are not integrated with strategies for teaching Welsh and English.

The majority of schools (68%) are not teaching or making preparations to teach international languages. 12% do not intend to teach international languages, because it is not compulsory, they have a lack of expertise, crowding in the curriculum, and no demand from parents. All Welsh-medium schools are either teaching or preparing to teach international languages.

The report shows a correlation between support for international languages in the community and the number of pupils eligible for Free School Meals: 'The more affluent the school's profile, the more likely they are to report a high level of support for international languages among parents and the local community' (p. 13).

The main barriers to delivering international languages are the need to train staff how to deliver languages (and how to deliver them in conjunction with Welsh), the need to have resources, pressures on time, pressures on finance.

### **Conclusion**

‘The overall conclusion of this year’s report must therefore be that the severity of decline in secondary schools, combined with the need to develop a new subject at primary level, requires incentives and support beyond the current scale and scope of Global Futures’ (p. 31).

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