



Raising the profile of MFL mentoring initiative

Evaluator's final report

July 2017

Contents

Key findings

1. Introduction and objectives
2. Evaluation plan and methodology
3. Impact of the project on take-up for MFL at GCSE
4. Other impacts of the project in schools and on pupils
5. Added value of the project: impact on mentors
6. Conclusions and recommendations

Key findings

Quantitative impacts

- In Phase 1, 57% of the total number of pupils mentored chose to take MFL in Key Stage 4 and in Phase 2, 50% did so. These represent very significant increases on the baseline figures and on the national picture in which the participation rate is around 20%.
- In Phase 2, only 29% of mentees had originally said they would take MFL, but an additional 190 pupils decided to do so after the intervention, representing an added value of 77%.
- In three consortia, the number of pupils choosing MFL more than doubled.
- 4 schools had had no GCSE group running for several years, but were able to run one after taking part in the project.

Qualitative impacts

- All pupils, and especially those from isolated or economically disadvantaged areas, have benefitted from direct personal contact with university students who have recent experience of living in a foreign country and embody a wider range of experiences and options. The opportunity to visit universities for Award and Recognition ceremonies has stimulated pupils' ambitions and discussion about their future careers.
- The project has actively addressed the challenge of building confidence and resilience among MFL learners and has been warmly welcomed by their teachers.
- Mentors have benefited from the training and the experience that the project has provided and will take this forward into their future careers.
- The scheme, in particular because of the way it has linked schools with higher education, had given MFL an improved profile with senior school management. The project has highlighted the importance of school leaders in achieving the objectives of the *Global Futures* plan and the potential to engage them more systematically.

Other insights provided by the project

- Although pupil attitudes towards MFL are a 'major obstacle' in a minority of schools, it is by no means a general rule that pupils are badly disposed towards MFL or that they are badly informed about the potential benefits. Nearly two thirds of pupils generally enjoy their MFL classes.
- Pupils may be strongly aware of the benefits of the subject and greatly enjoy their lessons, but still not choose to take it to GCSE because of systemic factors, particularly the way that MFL appears in option columns.
- Welsh may sometimes 'compete' with MFL because of the compulsory nature of Welsh and the dearth of slots for free choices. Pupils who decided to drop MFL were spread across all categories of self-reported competence in Welsh and bilingual pupils were as likely as monolingual pupils to drop the subject.
- There is considerable potential to improve deepen awareness of the specific ways in which MFL can enhance and enrich pupils' lives and their future careers, and to improve take up from Key Stage 4 through to higher education.
- The attitudes of parents and the wider community are an important determinant of pupils' choices and thought might be given to addressing these on a future occasion.

Success factors

- The National Coordinator has played a central role in organising, delivering and supporting the project.
- Mentoring in small groups has provided a more personal, individualised way of engaging pupils with key messages and ideas.
- University mentors who are relatively close in age to the pupils mentored have provided realistic but inspiring role-models.
- The professional development and training programme for mentors not only provided excellent preparation for their work in schools, but a development opportunity that they will take with them into their future careers.
- The link with higher education and opportunity for pupils to visit a university for the Award and Recognition ceremony have impacted both on the pupils themselves and on school leadership.

Limiting factors

- Organisation and facilities within some schools have been poor.
- Financial constraints in schools are squeezing MFL classes and the viability of smaller groups.
- The way schools offer MFL within option columns is a major constraint on pupil choice.
- For these reasons, some pupils who wanted to take MFL as a result of the project have not been able to do so.

Recommendations

- Engagement of school leadership teams – having a named individual responsible for oversight of the project within the school.
- Introduce a requirement on school leadership teams to run MFL courses, even where there are small numbers.
- Require school leadership teams to report on MFL take up.

1. Introduction

The project under scrutiny in this evaluation exercise was set up in late 2015 under the direction of Cardiff University, funded by the Welsh Government as a strand within its *Global Futures* plan to improve and promote the teaching of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in Welsh secondary schools. Its outcomes and impact are therefore extremely relevant in planning the next stage in realising the long-term ambition of the Welsh Government to make Wales ‘bilingual plus one’.

The *Global Futures* plan was launched in response to growing concerns about the low level of take up for MFL at GCSE and its future impact both on the job prospects of Welsh teenagers and the Welsh economy as a whole. It was noted that, although there is a certain reluctance on behalf of teenagers throughout the UK to choose to take a modern foreign language beyond the phase in which it is compulsory in our various education systems, Wales was suffering from exceptionally low take up. Participation in MFL at GCSE in Wales – already at a low level relative to other areas of the UK – declined by 48% between 2002 and 2016.

National surveys of the situation for MFL in secondary schools have found that:

- Schools are continuing to report declines in uptake for MFL in Key Stage 4. More than a third of Welsh schools now have fewer than 10% of the Year 10 cohort studying the subject.¹
- Whilst teachers see the Welsh Baccalaureate and the consequent reduction of option slots are the main reasons for the most recent declines, these are now being exacerbated by financial pressures and concerns relating to the UK’s departure from the European Union.
- Teachers believe that improving careers advice, changing the assessment and marking of the GCSE exam, increasing the number of free choices and ensuring that MFL appears in all option blocks would be the best ways of improving take up.²
- There has already been a high level of involvement by schools in projects to promote MFL, such as Routes into Languages Cymru, but although these have had a beneficial impact on attitudes, they have not substantially improved take up.
- Schools working in more disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to report that pupils do not appreciate the value of learning a foreign language and more likely to have very low take up of MFL.

¹ *Language Trends Wales 2016/17*, British Council Wales (2017)

² *Language Trends Wales 2015/16*, British Council Wales/Education Development Trust (2016)

Objectives

The objectives of the mentoring project were as follows:

1. To raise the profile of modern foreign languages in the partner secondary schools with a view to increasing the number of pupils taking one or more foreign languages at GCSE	Core objective A
2. To broaden the horizons of pupils in KS3 by highlighting career and mobility opportunities available to those with language skills	Core objective B
3. To raise expectations, improve motivation and strengthen the persistence and personal resilience of pupils studying modern languages	
4. To create sustainable links between HE Modern Languages Departments and their partner secondary schools	Added-value/process objectives
5. To offer employability experiences and opportunities to modern language undergraduate students	
6. To offer classroom experience to those modern language undergraduate students hoping to undertake a PGCE course	
7. To offer a fully bilingual package so that pupils in both Welsh and English medium schools can benefit from the initiative	

A further goal was to scope future possibilities for extending and developing work in furtherance of the project aims.

Organisation of the project

The mentoring project is distinct from other initiatives to promote take up of MFL in Wales in offering an intervention targeted at selected Year 8 and Year 9 pupils before they make their GCSE choices. The project involved student mentors from 4 Welsh universities and was organised regionally with a National Coordinator working in partnership with Regional Consortium leads for MFL.

The project took place over two academic years, with the first wave of mentoring taking place between January and March 2016 (Phase 1). In Phase 2, there were two waves of mentoring taking place between November-December 2016 and January-March 2017. Mentors attended training weekends prior to going into schools, and Award and Recognition ceremonies were organised at each of the participating universities.

Interim evaluation report

This report builds on an interim report on the first phase of the project completed in September 2016 which looked at the impact of the first wave of mentoring on pupils who were to start their GCSE courses in September 2016. It gathered data from schools on the situation for MFL and from pupils on their perceptions of MFL and inclinations regarding the subject. It also took into account the views of mentors who had been leading the intervention in schools:

Schools

Data collected from schools at the outset of the project highlighted the mix of factors affecting take up for MFL:

- The large number of subjects from which to fill a small number of slots in the timetable. The introduction of the Welsh Bac and the consequent restriction of option choices meant that in the project schools, there were fewer pupils for languages in Year 10 than in Year 11.
- The perception of difficulty of MFL as a GCSE subject. This is also a factor in England where evidence suggests it is also a reality.³
- Attitudes towards MFL. However, the largest number of schools in this piece of research already rated their pupils' attitudes as fairly positive and many participating schools had already taken action to improve pupil perceptions of the value of MFL.

Pupils

More than half of pupils in the study had already decided whether or not to take MFL at GCSE at the point of completing the initial questionnaire. At that point, 80% said that they thought that a foreign language would benefit them in their future lives. However, their career ambitions clustered around a narrow range of responses. There was little interest expressed in working 'in business' and those that did so did not see the relevance of being able to speak a foreign language.

Pupils' perceptions of the importance of MFL largely focused on their transactional usefulness and pupils' personal economic benefit. There was little evidence of internationalist values or the desire to access and understand other cultures as motivations for language learning.

Many expressed a lack of confidence in their own abilities as language learners – in many cases linked to their experiences of learning Welsh – as well as a preference for other subjects.

Mentors

Mentors reported that the project had been extremely well organised and that their experiences in schools were generally more positive than had been expected. They were pleased with the response from pupils and felt that they had made an important contribution to raising their aspirations and giving them confidence to pursue their studies.

Interim results

The interim report found that although the project was in its early stages, there were early signs that the intervention was having an impact not only on the pupils it specifically targeted, but on whole cohorts within the project schools. Thirteen out of twenty-one schools reported increased numbers for their GCSE classes starting in September, including one school where MFL was running as a GCSE option for the first time in three years.

The mentoring experience had impacted on pupils in the following ways:

- Mentors provided inspiring role models demonstrating the personal enjoyment and satisfaction that derives from interacting with other cultures.
- Mentors were able to build pupils' confidence in themselves as language learners, reassuring them that aspiring to speak a language fluently is not an impossible mountain to climb, and providing tips and study techniques.

³ Inter-subject Comparability of Exam Standards in GCSE and A level, ISC Working Paper 3, Ofqual, 2015

- Pupils' aspirations were lifted by contact with university students and opportunities to discuss university life, options for living and working abroad and future careers.

The interim report identified key factors underlying the project's success so far as: the use of university student mentors, the high-quality training and organisational support provided to mentors, and the personalised approach with small groups of pupils.

It also noted some key limitations at the end of Phase 1 of the project, namely that, in a few cases, pupils were targeted who had already made their GCSE option choices and the baseline data did not always reflect their true starting point. External factors, such as the number of option choices available, continued to be important factors which were limiting numbers for MFL, particularly where pupils had a strong interest in a competing subject.

The interim report provided the following recommendations and feedback for the funder and project team:

1. The conception and overall structure of the project were extremely sound and should not be changed.
2. Pupils who have already made a positive choice to take MFL GCSE should not be targeted.
3. Messages about the value of MFL in schools might benefit from a more explicit focus on international values and cultural engagement.
4. Careers information, advice and guidance should be developed which integrates MFL with enterprise in Wales within a global context.
5. Thought should be given to the continuation of the project beyond the current funding period.
6. It was also suggested to the funder that it might consider addressing some features of the external context which limit the project's success including, for example, the disincentives of the current assessment system.

Recommendation 2 was implemented in Phase 2 of the project, and recommendations 3 and 4 fed into the mentoring programme (they were also intended more generally). Plans are already in hand for a continuation phase involving digital mentoring.

2. Evaluation plan and methodology

The evaluation plan was designed to respond to the following research questions:

1. To what extent have the core objectives been met?
2. Where has the project been most successful? And where has it achieved less success?
3. Which factors have contributed to this?
4. What added value has the project provided?

It also sought to capture data which would inform the direction and focus of the project as it moved from Phase 1 to Phase 2, and to highlight the opportunities for future development.

Data collection

Data was gathered from schools, pupils, mentors and other stakeholders in the project, as set out in Table 1 below.

Date		Number collected
Beginning of project	Baseline questionnaires from schools (hard copy)	29
	Initial pupil questionnaires (hard copy)	254
After Phase 1	Updates from schools	17
	Semi-structured interviews with mentors	4
	Semi-structured interviews with teachers	2
Before Phase 2	Baseline survey of pupils (online) ⁴	3,096
	Baseline survey of new schools joining the project (online)	16
After Phase 2 mentoring	Semi-structured interviews with second wave mentors (January 2017)	3
	Semi-structured interviews with teachers (April 2017)	4
After option choices known	Updates from schools	47
Ongoing	Feedback and information by email and in person from Project Coordinator	

Table 1: Data collection

⁴ The aim was to survey all pupils in each class, before they were chosen to take part, in order to provide a genuine baseline picture from which to judge success.

Baseline data from schools and pupils

In the first phase of the project, quantitative and qualitative data was collected by hard copy questionnaire from schools at the outset of the project. This provided figures on participation in language learning in Years 10 to 13, data on pupil attitudes towards languages, and what MFL teachers completing the forms thought were the most significant barriers to increasing take up. The data collected were transferred to a spread sheet for quantitative analysis and their comments collated separately.

Data was also gathered from 254 hard copy questionnaires completed by pupils at the outset of the project. This was to enable us to compare attitudes expressed at that time with actual GCSE choices from information available as at June 2016. In most cases, the first mentoring session was used as an opportunity for pupils to do this. This meant that these questionnaires did not reflect the actual baseline starting point and the impacts on attitudes from a) being selected to take part in the first place; b) pre-participation briefing/subsequent reflection with parents and friends, and c) participation in the first session, all of which contributed to these initial responses. The responses showed a very high level of awareness of the benefits of MFL and interest in studying languages at university which we would have expected to have been much lower. The reason for this is likely to have been that pupils' attitudes were already being acted on as a result of the project before the questionnaires were collected. These questionnaires have therefore been termed 'initial questionnaires' and analysed with the understanding that they may not have captured pupils' true starting points. Interviews with teachers confirmed that pupils' attitudes and plans in relation to MFL had already begun to change before the initial surveys were completed.

In order to be able to match pupils' previous attitudes with actual behaviour, in the second phase of the project we collected baseline data from pupils, using a similar questionnaire but in online format, before they were chosen to take part in the project. This meant collecting data from a much larger cohort of pupils – more than 3,000 – all pupils in a year group wherever possible, in order to provide a much better basis for judging the true impact of the project.

In the second phase, we collected baseline data from schools joining the scheme in electronic format, in order to be able to manipulate it easily without having to transfer it laboriously from hard copy.

Mentor interviews

Semi-structured interviews with seven mentors were carried out as follows:

ID/Date interviewed	University	Degree course and year	School (s)
A/15/4/16	Cardiff	French and Italian/4th	Treorchy
S/15/4/16	Cardiff	Spanish and Italian/post graduate	St Josephs
L/15/4/16	Cardiff	French and Italian/2nd	Glantaf
S2/1/7/16	Bangor	French, Spanish and Italian, 4th	Rhyl High School
E/12/1/17	Cardiff	French and Politics, 4 th ⁵	West Monmouth
T/12/1/17	Cardiff	French, 4 th	Fitzalan, Ferndale
L2/12/1/17	Cardiff	French and German, 4 th	Llanhari, Coleg Cymenedol Y Dderwen

Table 2: Mentor interviews

⁵ This mentor was a Latvian national.

Interviews with MFL teachers

Interviews were carried out with MFL teachers in the project schools between 3 and 5 April 2017. The aim was to interview one teacher from each regional consortium and including teachers from both Welsh and English medium schools. Names were selected from the database of teachers who had responded to the Phase 2 Baseline Teacher Questionnaires, taking the first name from each Regional Consortium in each case, and emails sent requesting a short interview by phone or Skype. There were some difficulties in achieving responses and the Project Coordinator had to intervene in one or two cases to obtain a reply. One teacher was unable to take part in the process because of a family incident. Another was unable to speak by phone, but sent responses to questions by email. The following is therefore based on interviews with MFL teachers from the following schools:

Code/Date	School	Regional Consortium
T1/3/4/17	Llanwern	EAS
T2/5/4/17	Cefn Hengoed	ERW
T3/5/4/17	Aberdare	CSC

Table 3: Teacher interviews

Additional feedback from teachers was made available via the National Coordinator on an ongoing basis.

Take up data from schools

This was collected by the Project Coordinator once pupil choices were known after the Phase 1 and Phase 2 mentoring. It was not always readily available and at time of writing some schools still have not been able to submit data. Their comments and those of the Project Coordinator have been noted in the evaluation process.

3. Impact of the project on pupil take up for MFL at GCSE

3.1 Baseline situation for MFL in schools participating in the project

School characteristics

Both phases of the project included both Welsh medium and English medium schools in all four regional consortia. Schools were selected partly on pragmatic grounds (i.e. distance from the university supplying the student mentor) and partly using criteria related to their profile as regards take up of MFL, for example, in EAS, schools were chosen where pupils performed well in MFL at KS3, but where there was low take up at KS4. The desired outcomes varied from school to school: for example, in some schools the goal was simply to recruit enough students to be able to run a GCSE class, in others where take up was already relatively high, the project targeted pupils from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (i.e. eligible for Free School Meals - FSM) or More Able and Talented pupils (MAT).

Participation in MFL in Key Stage 4 in the project schools

At the point of starting to take part in the project, schools provided details of participation rates in MFL in Years 10 and 11: the national average is believed to be a little over 20%. In both phases, there were significant differences between partner schools in terms of take up, ranging from more than 50% in one school, to 0% in several schools where there was currently no GCSE course running. In Phase 1, schools had on average higher participation rates in Year 11 than in Year 10, indicating a downward trend. However, those schools participating for the first time in Phase 2 of the project, although starting with lower participation, seemed to be on an upward trend, since on average they had more pupils taking MFL in Year 10 than in Year 11.

	Year 10	Year 11
Phase 1	20%	24%
Phase 2	17%	15%

Table 4: Percentage of pupils studying MFL in Key Stage 4 in participating schools at project initiation

Choices already made by pupils

The initial/baseline surveys completed by pupils asked whether they had already decided whether to continue with MFL in Key Stage 4 and if so, what their plans were. The responses to this question show a substantial difference between the Phase 1 mentees, who had already been chosen to participate in the project, and the Phase 2 cohort, who are more representative of the general pupil population. In the interim evaluation, the large proportion of Phase 1 pupils already saying they would continue with MFL was a barrier to identifying the true impact of the project, and in Phase 2 schools were advised to select ONLY those pupils who had said they were planning to drop the subject or were undecided. In fact, a small proportion of those who took part in Phase 2 were those who had already planned to continue. It is not clear why schools selected these pupils to take part, possibly because they did not expect the preferences expressed to be definitive.

Phase 1	Phase 2
---------	---------

Planning to continue	39%	18%
Planning to drop	15%	45%
Undecided	46%	37%

Table 5: Pupils' plans regarding MFL on completion of initial questionnaire

3.2 Mentees' take up of MFL following the intervention

In Phase 1, the evaluation data is based on 136 pupils who were mentored, of whom 93 supplied data at the beginning of the mentoring process about their choices regarding MFL. As noted earlier, this data cannot be regarded as reflecting their 'baseline' status, since their choices may already have been influenced by the input they had received at this stage (and the very fact of being selected and agreeing to take part). Of these, 56 already said that they wished to continue with MFL in Key Stage 4. At the end of the mentoring intervention, the total number of mentees (including those for whom baseline information was not available) had risen to 77, **equivalent to 57% of the total number of pupils mentored in Phase 1**. This proportion varied considerably by Regional Consortium, reflecting the different criteria used by schools and consortia to select pupils to take part.

	Pupils mentored	Initial data available	Originally choosing MFL	Choosing MFL post intervention	Proportion opting/mentees
CSC	39	28	20	29	74%
EAS	22	16	10	16	73%
ERW	41	15	5	14	34%
GWE	34	34	21	18	53%
TOTAL	136	93	56	77	57%

Table 6: Phase 1 evaluation data by regional consortium

In Phase 2, two important changes were made. Firstly, data was collected from pupils **before** they were chosen to take part in the project; this was in order to establish a true baseline in advance of any possible impact of the project. Secondly, based on recommendations from the interim evaluation, schools were asked **not** to select pupils to take part in the project who had already indicated that they wished to take MFL in Key Stage 4. In addition, the project was extended to include a vastly increased number of pupils. The data available for Phase 2 is therefore much more conducive to assessing the true impact of the project.

	Pupils mentored	Baseline data available	Pupils baseline choices unknown	Originally choosing MFL (N)	Originally choosing MFL (% of baseline)	Pupils baseline choices unknown, deemed originally choosing MFL	Total deemed to have originally chosen MFL	Choosing MFL post intervention	Now choosing MFL (% of mentees)	Added value (N)	Added value (%)
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
CSC	226	168	58	60	36%	21	81	114	50%	33	41%
EAS	166	84	82	23	27%	22	45	89	54%	44	145%
ERW	330	202	128	59	29%	37	96	173	52%	77	118%
GWE	146	95	51	16	17%	9	25	61	42%	36	183%
Total	868	549	319	158	29%	89	247	437	50%	190	77%

Table 7: Phase 2 evaluation data

As shown above, in Phase 2, baseline data was available from 549 out of 868 mentees and of these a total of 29 per cent had said before being chosen to take part that they would like to continue with MFL (column F). It is clear that for one reason or another, the intention for all mentees to be pupils who had not already decided to take MFL was not fulfilled, varying between consortia from 17% to 36%. We have taken these proportions and applied them also to the mentees who did not complete the baseline survey, on the assumption that a similar proportion of these would have originally wanted to continue with MFL (column G). This gives a base figure (column H) with which to compare the total number of mentees who in fact decided, after the intervention, to take MFL to GCSE, allowing us to show the added value of the project in terms of the number of additional pupils opting for MFL (column K) and as a proportion of the original number who said they would do so (column L).

The key findings from Phase 2 are therefore that:

- **50% of pupils mentored chose to take MFL in Key Stage 4, up from the 29% who had originally said they would do so.**
- **This represents an additional 190 pupils, and an added value of 77%.**
- **In three consortia, the number of pupils choosing MFL more than doubled and in one case nearly tripled.** Added value was less high, although still very positive, in the consortium where a high proportion of pupils had been selected who already said they wanted to take MFL.

Although the proportion of mentees who chose to take MFL was lower in Phase 2 (50%) than in Phase 1 (57%), this was because Phase 2 was targeted more precisely at pupils who were 'unsure' or who had previously thought they would not to take MFL. However, Phase 2 clearly made a more impressive impact, not only because the 'conversion rate' was higher, but because a larger number of pupils were involved, more than six times the number in Phase 1.

The conversion rates of 50% and 57% both represent very significant increases on the baseline figures and on the national picture in which the participation rate is around 20%. In the baseline pupil survey of the whole Phase 2 cohort, only 18 per cent said they would choose MFL, and 37% were unsure. Comparing this to the national participation rate of around 20%, we can see that only a small proportion of these pupils who were unsure would be likely to decide to take the subject. (And

indeed, some who were positive when they completed the survey might change their mind or would find themselves unable to take the subject).

The very low level of take-up in some schools at the start of the intervention also needs to be taken into account in judging the success of the project – **4 schools had had no GCSE group running for several years, but were able to run one after taking part in the project.** And in one such school, although only 4 out of the 23 mentees chose to do MFL, there were only 6 choosing to do so in the whole year group.

3.3 Case studies

In this section we have identified examples of schools where the project has proved particularly successful, and those where its impact has been more limited.

Radyr

This is a school which has traditionally attracted relatively high numbers to its Key Stage 4 classes, which run for three years with pupils opting in Year 8. It currently has 20% take up in Year 9, 39% in Year 10 and 25% in Year 11. The school joined the project as part of Phase 2, as a result of which 17 out of the 20 mentees chose MFL, two of whom had previously said they would not choose to do MFL and 7 who were previously not sure. This represents one of the best conversion rates in the project. However, higher up the school, 5 pupils opted to take French at AS level next year and the Headteacher will not allow this course to run.

Cantonian High School/Lewis Girls School/Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen

These three schools, where no GCSE MFL classes have run for several years took part in Phase 2 of the project and will now run GCSE classes from September 2017. (See also Dylan Thomas below).

Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen

The school took part in both phases of the project and has seen a successful impact in both. In Year 1, 5 out of 8 mentored pupils decided to take MFL, when only 2 had previously said they would, and in Year 2, 17 out of 23 mentored pupils opted for the subject. This school had only 10% uptake for MFL on initiating participation in the programme. The Head of Department said that she now had the biggest GCSE class she had ever had at the school, and commented '[Our mentor] has been fantastic, the students here have loved her sessions. She has worked totally independently and made a real effort to build a relationship with the students'.

Dylan Thomas

This school has had no GCSE class for MFL since 2014 and took part in both phases of the project. In the first year, none of the mentees opted for the subject, but the school runs a three-year GCSE course and has 17 pupils taking Spanish in Year 9. As a result of participation in Phase 2 of the project, 13 out of 23 mentees opted for MFL and there will be two language classes running for next year's Year 9: Spanish GCSE and French Global Communication, each with 10 pupils.

Ysgol David Hughes

Although this school took part in both phases of mentoring, their engagement in the scheme was reported to have been very poor: no teacher from the school attended the teachers' briefing at Bangor University, or the Award and Recognition ceremony. There has also been a low level of engagement from the Regional Consortium, meaning that the selection and approach to schools was

done by the National Coordinator in conjunction with the Bangor University Lead. After Phase 1, none of the 10 mentored pupils opted for MFL, although 3 out of 21 did so in Phase 2.

Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni

This school took part in both phases of the project, with strong support from the Head teacher. It was one of the schools where poor appreciation of the value of language learning among pupils was reported as a major obstacle and the mentoring project was part of a concerted effort to improve take up for MFL, which included the introduction of a Chinese class. Take up for languages has increased year on year, from 12% in (current) Year 11, to 56% in (current) Year 10, reaching 70% in current Year 9, spread over French, Spanish and German. The Head teacher has made French compulsory for all top-set pupils. As a result of involvement in the mentoring project, 16 out of 20 mentees opted for MFL.

3.4 Take up for MFL in the project schools following the intervention

Data on take up in the project schools more widely following the intervention is available for 21 schools which took part in Phase 1. These schools reported on the level of take up for MFL for the Year 10 groups starting their GCSE courses in September 2016: 11 had seen numbers for MFL fall in the period before the initiative, whereas after the initiative, 13 schools had increased numbers.

Changes in the proportions of pupils taking MFL in Year 10, 2014 to 2015, by school:

- 8 increases
- 11 decreases
- 2 no change (including one school with no GCSE MFL class in either 2014 or 2015)

Changes in the proportions of pupils taking MFL in Year 10, 2015 to 2016 (i.e. after the intervention)

- 13 increases
- 5 decreases
- 3 no change, including one with no GCSE MFL classes running

Although these figures cannot show causality, they suggested that the project had an impact on take up more widely in the project schools, beyond the actual pupils being mentored. This hypothesis was given further substance in interviews with teachers and mentors. Clearly where mentoring enables a GCSE class to run where it has not done so before, other pupils benefit too.

3.5 Other factors affecting take up

In assessing the impact of the project, it is necessary to take into account other factors which may have limited or boosted the indicators used to judge its success: whilst on the one hand some of the successes of the project may be in part due to other actions, on the other there are well-known systemic factors which were not within the remit of the project to address which continue to limit take up.

In addition to the mentoring programme, it is evident that many other initiatives and projects have been taking place in schools to raise the profile of languages. These included visiting speakers,

student Language Ambassadors provided through Routes into Languages, and efforts by the teachers themselves. One teacher mentioned, for example, that she was providing careers information through the medium of French by looking at different jobs in French lessons. Many of these types of activities have already been running for several years, and it is likely that in conjunction with the focused efforts of the mentoring programme, they have contributed to its success, echoing its key messages and reaching a wide range of pupils and year groups. However, one teacher noted that although such efforts were often effective in ‘firing up pupils’, ‘the problem comes when the option blocks appear’. This and other systemic issues have clearly been a factor in limiting the potential impact of the mentoring project.

Reasons for low take up

In both phases, teachers were asked in their baseline questionnaires to give reasons why take up for MFL was not higher in their school. In the Phase 1 questionnaire, teachers were invited to say in their own words what they thought the main reason was for more pupils not taking a language to GCSE in their school. By far the most frequent reason given was the dearth of option choices and the plethora of subjects to choose from, in which languages are perceived as more difficult than other subjects. In Phase 2, the question was asked as a multiple-choice option (one answer permitted) based on the main reasons given in Phase 1. Here the small number of option choices once again came through as the most frequent reason, followed by the perceived difficulty of the subject. It is significant that only one school said that pupil attitudes were the main problem.

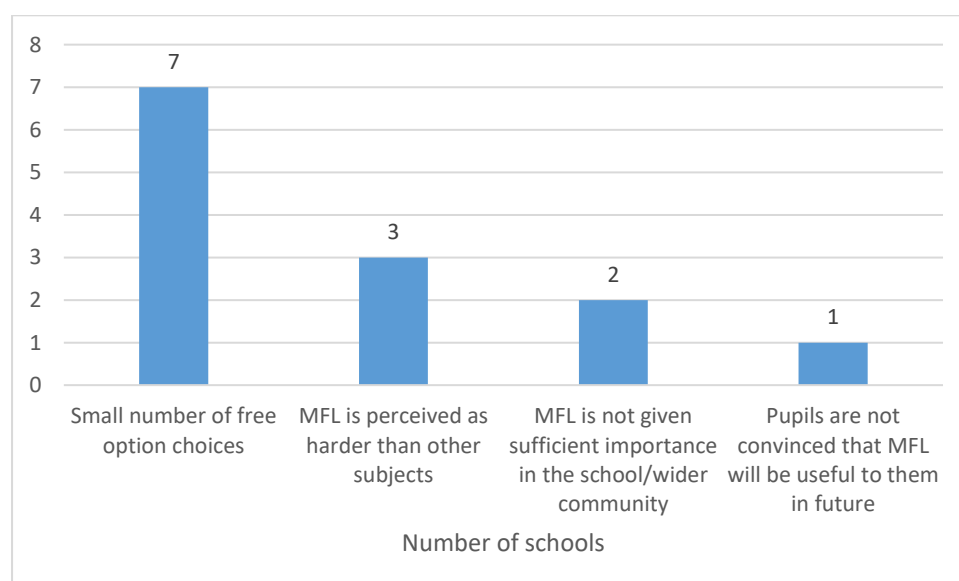


Figure 1: Main reason given by teachers why take up at Key Stage 4 is not higher, Phase 2 schools

In relation to perceptions of the difficulty of the subject, one teacher commented:

‘Unfortunately, the pupils also have a preconception that languages at GCSE are very difficult, which was proven in the listening exams for German today!’

Evidence collected for this report shows that **the attitudes of senior management and the wider community are indeed an important factor**, and we make some recommendations on this below.

Reasons for pupil choices regarding MFL

The very plentiful data from the Phase 2 baseline survey involving more than 3,000 Year 9 pupils provides some exceptional insights into the factors which pupils say affect their choices at GCSE. The multiple-choice options listed in the chart below were derived from the free text responses to the question put to pupils in Phase 1.

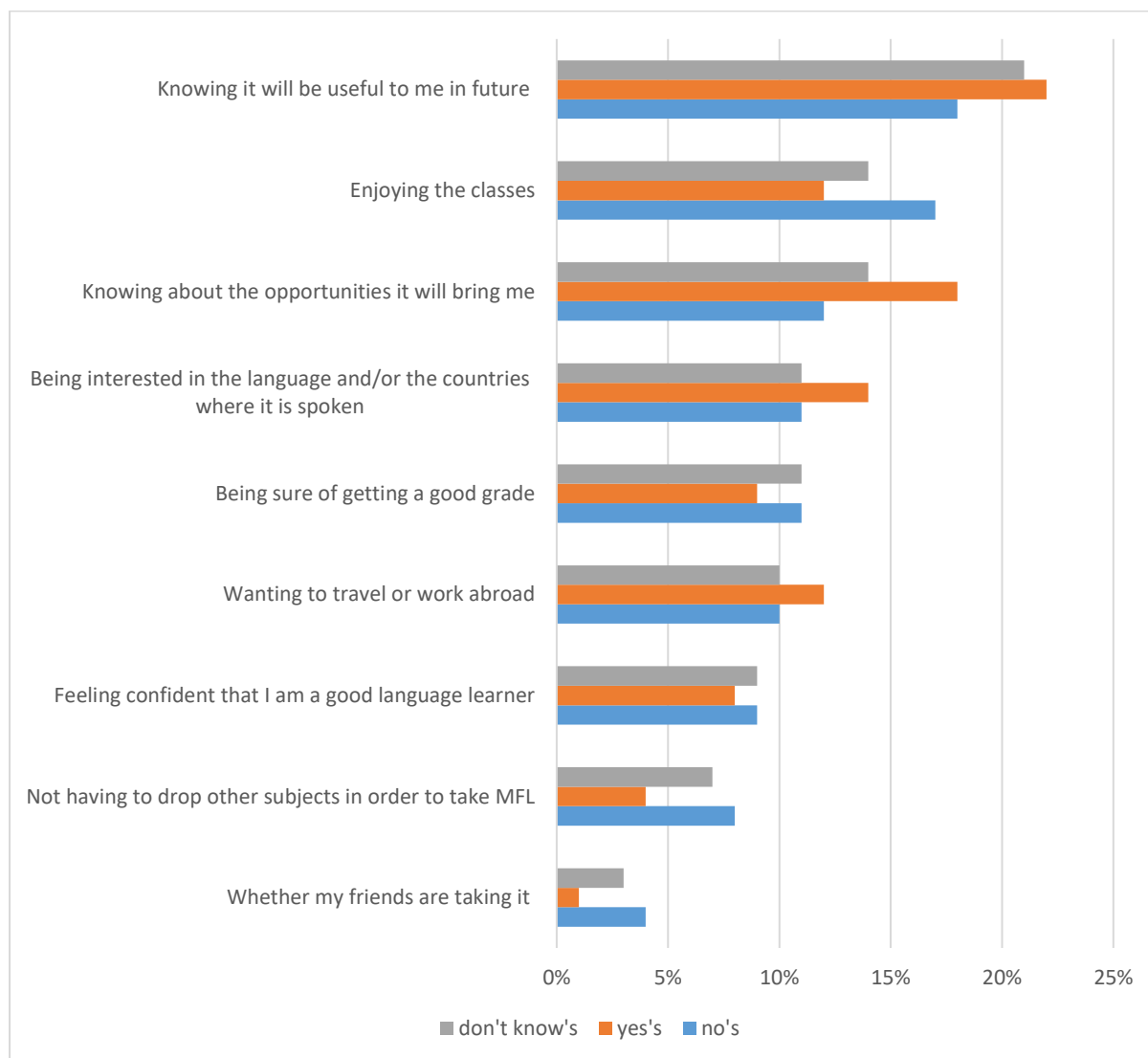


Figure 2: Factors in deciding whether to take MFL to GCSE, Phase 2 cohort, by pupil intentions

The findings presented above show very little significant difference in motivation between pupils who wanted to continue with MFL, those who wanted to give it up, and those who were not sure. For all three groups, the perceived 'usefulness' of the subject was the most important factor: we can see therefore that while the perception of 'usefulness' works to motivate those who wish to continue, a corresponding perception that the subject is not useful acts as a rationale for giving it up. As one pupil who had decided to give it up commented: 'because I shall never use it again'. Another said: 'I need to know that I will have a good grade to carry me and that I can trust that this will help me through life not just a waste of time just so I can talk to other people in different countries'. It is notable that pupils who already knew they wanted to study the subject did not rate enjoyment or the prospect of achieving a good grade as highly as their peers who were still unsure or who had already decided not to take MFL. Instead, pupils who wanted to take the subject valued being interested in the language and culture, and the idea of the opportunities that would come their way

as a result. These findings highlighted the **importance of the project in tackling the issue of ‘usefulness’ and raising awareness of the opportunities through young role models who could speak from direct experience.**

Although the ‘confidence’ factor did not feature strongly in the quantitative results, it was picked up in pupil comments, especially in the Phase 1 survey. Pupils who did not yet know whether they were going to choose MFL for GCSE or not were uncertain both about the extent to which it would help them, and about their own abilities as linguists. Mentors were made aware of the importance of building pupils’ confidence and overcoming the perception that learning a language is hard work for little reward.

In contrast to the comments from teachers, competition with other subjects did not feature strongly in the findings from the pupil survey. This may have been because pupils were surveyed in the autumn term, before they had been made aware of the particular choices they would have to face in the option blocks in their school.

Characteristics of pupils deciding not to take MFL

Using data from Phase 1, we explored the characteristics of pupils who had decided not to take MFL.

Given the development of a new national curriculum for Wales in which the teaching of Welsh, English and MFL will be linked in a single curriculum area, we explored whether pupils’ perceptions of themselves as bilinguals were linked to wider attitudes towards learning languages. In both phases, pupils were asked to assess their own competence in Welsh by ticking one of 4 boxes. The findings clearly reflect only pupils’ own perceptions and indeed, one teacher interviewed for the study noted that pupils may under-estimate their capability in Welsh. They show a wide span of ability, with the Phase 1 mentees generally rating themselves higher than the wider cohort who completed the Phase 2 survey.

	Phase 1 (mentees)	Phase 2 (wider cohort)
Bilingual	23%	11%
Good	33%	35%
OK	35%	41%
Poor	8%	12%

Table 8: Pupils’ self-reported competence in Welsh, Phases 1 and 2

The responses of the Phase 1 mentees were analysed in conjunction with other answers provided to the questionnaire, but no significant patterns emerged. **Those who decided to drop MFL were spread across all categories of self-reported competence in Welsh and bilingual pupils were as likely as monolingual pupils to drop MFL.** It was not possible therefore to draw any quantitative conclusions about whether pupils’ perception of their ability in Welsh is associated with any particular attitudes towards MFL or choices made. However, some pupils made comments showing how **Welsh may sometimes ‘compete’ with MFL because of the compulsory nature of Welsh and the dearth of slots for free choices.** This was echoed by one teacher who commented: ‘Pupils largely from very non-aspirational and extremely insular background/ approach to life find Welsh EXTREMELY hard and see it as ostensibly a foreign language hence another MFL on top, by options, for majority is too daunting.’ One pupil, who rated himself with very low competence in Welsh, made a similar observation: ‘I don’t have enough options in my column to choose an MFL and we already have to learn Welsh’.

Not enjoying the classes was a factor for pupils deciding to give up MFL, but not a very significant one. Three pupils who decided to drop the subject were in the highest category for enjoyment, and only 4 had said that they did not enjoy MFL lessons at all (although all of these were from the same school).

Just under two thirds of the pupils dropping MFL (28 out of 44) had said that they thought the subject would be useful to them in future. Although this was lower than the 80% of all pupils in the study who regarded MFL as useful, there was not a strong correlation between dropping the subject and believing it is not useful. Seven of those dropping the subject had previously said that the MFL would not be useful to them in the future, the rest were unsure.

This evidence shows that, despite the evidence from the baseline surveys, pupil awareness of the value of languages is not the only factor affecting their subject choices. Teachers' observations about the importance of systemic factors, particularly regarding the number of option choices available and clashes with other subjects clearly also come into play. **Pupils may be strongly aware of the benefits of the subject and greatly enjoy their lessons, but still not choose to take it to GCSE because of these systemic factors.**

4. Other impacts of the project in schools and pupils

This chapter looks more widely at the impact of the project on pupil attitudes and aspirations within the schools which took part.

4.1 Pupil attitudes before the intervention

Teachers responding to the baseline survey were asked to rate their pupils' attitudes towards language learning by ticking the prompt which best described the situation in their school:

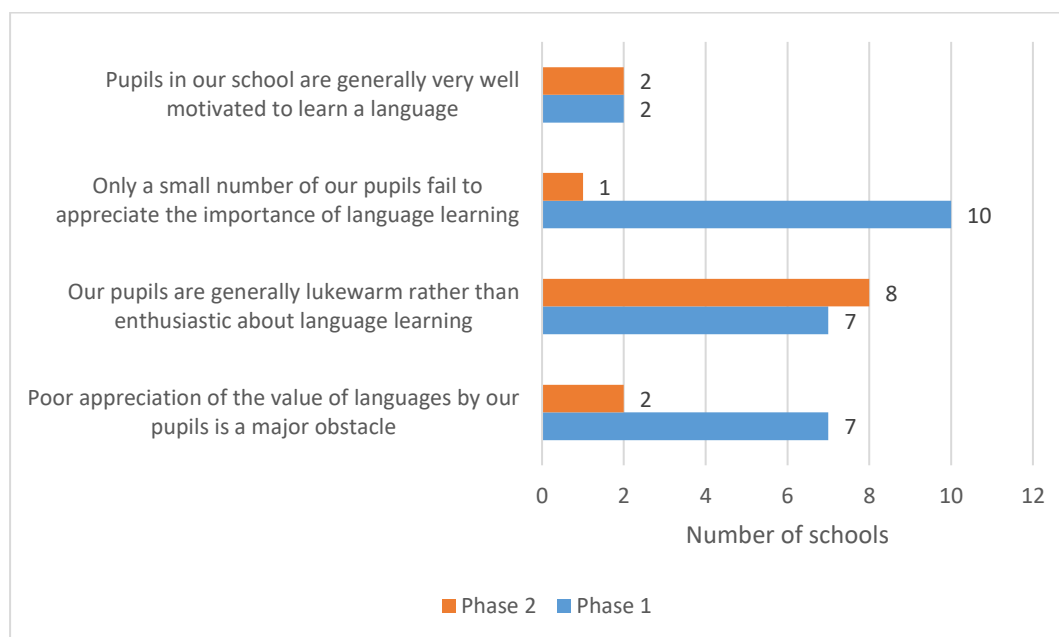


Figure 3: Pupil attitudes towards MFL, Phases 1 & 2

The disparity of the responses shown above highlights the varied circumstances of the project schools and the different contexts in which the mentoring took place. Teachers who were concerned about pupil attitudes towards language learning in their schools commented on the insularity and lack of opportunities pupils had to experience life beyond their immediate communities:

‘Students see no reason to study a language as many have never left the country. They do not understand how learning a language can help job prospects until we tell them or they listen to outside speakers. Many enjoy the lesson but feel that they will never use a language in the future’

‘Many pupils are from an agricultural background and do not believe that language learning will directly affect their future plans’.

One teacher commented that such attitudes particularly affected less academically-oriented pupils: ‘Lower ability pupils tend not to see the value of languages so much.’ Another made a significant point about parental influence, a factor which has not so far been taken into account in the design of the project:

‘Students’ backgrounds are the main influence on attitudes to language learning. Many parents have the same views on languages and don’t see them as important in comparison to other school subjects. Students and parents do not understand the benefits of language learning mostly due to

where they live. Most students never venture outside of Wales and therefore have never experienced different cultures.'

These comments reinforce the value of the project in bringing pupils into direct contact with university students who have recent experience of living in a foreign country and embody a wider range of experiences and options.

Teachers were also asked to rate pupils' aspirations in relation to language learning (Figure 4): once again there was a disparity between schools where teachers thought that pupils' awareness of the advantages of speaking another language was relatively high, and those where there was considerable work still to be done. **This reinforces the finding that, although pupil attitudes towards MFL are a 'major obstacle' in a minority of schools, it is by no means a general rule that pupils are badly disposed towards MFL or that they are badly informed about the potential benefits.**

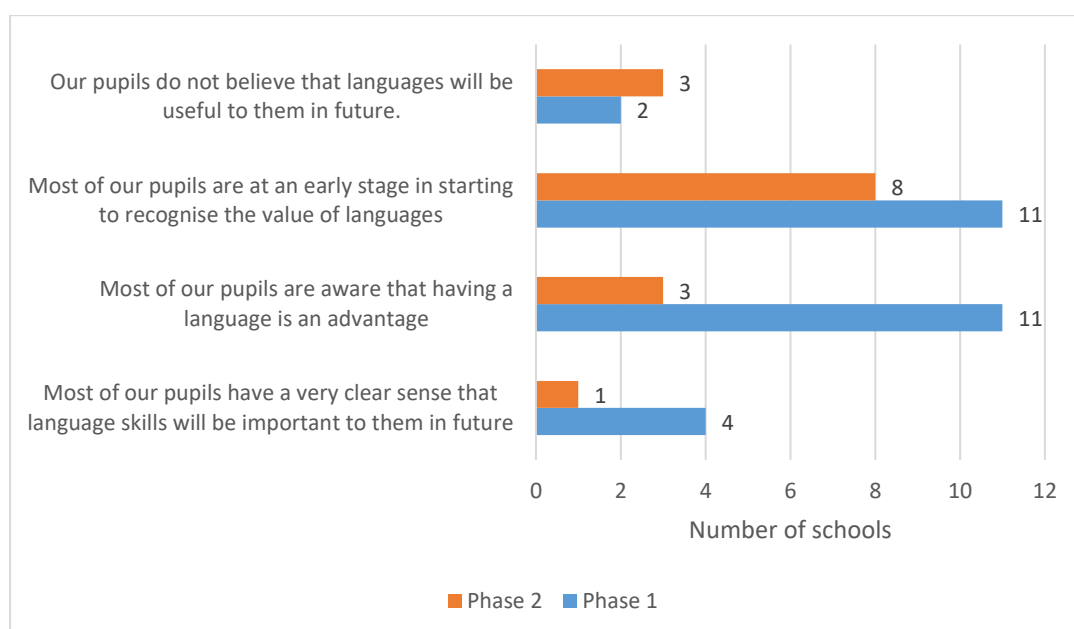


Figure 4: Pupil perceptions of the value of MFL for their future careers, Phases 1 & 2

However, even where awareness is relatively high, this does not necessarily lead to high take up for MFL. Teachers commented: 'I think our pupils are aware that learning languages is very useful and are quite enthusiastic generally in lessons, but parents and other teachers tell them they need other subjects for certain jobs. Other apparently less challenging subjects are often more appealing'. Here again, the influence of parents comes to the fore.

Findings from the project also contradicted the perception that pupils do not enjoy language learning. Pupils in both phases were asked to tick the answer which best described their feelings towards MFL lessons, and attitudes towards MFL were generally positive, as can be seen in the following table:

	Phase 1 (mentees)	Phase 1 ⁶	Phase 2 (whole cohort)
I thoroughly enjoy all MFL lessons	25%		12%
I generally enjoy my MFL lessons	60%	4%	51%
MFL lessons are generally rather dull	8%		21%
I do not enjoy MFL lessons at all	3%		16%

Table 9: Pupils' enjoyment of MFL lessons

The difference between the Phase 1 responses reflecting mentees only, and Phase 2 which reflect the whole cohort, can be attributed to pupils who already enjoyed MFL classes being more likely to be selected to take part in the project. Nonetheless, it shows that **nearly two thirds of pupils generally enjoy their MFL classes** and that, although some pupils find them dull or actively dislike the subject, low take up cannot be attributed a poor experience of language learning. In Phase 1, pupils were asked to comment further and, where they expressed reservations, these tended to be around the level of difficulty, the amount to remember, or not liking particular aspects of the language-learning process. Expressions about 'confusion' were also quite common. Pupils who did not like their MFL lessons said they found it 'boring' or 'hard', or disliked particular activities. But even pupils who said they did not enjoy their MFL lessons at all, or generally found them dull, were able to articulate some positive feelings towards the subject. **These remarks highlight the importance of building confidence and resilience among learners, something the project has actively sought to address.** However, as noted above, enjoyment of the subject alone is not sufficient to deliver high take up, as one teacher observed: 'Pupils comment that they enjoy the lessons but think other subjects will be of more use to them.'

With low aspiration a key factor not only in take up for MFL, but for educational achievement more generally, the project sought to broaden pupils' horizons and raise ambitions as regards their future careers. In Phase 1, three quarters (75%) of pupils said that they planned to go to university, with 23% undecided, and only 4 pupils saying they did not plan to go on to higher education. In the Phase 2 cohort, a lower proportion, 62%, said they planned to go to university and 31% were not sure. In Phase 1 (but not Phase 2), pupils were asked what subjects they might be interested in studying at university. Just over a quarter of pupils (26%) said that they might be interested in studying a modern foreign language at university – a surprisingly high proportion, although multiple answers were permitted and most put languages alongside a range of other possibilities, such as 'Law or MFL', or 'geography, sociology, drama and French'. The number of pupils saying that they wanted to study sciences was very slightly higher than those interested in MFL, and the interest in PE/Sport Science also very high. The large number of pupils saying that they might study a language at university showed that pupils are open-minded at this stage and that **there is therefore considerable potential to improve take up from Key Stage 4 through to higher education.**

When pupils were asked about what jobs they could see themselves doing in future, the most popular area of work in Phase 1 was the Sports Industry, and in Phase 2 this came second after professional careers such as law or architecture. Although some responses were very specific (e.g. 'running my own carpentry business') responses tended to cluster round a narrow range of responses, suggesting that pupils were not yet aware of the full range of careers open to them. It

⁶ A small number of pupils in Phase 1 ticked an intermediate response.

was significant that very few pupils stated that they were interested in careers in ‘business’, although MFL is frequently promoted for this purpose.

In Phase 1, as many as 80% of pupils said at the beginning of the project that MFL would benefit them in their future career, 15% were unsure and 5% (12 pupils) said it would not be useful to them. These responses contrasted strongly with those from the wider cohort surveyed in Phase 2, in which only half that proportion – 41% – said that a language would benefit them, 38% were unsure and 20% said it would not benefit them. This contrast suggests that pupils’ opinions in Phase 1 had already been modified by the intervention by the time they completed the survey, but it also highlights the generic challenge which the project sought to address.

There was evidence that some pupils, around 10%, had thought specifically about the usefulness of a language in relation to the future careers that interested them, for example: ‘It could help because people get a boat to Holyhead and their car might need repair and might speak a different language’. These messages almost certainly came from work to raise awareness of MFL either before the intervention or during the first session. Messages about general employability and the ability to speak another language making the difference at interview, which have been strongly promoted by Routes into Languages and CILT Cymru for many years, had evidently made an impression in the minds of pupils who commented to the effect that employers would be likely to choose a person with experience in languages over someone without. However, some comments belied misconceptions about the benefits of languages – e.g. ‘It’s not useful on computers’ – highlighting the importance of more in-depth careers information and advice. Some comments provided evidence of the lack of opportunities some pupils had had to travel abroad or interact with people from abroad: ‘Just in case you meet someone from a different country you can talk to them’.

Only a very small number of comments related to the cognitive or cultural benefits of speaking another language and it was notable that most of the views expressed focused on the transactional or instrumental value of learning a language and pupils’ own benefit. **There was very little evidence of internationalist values or the desire to access and understand other cultures as motivations for language learning.**

The number of comments from pupils relating to the value of languages for business purposes, for example ‘if you make a business you can deal with different suppliers in different countries’, contrasted with the relative dearth of pupils who expressed interest in taking business studies at university, or working in the business sector. Conversely, several pupils expressing an interest in business did not see how a language would benefit this. This leads to the conclusion that **careers information, advice and guidance focussing on enterprise education combined with MFL might help pupils to develop their thinking and ultimately could support the development of the Welsh economy.**

4.2 Pupil attitudes during and after the project intervention

Mentors’ views

Mentors all said that they felt that the pupils had enjoyed the mentoring. They expressed surprise at how low take up for MFL is and talked of wanting to inspire children, and to ‘share passion for languages’. They felt that the situation was all the more ‘shocking’ because of Wales being a bilingual country which they had expected to be more open and understand the need to do languages. One mentor noted that pupils had a mindset which saw languages as ‘just another class,

not a skill', and they only saw limited career possibilities. They had been memorising phrases and couldn't understand if the sentence was turned around. She said they loved the GCSE oral practice she did with them. She was surprised by the pupils' lack of opportunities to engage with the language: 'They have never spoken French outside the classroom, have never seen films in French or listened to French music. They see language learning as academic, not alive.'

Mentors were aware that pupils in schools did not see enough 'of what you can do' and felt that they had contributed greatly to this. Pupils had enjoyed hearing about travel and working abroad and had been eager to learn more. All the mentors interviewed felt they had inspired pupils to realise that they could use languages if they 'followed their dreams'. One said that she based her second session on pupils' responses to the initial survey question on what pupils saw themselves doing in future and how languages might help. She followed up interests with them such as medicine, music or working for MI5, so that they could see the direct relevance for themselves. She said pupils were confused and shocked to find out that languages were not just useful for teaching or for holidays. They warmed to mentors' own testimonies of using their languages, such as 'even working in a burrito place it's helped me', and had started to understand the more general benefits such as confidence and presentation skills. Another felt that, even though the pupils she mentored had already decided to take a language, they had been inspired, reassured, and even equipped with some study techniques which would help them. One mentor commented that the pupils were sad when she left and all wanted to do French afterwards, for different reasons. However, mentors were realistic that not all would choose to do a language, but felt that at least they had 'seen what languages can bring' and pupils would at least be able to 'make a more educated choice'. 'It's a short amount of time, you don't think it is going to have an effect, but it does'.

Some mentors also felt that sessions on similarities between languages, and the quirks of different languages had interested the pupils in languages generally. One mentor said she had tried to 'show language from another side' by discussing French slang and French words in English. In addition, one mentor did a session on safety on the internet which she said the pupils had enjoyed.

Mentors could see that the impact of their intervention spread beyond the group being mentored.

In one school, the Head of Languages had already spoken to the Year 8s about their involvement in the second year of the project, and the pupils being mentored had told their friends, creating a 'pyramid effect'. Another mentor commented that 'you could tell from the way they reacted that they were going to spread the word', and another said that pupils' friends were asking about the sessions and she encouraged them to show their friends the packs they received. One mentor had heard other pupils starting to use a phrase she taught her mentees, and assumed that they had shared it. In another school, the mentor felt she had not been more widely recognised and that 'they think I'm a social worker'. However, other pupils who heard about the scheme were 'jealous' and wanted to take part.

One mentor noted a difference in the responses of the boys and the girls, saying that the girls engaged better, while the boys were more fidgety. However, another mentor who worked with mixed pairs of pupils said that the boys were more proactive and the girls were shy. The social aspect of the mentoring had been important for pupils getting to know each other.

Teachers' views

Teachers interviewed were clear that **one of the great successes of the project was in building ambition and broadening horizons**, and that the link with higher education was key to this:

‘I think it made university life in general, and languages in particular, seem more accessible.’

‘Not only were the pupils learning about the values of languages but they were having a chance to speak to a real student’.

One teacher in particular highlighted the importance of the link with the university for pupils in a deprived area of the country:

‘Our pupils are from the economically disadvantaged Valleys and as such a lot of them would be the first member of their family to go to university. It was great for them to see that university is a real option for them and that travelling the world is open to all of them!’

Another noted that pupils more generally had been ‘talking more about universities and their options for the future.’

Teachers interviewed commented that **the scheme, and in particular the link with higher education, had given MFL an improved profile with senior management** and mentioned that ‘the Head spoke about the Award Ceremony and the link between Science and Languages. Other pupils want to take part now’. Another teacher commented: ‘It raised the profile and the Head was pleased.’ **The role of school leaders is clearly crucial in achieving the objectives of the *Global Futures* plan and evidence from this project highlights their importance and the potential to engage them more systematically.**

Teachers had nothing but praise for the mentors and said that they had ‘really motivated the pupils’. All of those interviewed said that they would ‘definitely’ take part again if the programme were offered to them, and they would like it to be made available to more pupils.

5. Added-value of the project: impact on mentors

Mentors felt that the project had benefited both sides – both the pupils and themselves: ‘it felt like success all round’. One commented how useful the experience working with children and lesson planning had been, which they said was good preparation for going into teaching.

The training sessions were greatly valued, particularly ‘how to give good feedback’ and ‘motivational skills.’ Mentors saw that these skills would stay with them long after their involvement. The experience of working in a school was also very valuable: ‘it’s good to say I can work with kids and I’m definitely going to put the training on my CV’. Mentors were pleased to be treated as equals by the staff and allowed in the staff room: ‘I was called ‘Mr Peters and I’m only 21’. S said she wanted to go into teaching and this had reinforced her love of working in schools. She had enjoyed the experience of leading a session: ‘this is my session, I’m leading it’. Another benefit was described as ‘learning to communicate positively’ - becoming more aware of the impact of ‘how you say things’ and how it might be misconstrued. **All these skills were felt to be extremely useful for their future employability** and ‘good to talk about in job interviews’.

One stressed how much she had learnt about the concept of mentoring: ‘it is different, getting pupils to work out examples rather than giving them the answers.’ She had not understood before what ‘mentoring’ meant.

Another mentor said that although she had got a lot out of training and had enjoyed it, she still felt unprepared, and unsure of the titles of sessions. Another stressed how she had to be creative in interpreting the sessions: there was not enough time available and technology was a problem. There is evidence that the experience had taught them to be more autonomous in their planning and preparation. One said that they would 'be more organised with my lesson planning' and another said that in future she would plan 'back up ideas' as not all groups responded well to the same input.

Conclusions and recommendations

There is a large amount of both quantitative and qualitative evidence to show that the project has fulfilled its core aims, both in relation to the specific objective of boosting take up for GCSE MFL in the project schools, and in relation to the more general aim of developing pupils' aspiration and enthusiasm.

The key findings are summarised below, together with an analysis of factors which made the project successful. We also provide a summary of factors which limited its success and recommendations on how these might be addressed.

7.1 Key findings

Quantitative impacts

- In Phase 1, 57% of the total number of pupils mentored chose to take MFL in Key Stage 4 and in Phase 2, 50% did so. These represent very significant increases on the baseline figures and on the national picture in which the participation rate is around 20%.
- In Phase 2, only 29% of mentees had originally said they would take MFL, but an additional 190 pupils decided to do so after the intervention, representing an added value of 77%.
- In three consortia, the number of pupils choosing MFL more than doubled.
- 4 schools had had no GCSE group running for several years, but were able to run one after taking part in the project.

Qualitative impacts

- All pupils, and especially those from isolated or economically disadvantaged areas, have benefitted from direct personal contact with university students who have recent experience of living in a foreign country and embody a wider range of experiences and options. The opportunity to visit universities for Award and Recognition ceremonies has stimulated pupils' ambitions and discussion about their future careers.
- The project has actively addressed the challenge of building confidence and resilience among MFL learners and has been warmly welcomed by their teachers.
- Mentors have benefited from the training and the experience that the project has provided and will take this forward into their future careers.
- The scheme, in particular because of the way it has linked schools with higher education, had given MFL an improved profile with senior school management. The project has highlighted the importance of school leaders in achieving the objectives of the *Global Futures* plan and the potential to engage them more systematically.

Other insights provided by the project

- Although pupil attitudes towards MFL are a 'major obstacle' in a minority of schools, it is by no means a general rule that pupils are badly disposed towards MFL or that they are badly informed about the potential benefits. Nearly two thirds of pupils generally enjoy their MFL classes.
- Pupils may be strongly aware of the benefits of the subject and greatly enjoy their lessons, but still not choose to take it to GCSE because of systemic factors, particularly the way that MFL appears in option columns.

- Welsh may sometimes ‘compete’ with MFL because of the compulsory nature of Welsh and the dearth of slots for free choices. Pupils who decided to drop MFL were spread across all categories of self-reported competence in Welsh and bilingual pupils were as likely as monolingual pupils to drop the subject.
- There is considerable potential to improve deepen awareness of the specific ways in which MFL can enhance and enrich pupils’ lives and their future careers, and to improve take up from Key Stage 4 through to higher education.
- The attitudes of parents and the wider community are an important determinant of pupils’ choices and thought might be given to addressing these on a future occasion.

7.2 Success factors

The National Coordinator has played a central role in organising, delivering and supporting the project

Mentors reported that the project had been extremely well organised, often very much in excess of their expectations that it would be somewhat chaotic. Organisers ‘understood what was needed’ and had supported them with weekly emails and ideas. One mentor described the National Coordinator’s support as ‘amazing’, another described it as ‘super-helpful’. Teachers also all confirmed that the project had been very well organised, one commenting in particular that the initial meeting with the National Coordinator was ‘thorough and very well explained’.

Mentoring in small groups has provided a more personal, individualised way of engaging pupils with key messages and ideas

Mentors observed that many pupils had already had a lot of input on encouraging them to take languages, but not in such small groups. This made the intervention more personal: pupils were less inhibited and able to ask questions, for example about the Year Abroad. However, some mentors and teachers suggested that there should be at least one session in a larger group to allow more pupils to benefit.

University mentors who are relatively close in age to the pupils mentored have provided realistic but inspiring role-models

Comments emerging from the mentor interviews indicated that using ‘younger people’ to talk to pupils was a particularly important factor in the success of the project. Another said that it made the experience more real for the pupils as mentors were role models close in age and could remember their own GCSE orals!

One teacher who had experienced two different mentors in her school felt that one was better than the other, with one being rather quiet and the other more outgoing, although she stressed that both were very reliable and felt that it was a question of personality, not training. Teachers commented:

‘Our pupils really liked our student mentor and enjoyed the sessions with her. She knew what she needed/wanted to do with the pupils over the 6-week period.’

‘The success of the programme comes down to your student mentors. I know you are thorough when choosing who will participate, and I agree that it is so important to do that. If there was a student mentor who was not passionate and approachable then the programme would certainly not be as effective.’

The professional development and training programme for mentors not only provided excellent preparation for their work in schools, but a development opportunity that they will take with them into their future careers

Mentors were unanimous that this had provided an excellent developmental opportunity for them, as well as preparing them for the task in hand. They all felt that the training received had been useful, enjoyable and well-focussed and that they would be able to put what they had learned to use more widely in their future careers. The whole experience was clearly exceptionally useful from the point of view of their future employability. Although only one of those interviewed intended to go into teaching, they all felt it was an excellent experience to include in their CVs and would give them plenty to discuss in future job interviews.

The link with higher education and opportunity for pupils to visit a university for the Award and Recognition ceremony have impacted both on the pupils themselves and on school leadership

One teacher identified the university visit as the absolute key factor in the success of the project, saying that 'if anything makes a difference it will be Award Ceremony at Cardiff University.' She described the chance to see life outside of a housing estate as a 'momentous' experience for pupils. Evidence from both teachers and mentors shows that linking the world of higher education to schools in this way has been hugely beneficial in raising aspiration and making progression to higher education seem a realistic and achievable proposition for pupils. This is an impact which goes far beyond the MFL subject area and is particularly important for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

7.3 Limiting factors and recommendations for future

Organisation and facilities within some schools have been poor

Some mentors were quite critical of their reception in the schools they worked in, saying that schools were not prepared, seemed chaotic, and that pupils arrived late and this interfered with the time available. Several commented on timetabling issues and the difficulty in finding a suitable time to run the sessions. Those who had to travel long distances felt that it was a 'long drive for a short input' but recognised that there was not much that could be done about the logistics of distance.

Mentors were also dissatisfied with the space allotted to them. One commented: 'I expected to be in a classroom, not a small cupboard or corridor, which was very overcrowded. People were always coming in late and there were disruptions when pupils were thrown out of classes.'

Another point of dissatisfaction was the lack of IT facilities. One sought to remedy the lack of a computer by bringing her own laptop but then found there was no wifi. Several agreed that having a projector and better technology would have improved the experience for pupils.

Teachers in schools are clearly very busy: one said that they had had very limited with the mentor for this reason, and a lack of engagement with the project in some schools may be attributable to this reason.

Another issue that emerged was the resistance of other departments to pupils being taken out of their classes, but as one teacher commented, 'when pupils are identified as needing extra literacy work, they are taken out of MFL classes, so it works both ways'.

Staff sickness, reorganisation and other types of disruption limited the potential impact of the project in a few schools, as the following comments show:

‘Unfortunately, this year we have had quite a lot of disruption and this has really affected our numbers for next year. One of my department is on maternity leave and the another is off with stress. Consequently, the year 9 classes of those teachers have been covered by a string of supply teachers and this lack of continuity has had a knock-on effect on options. In German, only 10 pupils have opted and in French we have 18 in one column and 3 in another, so the 3 have been asked to re-choose. This is a big blow for us as we always have 2 healthy classes for French in Year 10.’ (Head of MFL)

‘A very difficult year in the school, as the teacher had to apply for her job, also they couldn't take part in the second phase as the school was closed and pupils had to be taught in other schools’ (National Coordinator)

‘The school had never done it before and the Head of MFL was hospitalised during the process and was the only person who taught languages so she had to deal with supply teachers who weren't informed.’ (Mentor)

Recommendation: school leadership teams should be engaged in the project from the outset, with a named member of the senior school leadership responsible for oversight of the project within the school.

Financial constraints in schools are squeezing MFL classes and the viability of smaller groups

This issue has affected not only the minimum numbers schools will allow for a course to run, but their very ability to provide data on take up, as these comments show:

‘Due to budget cuts, the options columns keep changing and I have still not been given the final list. GCSE PE was set against French and a lot of the boys plumped for that instead earlier in the year. However, since then options for PE have been modified and I do not know whether this has affected decisions. So far only one definite, but maybe more. Really sorry not to be clearer. I found out today that Music had changed columns to the one for French which means some pupils who chose French may not do so as they also wanted to do Music! A result of cuts I am afraid.’

Later the same teacher commented: ‘The options have still not been confirmed to us. There are still meetings going on with pupils and SLT regarding courses being offered, and courses are still changing. This is due to the school facing budget cuts and rationalising courses. I have been assured that French will run, and that there are 'healthy numbers'. As I said before I am only sure of one of the boys being mentored who is taking French. All participants were very enthusiastic and gave very positive feedback to the mentoring. Curriculum leaders were not consulted on options columns unfortunately, and there is very little more I can add. Really sorry for this unsatisfactory response.’

This school was participating in the project for the second year. In the first year 4 out of 5 mentored pupils chose MFL, though all had previously said they would. The school had a take up rate of 17-19% on starting to participate in the project.

Recommendation: engagement of school leadership teams, as above.

The way schools offer MFL within option columns is a major constraint on pupil choice

As teachers indicated in their baseline responses, the small number of free option slots in schools is a limiting factor and this prevented the project from achieving a bigger impact. As one teacher commented: 'Some of the pupils who took part in the programme came to speak to me to say how much they wanted to do a MFL but their choices were limited'. Others complained about 'problems with option columns' and the way the columns were organised which put MFL at a disadvantage: 'Our school has put Triple Science and French together again this year and this has really affected numbers, more so than last year. I have asked for French to be placed in another block but this has been refused. Very frustrating and upsetting!' (School where 7 of 18 mentees chose MFL, of whom only one had originally said they would do so.)

'Pupils in our school are having to do more Maths and this is cutting down on their option choices.'

'This year French was only put into one option column which we feel seriously affected our take up. Senior Management disagree with this though! They think it is due to the loss of [a teacher] this year! (School where 3 out of 22 mentees chose MFL – none having done so previously).

I'm afraid only 2 of the 16 have opted for MFL. This is no reflection of the programme or [the mentor] - our numbers have dropped from 27 this year to 8 next year, unfortunately. I think factors such as compulsory full course Welsh this year as well as the Welsh Bacc have had a negative impact!

Recommendation: that schools taking part in the project be required to arrange for MFL to appear in a sufficient number of GCSE option blocks so that all mentees who wish to take the subject are able to do so. The Welsh Government might consider making this a national requirement for all schools, so that all pupils have an entitlement to take a GCSE in a modern foreign language.

Successes of the project not reciprocated in schools: some pupils who wanted to take MFL as a result of the project have not been able to do so

There was frustration expressed by some teachers – and by one mentor too – that although the programme had achieved considerable success, decisions within the school had prevented the impact from being realised. In one school which had not run a GCSE MFL class for (at least) the past two years, although five out of nine mentees chose to take MFL, the class was not allowed to run. (Tredegar)

In another school, although 22 pupils (12 of whom were mentored) wanted to take French, the Head teacher would only allow it to run as an after-school group (West Monmouth).

In another school, although the project provided enough pupils for a French class, take up was too low for German and it was not allowed to run. The teacher in this school commented: 'We are suffering from the choice boxes, as probably every school in Wales, due to financial restraints and the BACC. It is a sad state of affairs that schools are reducing to one language at GCSE, as we will eventually find that we no longer have the expertise needed in the future. The profile of Global Futures could be emphasised to Heads and the demands of languages within the Donaldson report needs to be raised.'

One mentor noted that in her school 'they had to make their preliminary choices during the mentoring and most wanted to do MFL, but although some pupils opted in, the teacher ruled some out.'

These comments contrast sharply with the experience of the school which has experienced year on year increases in take up for MFL as a result of the head teacher's commitment to supporting the subject.

Recommendation: that senior school leaders in partner schools be required to report on their MFL take up in May/June to the National Coordinator.

Teresa Tinsley

9 July 2017