



## Digi-mentoring project 2018

Evaluation report

July 2018

'The world is different than I thought'  
(Digi-mentee)

### Key findings

- 43% of pupils mentored opted to take a GCSE in MFL. This represents a conversion rate of 26%-28% of those who had previously been undecided or said that they would not do so.<sup>1</sup>
- More than nine out of ten pupils rated their experience in the Digi-mentoring project as 'Excellent' (49%) or 'Good' (43%). Over half (58%) said it had changed the way they think about languages in relation to their futures and another third thought that perhaps it had.
- Beyond the groups taking part in Digi-mentoring, take up for MFL in Key Stage 4 increased more generally in all except two of the project schools.
- These results indicate that Digi-mentoring is at least as effective as face-to-face mentoring, and in some cases may be more so. However, Digi-mentoring is more difficult to organise than face-to-face mentoring. Access to technology and the internet in schools adds another layer of difficulty and has been problematic.
- More than three quarters of pupils said that there had been problems in their school in relation to access to computers and the internet. Although in the majority of cases (51%) these were 'small problems quickly resolved', they were deemed severe enough by 26% of respondents to interfere with their ability to benefit from the programme.
- There was widespread agreement among mentees, mentors and teachers that the on-line materials and activities were of high quality, interesting and appropriate. The use of Hwb has presented certain limitations, particularly in terms of ease of on-line interaction between mentors and pupils but also in relation to the types of activity which can be included.

### Overview

The Digi-mentoring project is an extension of the MFL mentoring project which ran in 2016/17, involving students from four universities working with local schools to support take up of MFL.<sup>2</sup> It was developed to meet the needs of schools and pupils for whom geographic and other factors made face-to-face mentoring unfeasible and to trial a less resource-intensive way of mentoring pupils with the potential to be rolled out more widely. Pupils received face-to-face mentoring at the

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<sup>1</sup> Percentages are calculated on less than one hundred pupils and should be read as indicative only.

<sup>2</sup> Alcantara Communications, *Raising the profile of MFL mentoring initiative. Evaluator's final report*, July 2017.

beginning and the end of the programme and engaged with their mentors at a distance using interactive materials and resources online.

The project was originally conceived as a pilot involving ten schools with ten pupils in each. At a late stage in planning, the pilot was extended to include 19 schools. Several withdrew within days of the project commencing and their places were taken by new schools which came into the project within days of the intervention commencing. Eighteen schools started the project, however one was unprepared to deliver the digital element and special arrangements were made for the mentor to deliver an extended face-to-face session instead.

## Objectives

The purposes of the evaluation exercise are to:

- Evaluate the success of the Digi-mentoring project in increasing take up of MFL at GCSE among mentees.
- Gauge the success of the Digi-mentoring project in engendering enthusiasm for languages, broadening horizons and raising expectations (as regards pupils' future careers)
- Draw comparisons with the results of face-to-face mentoring.
- Investigate the quality of the interaction via the online platform, and its attractiveness for pupils.
- Ascertain what level of digital literacy is required in order to benefit, and whether a different platform would be more suitable.

## Data collection

The evaluation exercise draws on evidence from the following sources:

Source	Status
Baseline pupil survey	781 responses
Baseline school survey	17 responses
Interviews with mentors	10 interviews with mentors from all four universities, carried out by Skype and telephone, 22 March 2018
Interviews with teachers	6 interviews carried out in March/April: one in person, 2 by phone and 3 by email questionnaire
Interviews with pupils	9 interviews carried out face-to-face at Pencoed School, 13 March 2018
Exit survey of all pupils taking part in Digi-mentoring	87 responses
Interviews with project team	Interview with project manager carried out 23 April 2018. Interviews with the mentor consultant and the technical manager 8 and 17 May 2018.
Feedback via email and from project meetings	Throughout the project
Information on take up of each pupil taking part in the Digi-mentoring.	Available from 18 schools as at June 2018

Schools which also took part in the Face-to-face mentoring: take up data by individual pupil.	Available from 3 schools/colleges as at June 2018
Overall figures for take up in each participating school for the Year 10 starting in September 2018	Available from 15 schools as at June 2018

## Findings

### 1. Baseline pupil surveys

A baseline survey for pupils was designed with two purposes in mind. Firstly, to inform the selection of pupils to take part in the project: schools were asked to select pupils who were unsure about whether to opt for MFL at GCSE, who were also confident users of IT. Secondly, data was collected for the purposes of tracking pupil choices and the impact of the intervention. The intention was therefore for the baseline survey to be completed by all pupils in the cohort. Data was collected from 959 pupils in 13 schools. Data could not be collected from the rest, mainly for time reasons (schools joining the scheme at a very late stage), but also, in at least two cases, because teachers felt it would not be helpful. This means that schools which did not complete the survey chose pupils to take part on their own criteria. Two schools subsequently dropped out of the scheme before the beginning of the project, and a few further responses were eliminated as unusable. This left 723 responses from 11 schools. In addition, 58 pupils from another school completed a different questionnaire intended for pupils taking part in the face-to-face mentoring. The total number of usable pupil responses was therefore 781. Pupils were asked to say:

- What language(s) they were studying (79% French, 25% Spanish, 12% German).<sup>3</sup>
- Whether they intended to continue learning a language at GCSE (24% Yes, 34% No, 42% Not Sure).
- What sort of work they could see themselves doing in future.
- Whether they think learning a MFL will help them in their working life (48% Yes, 17% No, 36% Not Sure).
- If they wanted to find the answer to a question, which of a number of options would they try first. This question was intended to identify pupils who were comfortable using IT and were likely to have good computer skills. Answers were: 13% Phone/text a friend, 54% Look for the answer online, 6% Chat on social media, 26% Ask someone face to face.
- How they would describe their ability to speak Welsh (13% Bilingual, 33% Good, 38% OK, 15% Poor).
- Whether they already used Hwb in class or for homework (31% Yes, 48% No, 22% did not know what Hwb is).
- Whether they felt comfortable using Hwb (optional).

Teachers were asked to select those pupils replying 'Unsure/Don't know' in relation to their intentions regarding MFL, to take part in the project, weeding out those who were not confident about using IT. In fact, only 11 out of the 18 schools would have been able to select pupils in this way.

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<sup>3</sup> Percentages derived from the base of 959 pupils.

The data collected allows us to track the actual choices of pupils taking part in the Digi-mentoring, compared to their baseline positions, both individually and as a group. This is then compared with the choices of pupils who did not take part in the Digi-mentoring (as a group).

## 2. Baseline teacher surveys

A baseline survey was designed for schools taking part in the project, to be completed by the lead MFL teacher for the project. This asked about the current level of take up for MFL in Years 10 and 11 (and, where relevant, post 16), pupil attitudes towards the subject in the school and the main reason constraining take up for MFL in their school. It also asked about use of Hwb and teachers' confidence in doing so. Eight of the schools participating in the Digi-mentoring also participated in the face-to-face mentoring during Semester 1.

Schools taking part in the scheme represent a wide range of circumstances in relation to take up for MFL: 5 schools already have above-average take up, one has average take up (18% of the cohort), 6 below average and 3 schools currently had no pupils taking MFL in Year 10. Eight of the schools have post-16 pupils, of which one has no pupils taking a language in Year 12 and four have none in Year 13. Some of the other schools have reasonably healthy numbers taking MFL in the Sixth Form. Four schools rated poor appreciation of the value of languages among their pupils as a major obstacle to take up, seven said their pupils tended to be 'lukewarm' rather than enthusiastic, four said that only a small proportion of their pupils failed to understand the importance of languages, but only one said that pupils were generally very well motivated towards the study of languages. The majority of schools said that the small number of option slots was the main reason why take up for MFL was not higher; two said the low importance given to the subject within the school was the main reason, and one said that it was a question of pupils' lack of confidence in their own abilities as language learners. Only four of the schools already used Hwb in their teaching or for setting homework, but the majority (11) said they felt confident about using it.

## 3. Mentor interviews

### *Overall impressions*

All were enjoying the experience, two had already acted as face-to-face mentors. They liked the concept and the innovative aspect of digital media and were pleased to be involved.

They all liked the material and said that their mentees did too. There was a good variety which that meant it could appeal to different pupils at different times. Mentors found the material 'easy to use', 'fascinating', 'really good', 'interesting'.

### *Technology*

Around half the mentors reported problems of various kinds with the use of the technology at the school end. These were: the mentees not being sufficiently supported in their use of IT; the school system not allowing the mentor to log on; the process of getting all the mentees logged on being too laborious, meaning that time was lost; mentees having to share passwords because some had forgotten them; YouTube being blocked.

### *Mentees' response*

Mentors felt that mentees had responded well during face-to-face contact, but some found the email response from pupils disappointing. About a third thought that the emailing worked well,

others thought it patchy, with less response some weeks or from some pupils. Mentors in schools where there were IT problems and not sufficient support felt that this had impacted on the amount of interaction.

Mentors felt that the face-to-face session at the start was crucial. At the time of their interviews, they had not yet completed the final session and were eager to see their mentees again. Many felt that four weeks without seeing them was too long (in some cases, it was going to be longer than that because final sessions had been postponed because of snow). They suggested that video-conferencing or Skype might be better, or an additional face-to-face session.

All the mentors felt that the personal contact they had had with the mentees had engaged them over and above what they might have learned from the on-line material alone. They talked about their own passion for languages, the 'positive vibe', the relaxed way in which pupils were able to ask questions about their own experiences, and the way they were able to act as a bridge between pupils and their teachers and 'position it beyond information', leading the mentees into a different way of seeing things.

#### *Impact beyond the mentees*

About half the mentors were able to give examples of how the project had had a ripple effect beyond the pupils being mentored. These included use of Twitter, teachers who said they will use the material with other classes, other pupils in the school becoming interested in the ideas and wanting to take part, and the mentors themselves saying how much they personally had learnt and passed on to friends.

#### *Mentors' own gains*

All the mentors reported positively about what they themselves had gained from the experience. This included 'the idea that I can make a difference', 'realising that not everyone likes languages as much as I do', 'experience in liaison and project management', 'an experience I never thought I'd get', 'people will ask questions about it in job interviews' and 'learning to communicate [professionally] by email'. Almost all mentioned unprompted that they are intending to go into teaching. One said: 'I thought I didn't want to be a teacher, but seeing the change changed my mind and made me more confident I could teach a group'. Another said they had previously been put off going into teaching by parents and friends, but they found 'opening minds' to be very rewarding. One who had already taken part in the face-to-face mentoring thought that both modes were useful; another who had long experience with Routes Cymru as a Student Language Ambassador thought that mentoring was better than talking to large groups as it was more concentrated and therefore more likely to be effective.

#### *Suggestions for the future*

- More training and advance information for teachers (the most common observation)
- A set timetable for the mentoring at the beginning
- Someone to go into the school to check Hwb before the start
- Better IT support in schools
- Use of a webcam or videoconferencing instead of email
- A different platform from Hwb as it restricts what activities can be done and there are problems logging on
- Make sure mentees are appropriately targeted, perhaps via a second questionnaire to ensure that the group is correctly constituted.

Mentors wanted to thank the team and especially the project manager who was deemed to have done an 'amazing' job.

#### 4. Teacher interviews

##### *Motivation for taking part*

These included the desire to make more use of departmental I-pads as well as to strengthen the profile of languages more generally in the school. In some cases, the project formed part of wider efforts to promote MFL in the school.

##### *Identification of pupils to take part*

Not all schools followed the instructions to choose pupils identified as 'maybes' from the baseline survey. One school targeted the most able 'nos' and another targeted those for whom timetable clashes meant that they might not choose MFL. In one school, not all pupils completed the baseline survey so those who were more able but deemed to be undecided were chosen.

##### *Overall impressions*

All the teachers interviewed were positive about the content and the concept of the scheme but they were less happy about the logistics, especially the difficulties of dovetailing the availability of the mentor with that of the pupils. It was problematic – and in some cases not allowed - for pupils to miss lessons in other subjects. Difficulties setting up the playlists and with engaging with the mentor online were also mentioned. For one school, the scheme came too late in the year as pupils had already made their option choices (although the teacher was unaware of what they were). All said that they would be delighted to take part again another year, although in one case, where the school had also experience face-to-face mentoring, they would prefer this.

##### *Technology*

This worked well in schools where pupils were used to using Hwb or where there was sufficient IT support – either from IT staff, the teacher themselves or, in one case, a PGCE student. There were problems reported with passwords, with logging in and with the school wifi. One school used the whiteboard to resolve this. The project manager in Cardiff had obviously provided a lot of support and teachers appreciated this.

##### *Content and activities*

Comments ranged from 'fantastic' to 'fairly interesting'. Generally, teachers felt that pupils had enjoyed it. One teacher said that they had not found it as motivating as one-to-one contact with a mentor. Two said that it would be helpful to build in more interaction. One had not had an opportunity to see much of the content because she was 'always teaching'.

##### *The mentors and their preparation*

All reported very positively: 'great', 'excellent', 'well-prepared', 'enthusiastic' and said that the pupils had responded well. The only critical comment was that mentors need to be better briefed about dress codes in school as one came in very short shorts not deemed appropriate!

##### *Response of pupils*

Teachers all thought that their pupils had enjoyed the experience, particularly meeting the mentor and taking part in the Award ceremony. They liked 'getting out of normal lessons'. Several said that they had the impression that pupils had decided to take MFL as a result, perhaps as a result of feeling 'special' or the sense of being 'chosen' to take part. In one school, pupils were 'not so keen

on the work they had to do on the I-pads' and the teacher felt that this had not helped their 'cause' (to try to improve uptake of MFL). One of the schools had also taken part in the face-to-face mentoring but said they were not able to say which was working better. They said however that the face-to-face mentoring was easier to organise and the earlier timing (in the autumn term) was better.

#### *Wider impact*

One school mentioned that pupils had been watching the videos at home and sharing them with their parents; another had publicised the initiative in the school newsletter and had tweeted about the project and the Award Ceremony. Although one school said that there had been little or no impact on take up, several of the pupils had said that they might pick up a language again at university.

#### *Suggestions for the future*

- Allocate mentors who are available at times which are convenient for the school (or convince the Head to let children out of other lessons)
- Run the scheme earlier in the year/in the autumn term (2)
- Use these resources with Year 8 and get Year 9 to lead the sessions
- Allocate longer for pupils to work through the playlist – they did not have time to complete the additional tasks
- Have a chat room or use WhatsApp in preference to emailing and allow the mentor to chat to all at once. Pupils expect immediate responses, which is not possible for the mentor.

### 5. Interviews with the mentor consultant and technical manager

The project was conceived with creativity at the forefront and with a desire to frame language learning within a global context. Developers expressed a certain frustration with the limitations of Hwb and felt that they had had to compromise with what they would have liked to achieve in terms of communication between mentors and mentees. In an ideal world they would have had the facility for mentees to chat at whatever point they wanted, but this was not possible. They were left with no choice but to make pupils exit Hwb to email mentors via Outlook. Other ideas were not possible either, such as integrating activities with 'open' answers rather than making them either correct or incorrect.

Although they were not surprised by the technical issues reported in schools, they were disappointed to find Hwb used so infrequently. The technical manager suggested that in future, in an ideal world, it might be possible to go into schools and speak to IT staff in advance of running the project, in order to pre-empt difficulties such as blockage of YouTube videos, reported by some schools.

### 6. Pupil interviews

Nine pupils were interviewed at Pencoed School, having completed four out of five of the Digi lessons. They were interviewed in three groups of four, two and three pupils respectively. At the time they had all made their initial GCSE choices, though teachers did not know what these were. Pupils said they were chosen to take part in the scheme but were given the choice to opt out. One

group said they thought they had been chosen because they were all good at French and behaved well in class.

### *Overall impressions*

Pupils provided a very favourable response overall, though they said it was 'not yet perfect'. They thought it was 'very interesting' 'informational', 'cool'. They liked the quizzes and said it was a fun way to learn. They said they found out things they didn't know before.

### *Technology*

Pupils had been using I-pads which had not worked well because of a poor wifi signal (or bandwidth). This meant they could not see the videos. Sometimes the I-pads were not sufficiently charged. They had not used Hwb in their school before, though some had accessed it in their primary schools. They found it easy to get the hang of and were keen to use it in other subjects. They found the actual resource easy to navigate and interact with, challenging but fun because 'you got to know the answer'.

### *Content*

The content was very well received. Pupils felt that they had 'learned a lot'. They thought the videos were interesting and the coverage of many countries very good, and that it was pitched at the right level.

### *Communication with mentor*

This was not always as easy or as fluid as pupils would have liked. They found it difficult to get the hang of the email and having to exit Hwb to do so. They were impatient with the inevitable delays in receiving a response because the mentor was responding to several pupils at the same time. They said they should not be made to email the mentor so frequently – once to twice would be enough. Others said they got a quick reply and that it was good to hear about the mentor's own challenges with the language (e.g. rolling 'r's). On one occasion there was a fire drill which interrupted the session. Some pupils had had no contact because they had used the wrong email.

### *Impact on attitudes*

Although it appeared that most pupils interviewed already had a good perception of language learning, all said that it had taken them further. They liked the wider idea that it 'wasn't just about French' 'you get to travel and learn about culture'. They liked hearing other peoples' experiences and about job opportunities they hadn't thought about. They mentioned particularly the Sports Liaison officer and the Army. 'It makes you think about different countries, and it's not just croissants'. (One student added that she had realised that 'pain au chocolat' means 'chocolate bread'). Most appeared to have chosen to study French in the first option round.

Within the wider school they said there were less positive attitudes towards languages 'some love it, some see it as just another subject, some would rather do Spanish'. 'It's frowned upon by some', but they said that although the majority don't like it, they understand its value.

### *Parental attitudes*

All the pupils interviewed reported that their parents were supportive of their language learning – one said that he translated Welsh for his parents but his parents thought that French would be more useful than Welsh. Some parents had learned languages themselves, others regretted not having done so. Parents were reportedly delighted that their children had had an opportunity to take part. Pupils had been showing them their emails and discussing the videos with them. Some had watched the videos at home.



### *Suggestions for the future*

- There should be 16 slides rather than 10, but fewer mentor interventions (or more mentors so they can answer more quickly).
- They would like more activities to do.
- It should be run every year, for more people
- They should get the password and user name in advance, and use laptops, not i-pads
- The format could be varied – it was a bit repetitive
- Teachers should be better briefed in advance so they know what to expect
- A better system than Outlook for emailing.

### 7. Pupil exit survey

There were 87 responses to the survey. Around half (49%) rated the overall experience of Digi-mentoring as 'Excellent' and 43% rated it 'Good'. Five pupils rated it as only 'Satisfactory' and there were two pupils who deemed it a 'Waste of time'. This gives a very high satisfaction rating, with praise from more than nine out of ten pupils.

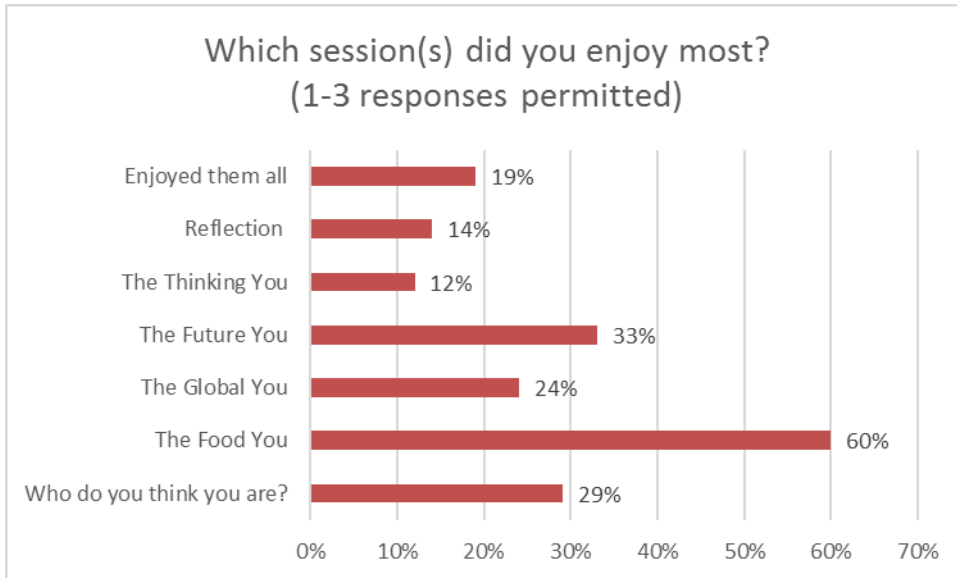
More than three quarters of respondents said that there were problems in their school in relation to access to computers and the internet, but in the majority of cases these were 'small problems quickly resolved' (51%). However, 26% of respondents said that these problems were severe enough to interfere with their ability to benefit from the programme.

Only 17% were already frequent users of Hwb, 46% had used Hwb 'once or twice' and 37% had not used it at all.

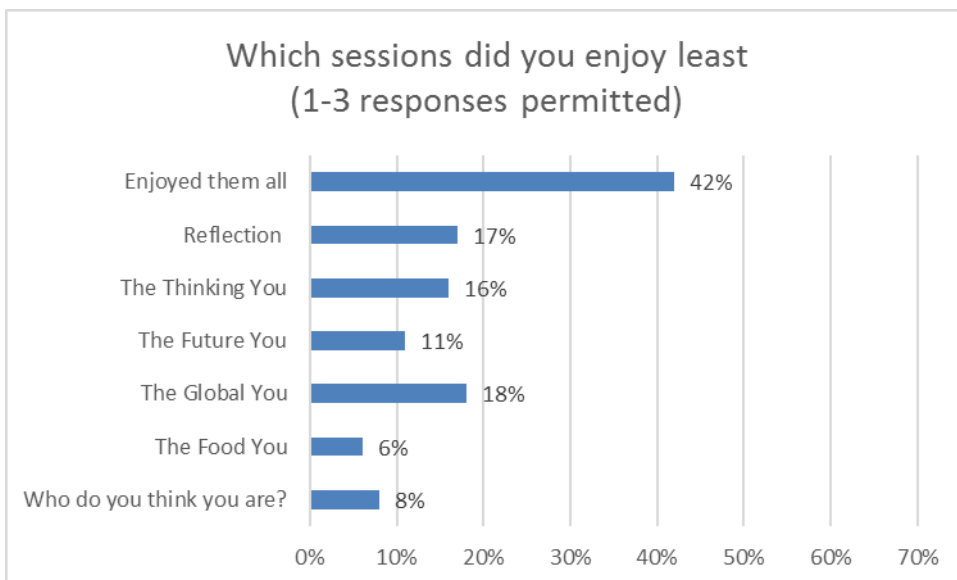
The vast majority (88%) found Hwb easy to use, although mostly 'quite easy' (59%) rather than 'very easy' (29%). The rest (11%) found it 'not very easy' but none said they found it difficult.

All except one said that the resources were easy to use once they were logged on. For 52% this was 'quite easy' and for 47% 'very easy'. The outlier said that this was 'not very easy' rather than 'difficult'.

The most popular session by far was the one about food and with a spread of support for the other sessions appealing to different pupils. Twenty per cent of pupils said they enjoyed all the sessions.



The least popular session was 'The Global You'; however, 42% of respondents said there was no session they particularly disliked.



More than half (53%) said they did not know or could not remember whether they had completed the optional 'over to you' activity. More than a quarter (27%) confirmed that they had done this, and 21% said they had not. Although one or two commented that they did not know what to do, or did not have the 'necessary tools' to complete the tasks, most comments were positive, e.g.:

'I enjoyed creating an international menu and asking questions to people who work within a workplace where they use languages almost everyday!!'

'I found each activity fun and or interesting.'

'The option activities were OK although with it being an aside course/mentoring scheme, some tasks took a while and it began to feel like homework due to poor timings with Hwb and time allocation wasn't long enough. The activities set were quite good to reflect on the lesson'

The vast majority (88%) said it was easy to communicate with their mentor, and the remainder (12%) said it was 'not very easy'. Nearly half (48%) said it was 'very easy' and 40% 'quite easy'. However, there were a number of comments about difficulties, such as: 'I lost my login details', 'I had the wrong email', 'sometimes the email didn't work', 'slow connections'. Some pupils said that they had used Skype instead, and one suggested that Facetime would be better. In other cases, communication worked well:

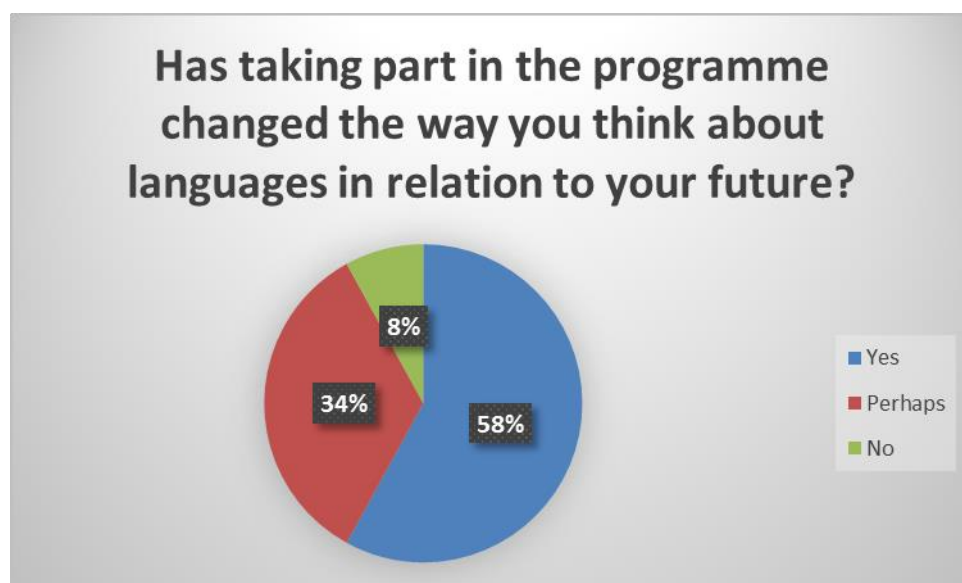
'I emailed my mentor and she emailed quickly. She was talkative and sociable and easy to get along with.'

'She was extremely kind and helpful and understanding with my queries and issues, along with my opinions and feelings.'

'The mentor responded quite quickly but if she was in person i think it would have been better.'

There was a very high satisfaction rating for the help received from the mentors – 63% rated this as 'very good' and 30% as 'good'. Six rated it as only 'satisfactory' and none ticked the box for 'not very good'.

More than half (58%) said the experience had definitely changed the way they think about languages in relation to their future, and another 34% said that perhaps it had. Only 7 pupils said that it had not.



Pupils provided a large number of positive comments in response to this question, showing how the experience had expanded pupils' horizons and ambitions, e.g:

'I'm starting to realise the significance of what learning another language can do for you'

'It was very good and changed the way I think about other countries'

'This program strengthened my love for French and languages as a whole'

'I can pick up more languages if I decide to in the future'

'101% sure I want to take French for GCSE'

‘It has made me think about how much languages can help you get good jobs and it will help you when you want to travel somewhere’

‘It has helped me a lot, and hopefully in the future I will have a chance to learn a new language/s’

‘French could help a lot more than I thought’

‘I have now been persuaded to take Spanish for GCSE but I wasn’t even considering it before’

‘I didn’t enjoy languages but now I do’

‘It will definitely help me in the future however I didn’t pick it for GCSE’

‘I now realise that languages are not just ways to communicate but they improve knowledge and also improve your chance of getting jobs. I no longer see languages as boring’

‘It changed my thoughts on languages as it showed how important they can be’

‘I wasn’t planning on taking Spanish as a GCSE but after mentoring I decided to take it as it opened doors to a lot of jobs around the world’

‘I didn’t think languages were very important but I realised how many jobs that need you to be able to speak a foreign language’

‘It makes me respect languages a lot more’

‘There’s a lot more to languages than I thought’

‘Has made me consider taking languages in uni so that I can go to a different country’

‘I have realised that you don’t just have to be a translator or French teacher to need a French qualification’

‘It has made me think that I can travel around the world and meet new people and teach them new languages’

‘I have not opted for a language for GCSE, but now I may do one at A level’

‘I decided not to take a language for GCSE however if there are other opportunities throughout my education to learn a language I will definitely use the opportunity!’

Pupils’ responses to an open question about what they had learned from taking part in the Digi-mentoring were very diverse and endorsed the broad-based design of the project:

‘I learnt that languages and roots are extremely important’

‘French is used a lot more than I thought’

‘I learnt about jobs you can get from learning a language’

‘I learned that there are many different types of lifestyles and cultures around the world’

‘I learnt about how in English a word means one thing and in other languages it could be totally different’

‘How languages influence our country’

‘The world is different than I thought’

‘I learnt some Norwegian and Chinese’

‘I learnt many facts about how languages can improve mental health and decrease anxiety’

‘That languages can be used for a lot of things, not just speaking to people’

‘I learnt about lots of foods from different countries’.

## 8. Reported take-up in project schools

### *7.1 Number of mentees choosing MFL*

Data is available on 168 pupils from 18 schools. Discounting data from the school which only took part in a single mentoring session, and another where pupils were in Year 8 and do not choose options until next year, we have 151 pupils, of which 65 chose to take MFL, success rate of 43%.

Success rates varied between schools from one to nine out of 10 pupils. It is notable that schools which joined the scheme late (asterisked) are outliers. This seems to be connected to the way that pupils were selected to take part.

School/College	Number of pupils mentored	Number choosing MFL	Success rate
Llanidloes*	10	1	10%
Welshpool High School	10	1	10%
St Richard Gwyn	8	1	13%
Bedwas High	8	1	13%
Llanfyllin High School	11	3	27%
Porth County School	10	3	30%
Glan-Y-Mor	8	3	38%
Argoed School	9	4	44%
Tredegar Comprehensive School	10	5	50%
Ysgol Tywyn	10	5	50%
Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen	9	5	56%
Monmouth Comprehensive School	10	6	60%
Rhyl HS*	10	6	60%
Ysgol Eifionydd	10	6	60%
Y Pant*	8	6	75%
Pencoed	10	9	90%

*Chart 1: Success rates by institution*

Not all schools were able to provide full data sets to enable a comparison of actual with intended take up, and six had not been able to supply baseline data because they joined the project late. Tracking of individual pupils and detailed analysis of data has only therefore been possible in the case of 9 schools.

Chart 2 below shows that, of the 451 pupils in these schools completing the baseline survey, 119 (26%) were intending to take MFL at that point. This is higher than the national average of 18%, suggesting that pupils completing the survey were either screened or self-selecting as more likely to be taking MFL than all pupils in the cohort. For example, in one school with very low take up for MFL 50% of pupils who completed the baseline survey said they were intending to take the subject.

Of the 451 pupils, 85 took part in the Digi-mentoring project, and 27 chose to take MFL, giving a 32% success rate. Of these 27 pupils, 18 had originally said either that they would not take a language (4) or that they were not sure (14). Five pupils from two schools had originally said they would choose MFL and data is not available for the other 4 pupils. The lower success rate apparently achieved in this group of schools compared to all schools taking part is likely reflect the choice of pupils in the schools which joined the project late, since they were not able to choose pupils on the basis of 'not sure' replies in the baseline survey as was intended. The higher success rates in Pencoed, Y Pant and Eifionydd (see Chart 1) seem to be linked to the targeting of larger numbers of pupils who were already intending to take MFL.

School	Number completing baseline pupil survey	Pupils intending to take MFL (baseline)	Number mentored	Choosing MFL after mentoring	Original choices (from baseline survey)			
					Not sure	No	Yes	N/a
St Richard Gwyn	53	8	8	1	1			
Bedwas	40	19	8	1		1		
Monmouth	61	31	10	6			3	3
Tredegar	26	3	10	5	3	2		
Llanidloes	52	17	10	1	1			
Llanfyllin	69	10	11	3	1	1		1
Welshpool	47	16	10	1	1			
Glan-Y-Mor	41	3	8	3	3			
Eifionydd	62	12	10	6	4		2	
TOTALS	451	119	85	27	14	4	5	4
%		26%		32%				

Chart 2: Actual choices compared with baseline data

### 7.2 Conversion rates

The table below shows the actual choices of pupils who took part in the Digi-mentoring compared to their intentions as stated at the time they completed the baseline survey. Of the 85 pupils mentored, 68 had not originally chosen MFL and the choices of another 10 are not available (because they did not complete the baseline survey). The conversion rates are therefore:

Fourteen pupils of the 56 who were previously uncertain about whether to opt for MFL did so following the mentoring (25%).

In addition, four pupils of the 12 who had originally said they would **not** opt for MFL did so following the mentoring (33%).

And of the 10 pupils for whom baseline data is not available, 4 opted for MFL (40%).

Two pupils who had originally opted for MFL changed their minds following the intervention.

The overall conversion rate works out at 26% (18/68) or 28% 22/78 if we include those pupils whose original choices are unavailable. NB: percentage figures should be treated with caution since they are calculated on numbers of less than one hundred. They are provided as a general indication of the success of the project.

Original choices	Yes	Not sure	No	Not available	total
Glan-Y-Mor	1	7			8
Eifionydd	2	8			10
Welshpool		10			10
Tredegar		6	3	1	10
Richard Gwyn	1	7			8
Monmouth	3		1	6	10
Llanidloes		10			10
Llafyllin		4	4	3	11

Bedwas		4	4		8
	7	56	12	10	85

Chart 3: Original choices of mentees by institution

### 7.3 Impact on take up rates for MFL within the project schools

In the vast majority of schools which took part, take up for MFL has risen as a proportion of the cohort in comparison to the last two years. All three establishments where previously no pupils had taken MFL to GCSE, (two schools and one college) now have pupils wishing to do so. It is to be hoped that they will be allowed to do so.

Two schools have lower take up than previously. In one of these, the IT department had reportedly shown considerable negativity towards the scheme, and in particular in relation to Hwb. This school also took part in face-to-face mentoring, as a result of which 4 of 16 mentees chose to take MFL. However in this school, two of the face-to-face mentees and one of the digi-mentees who had originally indicated their intention to opt for MFL, withdrew from doing so after the intervention. The other school where take up for MFL actually dropped joined the scheme at a very late stage. The project manager reported that it had been very challenging to communicate effectively with the school and that many sessions had been disrupted. Clearly a project such as this cannot compensate for particular circumstances within schools and there will inevitably be other factors influencing take up – positively as well as negatively.

School/College	Previous take up for MFL in 2017/18		Reported take up for Year 10 in 2018/19
	Year 11	Year 10	
Pencoed	16%	29%	32%
Porth County School	17%	28%	27%-30% <sup>4</sup>
St Richard Gwyn	10%	25%	8%
Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen	0%	0%	10 pupils
Bedwas	10%	15%	30%
Monmouth Comprehensive	28%	23%	28%
Tredegar	0%	0%	11 pupils
Llanidloes	17%	11%	7%
Llanfyllin High School	8%	6%	12%
Welshpool High School	19%	14%	30%
Argoed School	30%	18%	36%
Glan-Y-Mor	0%	0%	11%
Ysgol Eifionydd	7%	9%	21%
Ysgol Tywyn	17%	4%	14%

Chart 4: Take up rates for MFL in project schools

## 9. Comparisons with the results of face-to-face mentoring

<sup>4</sup> 30% figure excludes SEN group not eligible to choose MFL. It is not known whether baseline figures supplied by the school took this group into account.

The Digi-mentoring project achieved a 43% success rate in stimulating take up for MFL. This is lower than the 50-57% success rates achieved with last year’s face-to-face mentoring, but improvements were made this year which made it more successful in targeting undecided pupils rather than those who had already intended to take the subject. A far higher proportion of mentees in this project were previously undecided or negative towards choosing MFL – 80% as opposed to 41% in Phase 1 and 50% in Phase 2 of the face-to-face mentoring.

The conversion rates for the Digi-mentoring are therefore higher – 26%-28% depending on assumptions made in the calculation, compared to 21% in last year’s face-to-face mentoring.

Two schools and one college which took part in the Digi-mentoring also took part in this year’s face-to-face mentoring, of which only one was able to provide baseline data. The results reported show that in two cases, digital mentoring was actually more effective than face-to-face mentoring.

	Baseline data available	Pupils choosing MFL in the baseline survey	Number of mentees	Mentees choosing MFL after the intervention	Success rate face-to-face	Success rate Digi <sup>5</sup>
Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen	0		10	0	0%	56%
Rhyl	0		20	9	45%	60%
St. Richard Gwyn	12	2	16	4	25%	13%

*Chart 5: Results of face-to-face mentoring in Digi-mentoring schools*

We must conclude that the Digi-mentoring has been at least as effective as face-to-face mentoring in promoting take up of MFL, and in some cases even more so.

## Conclusions

### I. The success of the Digi-mentoring project in increasing take up of MFL at GCSE

The Digi-mentoring project has been successful in encouraging 43% of pupils mentored to opt for MFL, most of whom were previously undecided or had expressed an intention not to take the subject. Given that a quarter of pupils reported that technical problems in schools had interfered with their ability to benefit from the project it is likely that the success rate might potentially have been even higher.

Also as a result of technical issues, the level of on-line interaction between mentor and mentees has not always been high. The personal contact established between mentors and mentees in the face-to-face sessions at the beginning and end of the mentoring remains an important element. The success of the project relies on much more than simple information-giving. It is the establishment of a rapport and a connection between mentees and mentor which helps to lead pupils into different ways of seeing themselves and their future.

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<sup>5</sup> From chart 1 above.



The barriers to increasing take up for MFL, which have been well rehearsed elsewhere, still remain. A project such as this cannot compensate for the small number of option choices pupils have, clashes with other subjects they are interested in, or the perception that it will be difficult to obtain a good grade with MFL.

## II. The success of the Digi-mentoring project in engendering enthusiasm for languages and broadening horizons

There is widespread praise for the quality of the resources produced as part of this project by pupils, teachers and mentors and there is interest in using them more widely. The choice and spread of topics has been well thought out to appeal to different pupils and the level of the content is deemed to have been well-judged.

It is clear that the experience of Digi-mentoring has had an impact on many more pupils – perhaps twice as many – as those who will now go on to take MFL at GCSE. There is also evidence that the project has raised awareness more generally in the schools taking part, and among parents. All this is a necessary part of developing the profile of the subject, particularly as regards school management.

## III. Benefits and drawbacks compared to face-to-face mentoring

The evidence here suggests that Digi-mentoring has been at least as effective as face-to-face mentoring, but it has been demanding in terms of logistics and organisation.

The technical requirements in schools add another layer of organisational complexity and arrangements have clearly been less than satisfactory in a number of cases. The results achieved by the project have been in the face of a very high incidence of problems with access to computers and the internet in schools. In a context in which digital literacy is a policy priority, poor support for the use of technology in schools is an issue with wide-reaching implications beyond the smooth-running and effectiveness of this project.

Aside from the technical issues, there have been difficulties coordinating the availability of the mentor with that of pupils and teachers. Schools seem to prefer face-to-face mentors and mentors prefer more contact with pupils. They feel they gain more from face-to-face mentoring but nonetheless the Digi-mentoring experience has still been very valuable for them personally.

## IV. Issues relating to the on-line platform

The limitations of Hwb had been well understood in advance by the development team. Feedback from pupils and mentors confirms that the facility to chat within the resource, rather than coming out of it to send emails, would have greatly enhanced the experience. The level of online interaction between mentor and mentees was perhaps one of the least successful aspects of the project, along with disappointing technical support in schools. However, it is understood that a more agile system was not simple to set up and in fact what was achieved through built-in interaction within the resources was very well-received. The resources were deemed attractive by pupils and they clearly possessed sufficient technical skills to allow them to benefit.

## V. Final thoughts

The project manager reported many communication difficulties with the project schools, who were not always forthcoming with the support and information needed to run (and evaluate) the project successfully. In view of the benefits of the project for pupils and schools, the amount of support provided free of charge, and the prestige of working in collaboration with a university, this experience is disappointing and perhaps highlights the pressures under which schools in general, and MFL departments in particular, are working. If the project were to be rolled out across Wales, it is likely that it would continue to face these difficulties.