

Longitudinal review of MFL student mentoring project



Teresa Tinsley
For Cardiff University School of Modern Languages
December 2019

Longitudinal review of MFL student mentoring project

Introduction

The MFL student mentoring project is now entering its fourth year, having first run in spring term 2016. Under the scheme, suitably prepared undergraduate and postgraduate students are sent as mentors into secondary schools to improve engagement with modern foreign languages, with the aim of increasing engagement with MFL and the number of students opting to study languages at GCSE Level and beyond. The project is an innovative collaboration between four Welsh Universities – Aberystwyth, Bangor, Swansea and Cardiff. It is funded by the Welsh Government as part of its *Global Futures* strategy and coordinated from the School of Modern Languages at Cardiff University. Its website sets out a broad range of aims as follows:

- To highlight the benefits of learning a modern foreign language at GCSE, A-level and degree level.
- To broaden the aspirations of learners by highlighting career and mobility opportunities available to those with language skills, such as working and studying abroad.
- To raise expectations, improve motivation and strengthen the persistence and personal resilience of learners studying modern foreign languages.
- To create sustainable links between higher education modern languages departments and partner secondary schools.
- To offer classroom experiences and opportunities to modern foreign language undergraduate students, with a view to encouraging a greater number to consider teaching a modern foreign language.
- To provide engagement between University students and the local community to provide enriching experiences for both.¹

Alcantara Communications was commissioned to track the cumulative impact of the project on pupils in schools which have been involved in the scheme for three years or more, and on mentors who were involved from the start and/or took part in at least two rounds of mentoring.

This report draws on the following sources of data:

- An evaluation workshop for teachers involved in the scheme
- Feedback from mentors via an emailed questionnaire
- Project management data.

¹ <https://mflmentoring.co.uk/our-aims/>

Key findings

- All schools reported that the project had given their pupils a better understanding of the benefits of language skills for their future lives, and that it had made pupils more enthusiastic in their MFL classes.
- Most schools also reported that the project had improved take-up for MFL at GCSE, although there are external factors and fluctuations from year to year which lessen this impact.
- The project has raised the profile of MFL in all but one of the schools and, in the majority of cases, it has also impacted on Senior Leadership Teams' attitudes towards the subject, although there is more that could be done in this area.
- Schools cite a wide range of other impacts, including raising pupils' aspirations to go to university, improved parental attitudes towards MFL, and benefits for pupils' personal development in terms of confidence and taking responsibility for life-decisions.
- The impacts of the project build over time and are highly valued by schools, who would like to see it maintained and its reach scaled up.
- Mentors have gained a wide range of benefits as a result of taking part in the project, including:
 - Acquisition of new skills relevant to future employment
 - Developing their own knowledge and learning
 - Helping them to make decisions about their own career pathways
 - Linking their university experience to the wider society
 - Impacts on their own personal development and confidence
 - Gaining satisfaction at having achieved something worthwhile.
- They have already been able to apply the skills and learning acquired in a range of new contexts and have benefited from new opportunities which have opened up as a result of participation in the scheme.
- They express heartfelt appreciation for having been able to take part in the scheme and intense awareness of its benefits for pupils.

Teacher workshop

Teachers from nine of the 14 schools in South Wales (CSC and EAS regional consortia) which have been involved in the mentoring project over a period of three years or more, attended an afternoon workshop in Cardiff on 8 November 2019, organised by Cardiff University and attended by the evaluator. Participants were asked to discuss, and to submit responses on paper, in relation to the following research questions:

1. Which impacts have been observed in schools as a result of year-on-year participation in MFL student mentoring?
2. To what extent are these impacts the result of a range of measures (including MFL mentoring) to support MFL within the school? Are there impacts which can be directly attributed to MFL mentoring?
3. Has year-on-year involvement had a cumulative impact within the participating schools or does the impact taper away?
4. How could this scheme develop further in support of *Global Futures* or other policies to support MFL in Wales?

Observed impacts

Teachers were given a prompt list of possible impacts of the MFL mentoring scheme, derived from previous evaluations of this and other projects.² They were asked to rank in order of importance the impacts they had observed in their school and to comment on any additional impacts not already included in the list. They were then asked to say which of the observed impacts were most important to them in their school, and which they would like to strengthen in order to achieve greater impact than currently noted.

Seven out of the nine schools reported that the number one impact of the scheme had been that pupils have a better idea of the benefits of language skills for their future lives, while the other two schools placed this impact in second and third place respectively.

Second in importance in terms of impact was that pupils are more enthusiastic in their MFL classes. Although no teacher placed this in first position, one ranked it second in importance and four ranked it third. All the schools reported that they had noted this impact to some extent, though one felt it was an impact that could be strengthened.

The third most important impact of MFL mentoring was an increase in take up for GCSE. Although two schools were not able to report this as a benefit of taking part in the scheme, of those that did, two placed it number one in terms of importance and a further two ranked it second. From discussion, it is clear that, in most schools, take-up fluctuates – whilst there may be a positive impact one year, the project may be less successful the following year. Participants said that this depended on the cohort and also sometimes on the individual student mentor and the rapport they were able to develop.

All participants except one reported that MFL mentoring had raised the profile of MFL within their school: in discussion, teachers described the project as creating a ‘buzz’ and a sense that languages are special. Five participants felt that their Senior Leadership Team were more positive towards MFL as a result of taking part in the project. One participant reported that the impact on senior leadership had been particularly valuable in their school in that they had now ‘seen beyond the cash’ in terms of facilitating the scheme and funding supply cover. Where schools had not noticed this impact, this could be because the respective school leadership may have already been very supportive, as one school clarified explicitly. However, two schools felt that this aspect could be strengthened and another participant reported in discussion that their senior leadership were ‘oblivious’, that they were not allowed to go to the Award Ceremonies and there was no communication about the success of the project within their schools. A hard copy letter from the university addressed to the head teacher might help to achieve better buy-in from senior leadership.

Five schools reported that the project had had an impact on pupils’ aspirations to go to university. Of these, three ranked this impact in their top three. In discussion, one teacher commented that all her A level class are applying for university courses involving languages and that a mid-ability pupil who was in the first wave of mentees will be the first in her family to go to university.

Four schools reported that the project had had an impact on parental attitudes towards languages and two regarded this aspect as very important. Letters sent home informing parents that their children have been selected to take part in the project were seen as greatly supporting this aspect.

² The same prompt list was used in the longitudinal evaluation of Routes into Languages Cymru carried out by Alcantara Communications in 2018.

Few schools noted that participation in MFL mentoring had generated greater interest in language trips/exchanges abroad, or that literacy in Welsh and English had improved as a result – two in each case, and neither ranked these impacts as particularly important. As regards school trips abroad, various workshop participants commented that ‘it doesn’t exist as a concept’, ‘we’ve tried but it doesn’t work’ and that ‘we can’t afford to fund trips’. One participant made the point that the MFL Mentoring scheme was designed to provide access to experiences in lieu of school trips abroad, which were unviable. Funding was identified as a problem, and some said that pupils went abroad with their families, who could find cheaper options than trips run by schools with organised activities which had to be paid for. In some schools there was also ‘competition’ from trips abroad organised by other departments.

Additional impacts not on the prompt list were given as follows:

Pupils have enjoyed contact with people who are not teachers but successful linguists

Pupils spread the word that languages are important

Pupils gain an insight into how MFL may be paired with other subjects at undergraduate level.

In discussion, participants also identified benefits for pupils in terms of personal development as a result of participation in mentoring, including empowerment, confidence-building and greater responsibility for their learning and life-decisions.

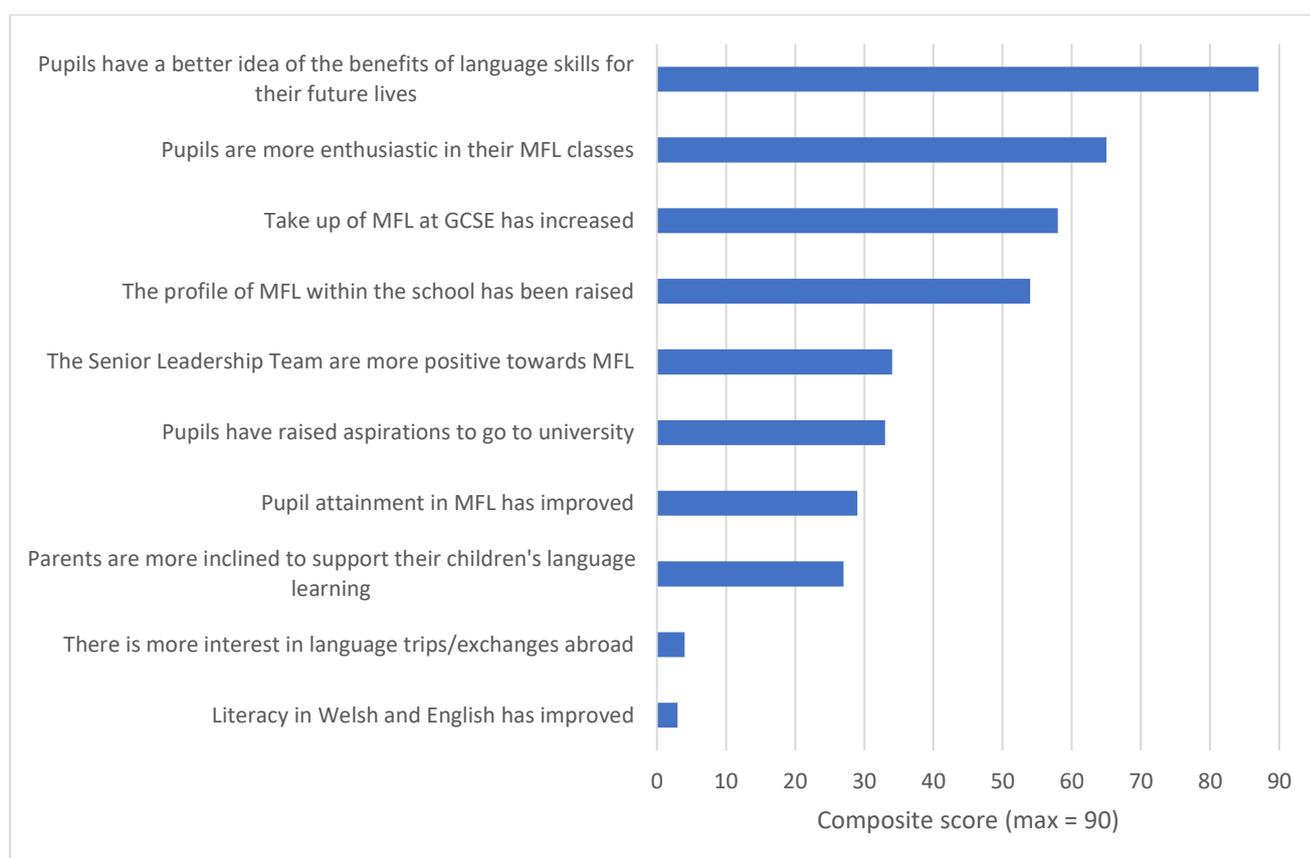


Figure 1: Impacts noticed by schools as a result of taking part in MFL student mentoring, ranked in order of importance.³

³ Composite scores were obtained by giving those impacts ranked first 10 points for each mention, those ranked second 9 points, etc. Impacts not noted were given 0.

Most valued and most desired impacts

Participants were asked to say which of the impacts they had noted were most important to them in their school, and which they would like to strengthen – i.e. which they believed could be having more impact than currently being felt.

As might be expected, the current impacts which are most widely valued are those which are being felt by most schools – relating to pupils' awareness of the benefits of language skills and their enthusiasm in class – see chart above. Four schools would like to see the project having more of an impact on pupil take-up at GCSE, and another four schools would ideally like to see the project having an impact on pupils' attainment in MFL. In discussion, the possibility that pupils could be given something specific to learn, as a practical take-away from the mentoring, was put forward.

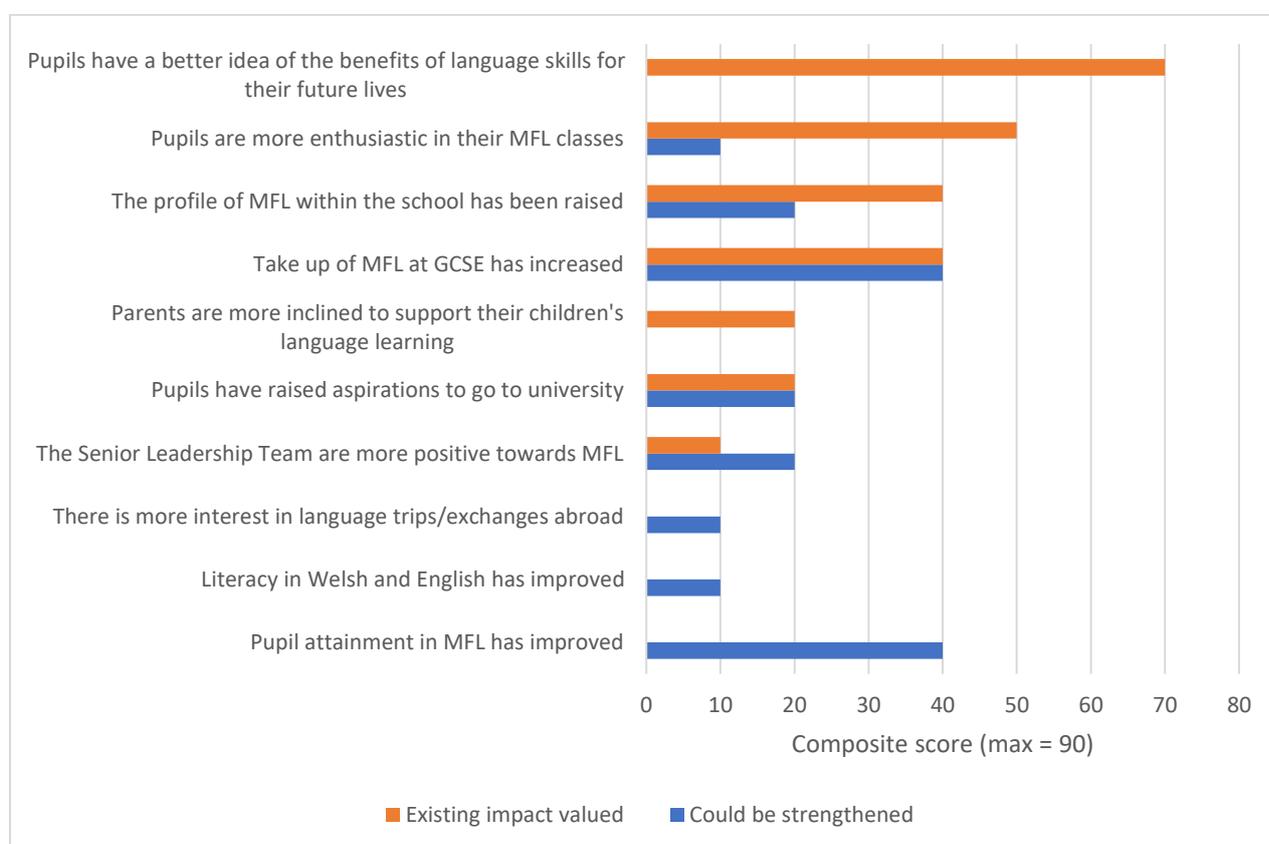


Figure 2: Current impacts which are most valued vs. those which could be strengthened.⁴

MFL mentoring in relation to other activities to promote MFL

MFL mentoring is by no means the only activity schools represented at the workshop employ to encourage take-up and motivation in MFL. All named a variety of other activities designed to raise the profile of MFL in the school generally, and others targeted at specific year groups. For example, six of the schools offer MFL revision clubs, four are involved in transition activities with their local primary school(s) and six had welcomed in the well-known proponent of languages in schools, Tim Penn, to give a talk. Four schools mentioned the Pupil Language Ambassador programme run by

⁴ Ten points were allocated for each mention.

Routes into Languages Cymru and two had the status of Confucius Classrooms, teaching Mandarin as well as European languages. One urban school runs a community languages project for pupils who speak languages other than English and Welsh at home. Schools also mentioned other ways in which they worked with their regional consortium and with Cardiff university, and promotional activities around the European Day of Languages. Two schools are systematically embedding units of work on the importance of MFL into their Schemes of Work, while others are focusing on singing, kinaesthetic learning or alternative accreditation to GCSE as a way of attracting and engaging students.

Examples of impacts directly attributable to MFL mentoring

Given the plethora of other activities in which they are involved, participants were asked to identify the benefits which could be directly attributed to engagement with MFL mentoring as opposed to other general or targeted promotional work. Their responses highlighted the way this project enables individual mentees to have meaningful personal interaction with a linguist role-model not far from their own age:

Pupils see that language learning is a process and with time and effort they can get to the same standard as their mentor.

Increased uptake by many pupils – they can relate to the mentor and respond well in small groups

Meeting the mentor showed languages gave them lots of opportunities.

Participants drew attention to the impact on mentees' personal development in terms of confidence and self-belief:

Boosts pupils' confidence and makes them consider languages as a serious option for future study

Pupils became more confident in their own ability to choose a language for GCSE and have the self-belief to carry on and study a MFL at university.

One school highlighted importance of the project as a way of targeting individual pupils and their parents:

The project has given us the opportunity to target individual pupils who would possibly not consider choosing a language at GCSE level and to reach out to their parents to encourage them to consider this as an option.

Where mentees were able to take part in university visits, this was seen to have had a direct impact in opening up attitudes towards future options:

Mentoring and the trip to the university showed that university students look just like us

Changed the perception of languages – it's something they CAN attain – especially true when we came down to visit the university – some have never been to Cardiff.

Impact of year-on-year involvement

Another question explored in the workshop was whether the impact of MFL mentoring changes over time. Does year-on-year involvement in the project help to build a language-friendly ethos in the school over time, or does the impact taper away? None of the participants reported any decrease in impact over time but rather spoke of increasing success as the project became established and they grew better at managing arrangements in their school:

The impact is gradual – it takes time to evolve over a few years and gain momentum.

Another participant reported that the success-rate for her mentees taking up languages had risen each year, with 9 out of 15 mentees opting the first year, 11 in the second and 12 in the third.

The consensus was that this is a scheme which is working well: there is no need to provide a constant stream of new initiatives other than updating information as necessary in response to changing times. Some schools have been involved with the new Year 11 mentoring project. They thought this was an excellent idea and a logical next step.

As regards future development, participants agreed that the challenge was scalability – extending the benefits of the scheme to more schools throughout Wales.

Feedback from mentors

Eleven mentors responded to an emailed invitation to provide feedback on their lasting impressions of the scheme and to report on how it had impacted on their own development and plans for the future. Of these, ten (out of a total of 16) had been involved in at least two waves of mentoring and, with some overlap, four (out of 27) had been involved in the very first round of mentoring.⁵

All those responding – as might be expected, given the fact that they had chosen to respond – reported very positively on their experiences. What was not necessarily expected was the passion and warmth of their answers and the extent to which taking part in the project had made a lasting impression, shaped their career development, bridged the gap between university and the work of work, and enabled them to develop skills and understanding they were already putting to use in new situations. Many expressed sincere gratitude for having been able to take part in the project.

Four of those responding were currently employed in various private-sector jobs in exports, marketing, IT and finance respectively. Four were, or had been, involved in higher-level study at Masters level and beyond, two were living in Spain and another about to undertake a placement in Italy. Two were currently acting as assistants in running the project. As one respondent put it:

I entered into the mentoring scheme because it sounded like a great opportunity and I had no idea how much I would take away from the scheme.

Responding in their own words to six open questions, respondents identified a wide range of impacts as a result of taking part in the project, including:

- Acquisition of new skills relevant to future employment
- Developing their own knowledge and learning
- Helping them to make decisions about their own career pathways
- Linking their university experience to the wider society
- Impacting on their own personal development and confidence
- Gaining satisfaction at having achieved something worthwhile.

⁵ The low response rate was due to difficulties tracking down mentors who had left the university several years previously.

Impact on skills and employability

Mentors provided the following comments on transferable skills including time management, organisational and presentation skills they had gained as a result of participation in the scheme:

Being part of the scheme helps you to develop leadership skills, organisational skills and time management. You learn to adapt to different situations, understand people and find ways to help people in a way that benefits them the most.

I developed a range of transferable skills, such as effective time management, leading group activities and managing group dynamics, as well as preparing reports and presentations. Many employers nowadays value these skills and the ability to demonstrate them even more than the work experience a candidate has.

I think that I really benefitted from the experience, especially with regards to time management and punctuality. It also reignited my passion for languages.

The scheme was great for my CV and also added a new dimension to my degree course.

Impact on mentors' own knowledge and understanding

It really opened my eyes to how students' value or don't value languages, and how they feel about the world in general. It has also helped me realise how languages are connected to each other, something I didn't know beforehand and given me a comprehensive understanding of the world of languages and how interesting it is.

Planning different sessions and activities every week was great fun and gave me the opportunity to learn myself.

Impact on career decisions

Mentors described how participation in the scheme had enabled them to develop their ideas on future career pathways and to understand their own potential and the things they enjoyed doing:

The scheme played a huge role in helping me decide what I wanted to do with my career. [This respondent is working in marketing in educational context]

The experience has helped me make the decision that I wish to work with the promotion of languages as a career... it has made me realise that there is huge problem in the UK with regards to our approach to learning them. Therefore, it has made more sure than ever that this is a problem that needs to be changed, and that is something I want to be involved with.

The project inspired me to progress in my own language learning journey, and I therefore I decided to move to Spain and learn Spanish.

Talking about my language journey to the pupils I realised how much I missed living in Spain, how much I love its culture, food, people, the language. So, I decided to go back, I started actively searching for jobs in Spain and here we are...I am now living in the city that I always dreamt about!

The scheme has really helped me to settle into working in a school environment and also helped me to decide that I feel passionate about education.

Before the project, I was convinced that I only wanted to work behind the scenes, in a non-public-facing role, which was likely due to lack of confidence. However, now I feel open to the idea of working in the education sector, as I really enjoyed my time mentoring and hope to possibly inspire more young minds in the future.

It has also broadened my horizons and I have decided that I want to learn Italian to add to the list of languages that I can speak. Because of this I have accepted a last-minute job to teach at a school in Italy for three months.

Linking the university experience to the wider society and world of work

A number of mentors provided unsolicited comments on the way that participation in the scheme had enabled them to bridge the gap between university and the world of work and forge connections with the wider society:

The mentoring scheme was really valuable to me whilst I was at university. It was something that I could get involved in that was related to my degree but also totally different. I made friends through the scheme and my confidence grew as I travelled to new towns in Wales and visited schools. It allowed me to decide what I wanted to do after uni and I found a passion through the scheme; encouraging young people in education.

It was also a good reminder that what our universities do can have impact. This was important for me as I wanted to go into academia. I also developed ties with certain schools in Cardiff, which will be key for my PhD.

I gained lots of confidence and a keen interest in the language context in Wales. After four years in Wales, I had a new appreciation for the city I have made my home. Going out into the community was essential for that. It also gave me something to do outside of my studies and helped me to think about what I would want to do after I completed my degree. It gave me lots of professional experience that I could use in interviews as it was leadership skills that I was developing.

Impact on personal development

Mentors reported an impact on many different aspects of their personal development, most notably improved confidence linked to their career decisions:

I was so nervous going into the project as I was quite a shy person and not very good at public speaking. Now, having done mentoring for two academic years, I feel more confident in myself and my abilities. This new positive mental attitude has really helped me in my personal and professional life, and I cannot thank the mentoring team enough.

Taking part in the project also helped to improve my confidence as I had to adapt to new situations and working with different people.

Being an MFL student mentor also helped me gain confidence and learn how to deal with challenging situations. As prepared and organised as you are, an unexpected situation can always arise in the classroom. That is why as a mentor, you need to learn to think on your feet, adapt and incorporate some degree of flexibility into your plans. This is also an extremely useful skill in the world of work.

I am more patient now, having had experience in talking with a variety of different people from different backgrounds and experiences, and feel that now I can apply this to everyday life.

It gave me the confidence to stand up and lead a group. It also made me more determined to continue within the field of languages as I think otherwise, I would have moved away from languages into a different field of work.

My second mentoring group was a little bit more challenging, but this helped me learn more and gain important personal skills faster.

For some, working as an MFL mentor had helped them reconnect with fundamental motivations and enthusiasms as they finished their degree course:

The mentoring scheme has also helped to rekindle my passion for languages, something I thought I had lost.

It did also help me fall back in love with my subject when the exams and coursework got hard! It reminded me why I chose this path when I was their age.

Satisfaction at having made a difference

Another theme running through unsolicited comments made by mentors was the sense of satisfaction at having achieved something worthwhile. The fact that mentors felt it had been so worthwhile is an important indicator of the success of the scheme:

I felt good that some had actually changed their mind and taken GCSE and they felt more at ease when studying. I felt like I made a difference in someone's life.

I found it so rewarding to see how much of a positive impact you can have on a pupil's life. Some of the pupils I mentored, never had the aspirations to go to University or to even continue their education let alone continue their language journey; Showing the pupils the endless opportunities learning languages offers and watching them broaden their horizon in the short time you do work together really was an amazing opportunity.

For me, this experience really showed that I want to be doing something where I can see that what I am doing is having a positive impact. I know that for me to stay motivated and to enjoy what I am doing I need to be able to see that there is good to what I am doing. It was by taking part in this scheme that I learnt this.

Application to new situations

Respondents described how they had already been able to apply the skills and learning they had gained in new contexts:

In teaching:

I am currently a language assistant in a secondary school in Spain and I am able to apply many of the techniques learnt through taking part in the scheme. Many of the skills we were taught in the training weekend are extremely useful in a classroom context here... I often refer back to the many reasons I used to promote languages in the UK and use them to motivate the students in Spain

In private sector employment:

The soft skills I developed thanks to the mentoring programme, such as work ethic, organisational skills, communication, etc., are now helping me in many situations at work. My job involves communicating with clients and suppliers from around the world on a daily basis. Needless to say, there have been quite a few difficult situations, but I have been able to apply a lot of what I learnt as a mentor to deal with them more effectively.

At job interviews:

Since graduating and applying to graduate roles I regularly make reference to the experiences I had with the mentoring project. I think that taking part in a scheme like this allows people to develop so many skills that really are applicable and valued by employers in the working world. These are skills that everybody has however being able to demonstrate working examples and being able to show dedication is invaluable. In addition to this, when taking part in the training days you learn so many different techniques on coaching people and dealing with different situations and that has in a way become very valuable when applying to jobs. When talking to people I have been able to talk about my experience on the scheme so positively and how nice it is to share something you are so passionate about with other.

In academia:

When it came to my MSc dissertation I had more of an idea as to how the students would engage with activities.

Confidence is something that has helped me in all aspects of life. Organisation is another thing that the project helped me with. Being in 4th year the second time around meant that I had to properly plan my time and use it effectively to complete all my assignments and plan great sessions for my mentees.

The two schools that I visited were very different in terms of socioeconomic context and language profiles. ... This was a good reminder that not all schools are similar and that being bilingual in Wales does not necessarily refer to Welsh-English bilingualism. This has been invaluable for my MSc research and, I anticipate, my PhD.

This respondent also commented:

Great project, great experience! A great way for me to bridge research, policy and practice! Diolch!

New opportunities

Respondents also described how participation in the project had directly led to new opportunities for them and to additional benefits for the schools in which they worked:

I was able to teach Arabic to primary school children through mentoring, as the contact teacher that I worked with in the school asked me if I could go to one of the catchment schools during their language weeks. It was very fun and interesting seeing primary school students' views on languages and how enthusiastic they were to learn something new and different.

The teachers were so helpful and even invited me to a trip to Dunkerque and Ypres and I attended helping with the children.

I have graduated now and am still liaising with the school in order to set up a link between the school I work in in Spain and Croesyceiliog.

Lasting impressions

When asked what their lasting impressions of the scheme were, respondents commented on the satisfaction at having made a difference, the enjoyment they had derived and the understanding they had gained of the differing contexts for MFL learning in schools in Wales:

Satisfaction at having made a difference:

I hope I managed to pass on at least part of this enthusiasm to my mentees. What I love about this project is that it creates some sort of a "butterfly effect". That is, if you get at least 2 or 3 pupils interested (sometimes even 1 could be enough), no doubt they will spread the word and soon you have a little community of aspiring linguists.

I loved the scheme and can't express just how important it is. The young people that I met and mentored for the duration all loved the experience and wished they could do it again. For many it gave them the confidence that they needed to pursue modern languages at GCSE. I felt like it made an even bigger impact on the pupils in the Welsh medium schools that I worked in as they realised by already having an extra language, they were already ahead instead of seeing languages including Welsh as a chore.

It really is amazing to be able to share the experiences you have had and watch the pupils grow in confidence across the sessions

It's so touching to know that just a small act may have a lasting impact on someone and change their attitude towards school, languages and ultimately other cultures.

Enjoyment:

I loved that I was given the opportunity to share my language journey and something I was so passionate about with the pupils. It was so rewarding seeing the pupils develop and knowing that after taking part in the scheme they were more inclined to continue studying languages was so rewarding.

I had my reservations at the start of the first semester but by the end I was convinced. The mentees loved it, the teachers loved it and I loved it.

I enjoyed it so much that I took part in both semesters as well as assisted in the new project in Northern England. I really loved the interaction with the students and the happiness I felt when I had convinced some of them to change their minds.

Awareness of diverse contexts for MFL in Wales:

It was amazing to see how different students' participation and interest was depending on the school and also the language used, as I went to a Welsh school where I mentored in Welsh and then the same in an English school. I really enjoyed seeing how different student's thoughts were concerning the world and languages as a whole.

One of the lasting impressions was how diverse student experiences are. Whereas some students understood activities due to them having had opportunities, other did not. Again, a reminder of how diverse the socioeconomic context is in Wales...

The diversity of the schools is what continues to stick with me. Each school has its own context and culture that had to be taken into consideration when mentoring. The pupils also had very different

opinions and attitudes to their language profiles, differing in terms of their attitudes to Welsh and other languages they speak outside of school.

The flexibility of the scheme to accommodate these variations is so important. The training continuously made this point and equipped us to mentor in the various contexts.

Appreciation of the scheme

Mentors appended comments uninformed about how important they considered the scheme to be:

MFL Mentoring is truly life-changing not only for the pupils, but for the mentors as well. I hope more countries learn about the project and develop similar initiatives in the future.

I feel as though the scheme is extremely effective and I hope it continues to grow and develop as it is extremely necessary to promote the use of MFL languages within the UK.

People with the power to make the important decisions in this country need to realise just how incredible this project is and see that waves that it is making.

One called for the link between mentors and schools to be strengthened and extended in order to reinforce mentors' ability to act as a 'bridge' between pupils and teaching staff:

I think it would benefit the scheme even more if the period of time you worked with the schools was extended. When only doing 6 weeks it feels a bit of a shame for it to all come to an end so suddenly. It would be nice if each mentor could devise a plan with their school - maybe making it a scheme that is used by more of the school years? Potentially considering assemblies where the mentor can become more recognized within the school? This would obviously require more dedication from the mentors; however, I think that the schools and pupils taking part would see more of a benefit. I think the mentor creates a bridge between the teaching staff and the pupils and they have the opportunity to show that language learning can be fun and not just what you learn in the classroom.

Conclusions

This modest research exercise has brought to light a wide range of benefits for pupils, schools and mentors in line with the project's broader aims. This quote from a mentor provides a vivid expression of these:

In my opinion the scheme is really valuable to pupils not just because it highlights the benefits of learning a language, but because it opens up pupils' minds to the opportunities that exist if you work hard and apply yourself (e.g. going to university, travelling etc.)... I felt that they all gained something from the scheme, whether it was directly associated with learning more about a language or by meeting someone who was studying at university.

Beyond the main benefits observed in all or most schools contributing to this research (better pupil understanding of the benefits of language learning, increased take-up for GCSE, greater enthusiasm in class, and a higher profile for the subject within the school), impacts differ according to varied circumstances within them, including demography, the extent of senior management or parental support, existing take up for MFL, etc. In some schools the project has boosted senior leadership awareness of the importance of the subject and supported the creation of a more language-friendly

ethos, while others are achieving success with the project despite SLT indifference. The feedback reported here has been taken from schools in South Wales alone, but it is nonetheless likely that the impacts felt will be similarly varied across Wales as a whole.

Alongside MFL mentoring, schools with long-term involvement are also involved in other efforts to promote take-up and enthusiasm for MFL, some targeted at specific groups of pupils, others aimed at promoting the subject more generally. In doing so, they are aware of working in a difficult context for MFL in secondary schools in Wales, in which many factors stack the odds against pupils choosing MFL at GCSE.⁶

Among the many initiatives schools employ to promote MFL both inside and outside the classroom, MFL mentoring is distinctive in the connection it provides to higher education and the personal contact mentees experience with a student who is near their own age but at a more advanced stage on their language-learning journey. The evidence examined here also suggests that the impact for schools builds from year to year and therefore provides a strong case for continued and, indeed, extended funding in the next phase of *Global Futures*.

The research has also highlighted a notable impact on mentors in enriching their university experience and bridging the gap between study and working life – an aspect of the project which has not received a great deal of attention up till now but will be of particular interest to higher education stakeholders.

⁶ Including the small number of free option choices, a general consensus regarding the comparative difficulty of MFL exams, and competition with other subjects, particularly Welsh and STEM subjects. See the latest Language Trends report: <https://wales.britishcouncil.org/en/language-trends-wales>