



Language Trends Wales 2025

Language teaching in primary schools, secondary
schools, and post-16 colleges

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Foreword from British Council Wales

It is a crucial moment to introduce the eleventh edition of *Language Trends Wales*, our annual deep dive into the state of international language learning in schools across the country. For over a decade, this report has been a vital reflection of where we stand as a nation in terms of linguistic ambition, cultural openness, and global engagement.

Wales aspires to be an outward-looking nation, international in outlook, confident in its place in the world, and proud of its cultural and linguistic diversity. Language learning is fundamental to realising that vision. It empowers young people to connect, to understand, and to thrive beyond our borders.

This year's findings paint a picture of both growing momentum and serious challenges. We have reasons to be hopeful, but also powerful reasons to act.

At Key Stage 4, we are finally seeing encouraging signs of revival, with uptake in GCSE Spanish and French on the rise. These green shoots are a testament to the dedication and passion of language teachers and advocates across Wales, and to a wider recognition of just how essential multilingualism is in today's world. These gains should be celebrated and built upon.

At primary level, too, there is movement. With international languages now a statutory part of the new Curriculum for Wales, many

schools are stepping forward, embracing the chance to introduce children to the rich diversity of global languages and cultures from an early age. This shift is not just welcome. It is transformative. It lays the foundation for a generation of young people who are more globally aware, more open, and more confident.

But we must not be complacent. Not all primary schools have yet been able to implement international languages. More worryingly, we are witnessing a steep drop in A-level language entries, especially in German, which is now at risk of vanishing altogether from the post-16 curriculum in Wales. This is not just a statistic. It is a warning sign. This decline will limit the language opportunities of our future generations, affecting their ability to live, work, and connect across borders. Languages need to be a cornerstone of our aspirations as a nation, one that sees itself as outward-looking, internationally minded, and proud of its place in the world.

Secondary school provision remains patchy and inconsistent. We cannot allow enthusiasm at primary level to be met with dead ends at secondary and beyond. Without a clear, supported pipeline, we risk inspiring curiosity but failing to offer young people the means to pursue languages further.

After more than ten years of tracking these trends, and consistently reporting declines at key stages of the education system, it is time for more than acknowledgement. It is time we commit to the long-term planning and investment needed to fully realise the ambitions of the Global Futures strategy. Language planning, as we know from *Cymraeg 2050*, requires system-wide thinking and investment. It is in Wales' interest to consider this.

Wales is a nation that celebrates many identities and many voices. We are a Nation of Sanctuary, a multilingual country, and a proud contributor to global conversations. Over 130 languages are spoken by pupils in Wales. What a strength that is. What a foundation to build upon.

But now we need a shared long-term vision, supported by investment, which builds on the positive short-term strategies that have underpinned the excellent work undertaken by Global Futures to date. Building on Global Futures, we need a vision that not only protects the languages we still have, but nurtures the full linguistic richness of our communities. We need a plan with the power, levers, and resources to address the issues, unblock the obstacles, and ensure every learner, whatever their background, has access to high-quality, sustained language learning throughout their educational journey. Global Futures has paved the way for this work, but more is now needed to provide the strategy with the tools to succeed.

Language Trends Wales 2025 offers us insight, but more importantly, it offers us a call to action. Let us take this moment to recommit to language learning in Wales. Let us be bold. Let us be ambitious. Let us ensure that Wales continues to speak and be heard on the global stage

Ruth Cocks

Director, British Council Wales

Introduction

Language Trends Wales is an annual survey of maintained schools and post-16 colleges, designed to gather information about the current situation and trends in International Language teaching and learning. The resulting report aims to i) track International Language learning trends over the years; ii) assess the impact of policy measures in relation to International Languages; and iii) present an overview of the current context of International Language teaching and learning, using quantitative data and the expert views of teachers collected from the surveys.

The first *Language Trends Wales* survey was carried out in 2015, and it is part of a series of annual and biennial British Council research reports carried out in England since 2002, in Northern Ireland since 2019, and in Scotland since 2024. Previous reports can be found on the corresponding country's British Council website.¹ *Language Trends* shows general shifts in the teaching and learning of languages and provides a springboard for teachers, school leaders, academics, inspectors, policy makers, school pupils, and the public to consider aspects of International Language learning more deeply.

British Council Wales contracted a team of researchers at Queen's University Belfast to conduct *Language Trends Wales 2025*. The research team has previously worked on similar outputs for the British Council and includes members with experience of teaching languages in primary and secondary classrooms in the United Kingdom (UK) and abroad.

On behalf of British Council Wales and Queen's University Belfast, we would like to put on record our sincere thanks to the teachers who participated in our research and made this research possible. We thank you for your continued time and support.

Headline findings for 2025

- Over 80 per cent of responding primary schools teach an International Language in the 2024/25 school year, which is double the percentage reported in 2022;
- Eighty per cent of primary schools reported that language lessons are delivered by the class teacher, yet 74 per cent of respondents consider staff proficiency in International Languages to be a main challenge in meeting curriculum requirements;
- Responses from primary schools reflect a plurilingual classroom, with Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Spanish, and Urdu amongst the languages being taught;
- One to two hours per week is timetabled for key stage 3 language learning in two-thirds of responding secondary schools;
- Approximately forty-five different languages and/or dialects are spoken by learners in responding secondary schools;
- Provisional exam figures in Wales reveal increases in French and Spanish GCSE entries, but declining A level entries in French and German;
- Two-fifths of responding secondary schools reported no post-16 provision in International Languages, the majority of which are schools with the least affluent socio-economic profile;
- All responding post-16 colleges have learners of International Languages in Year 12 and in Year 13 in 2024/25; two colleges reported having more than 20 learners of Year 12 International Languages in 2024/25.

¹ See <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/research-series/language-trends>.

Policy context and background

The New Curriculum for Wales (CfW) was introduced to maintained schools in 2022, providing statutory guidance for schools to follow to better support all learners on their educational journey. Notably, the framework aims to provide equality of opportunity regarding ‘the experiences, knowledge and skills that our young people need for employment, lifelong learning and active citizenship’ (CfW, 2022). The New Curriculum provides schools with shared guidelines and expectations for shaping curriculum and assessment. In the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience, ‘International Languages’ education encompasses the teaching of languages other than Welsh and English, including community, modern and classical languages, and British Sign Language (CfW, 2021).

Alongside the new CfW, the government-backed programme Global Futures aims to support the plurilingual ethos of the CfW and help support language learning and education in schools.² Global Futures was first initiated in 2015 following the dissolution of CILT Cymru, Wales’ National Centre for Languages, which had existed since 2002. There are several strategic aims and actions, including the very successful and highly rated MFL Mentoring Project, a scheme that provides high-quality direct support to secondary schools in relation to language learning and studying an International Language at GCSE level.³

Despite these positive and affirming measures to support the growth of a plurilingual society, significant challenges remain in languages education. In 2024, the previous *Language Trends Wales* survey revealed a dwindling pipeline of language learners over the last decade, and voices from the International Languages classroom raised key concerns on the future of language learning, including viability of class size, funding in International Languages and low pupil numbers. The proposed closure of the Modern Languages department in Cardiff university was announced

in January 2025; given that over 60 per cent of undergraduate students in Wales on languages pathways are enrolled in Cardiff University, such action would prompt significant impact on the future of language learning in Wales (University Council for Languages, 2025). A former Cardiff Modern Languages student created a petition to save the department, receiving more than 13,000 signatures of support (Save Cardiff Languages, 2025); at the time of writing, the proposed closure is no longer going ahead and initial plans to cut 400 jobs have been reduced to 138 jobs (BBC, 15 May 2025). However, the future of languages education in higher education remains ambiguous, and such proposed measures are at odds with the plurilingual ethos of the CfW and Global Futures.

Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, published a thematic review of International Language teaching and learning in schools in July 2025.⁴ Survey response rates were comparable to those achieved by *Language Trends Wales* 2025, though we are unable to ascertain if the same schools replied to both our survey and that of Estyn. Their report highlights examples of how primary schools have successfully developed International Languages in the curriculum. There are examples of good quality teaching and learning in the primary, secondary and all-age schools visited by Estyn. However, according to Estyn, curriculum design and the quality of teaching remains inconsistent. As a result, the experiences and opportunities available to pupils in International Languages are too variable. Estyn also found that transition arrangements between the primary and secondary phases are often weak and uptake at GCSE and A Level is low. Taking these issues into account, the future of International Language education in Wales remains challenging.

It is against this policy background and context that the research team embarked on data collection for *Language Trends Wales* 2025.

2 For further information on Global Futures, see <https://www.gov.wales/global-futures-plan-improve-and-promote-international-languages-wales-2022-2025.html>.

3 To find out more about the scheme, see <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/modern-languages/about-us/engagement/foreign-language-student-mentoring>.

4 For the full Estyn report, see <https://estyn.gov.wales/improvement-resources/international-languages-in-schools-in-wales/>.

Research outline

Ethical approval was secured from the Research Ethics Committee at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast prior to data collection. All participants gave their voluntary and informed consent to participate, and the research was conducted to the highest ethical standards.

The research is guided by the following question: 'What is the current state of International Language teaching in primary schools, secondary schools and post-16 colleges in Wales?'. To answer this research question, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, building on the previous *Language Trends Wales* reports. The research methods comprised three surveys for primary schools, secondary schools, and post-16 colleges, all available in Welsh and English. The surveys comprised closed question items to be analysed quantitatively and included some open question items for qualitative commentary.

Survey questions were developed by the research team in early 2025 and refined in consultation with a panel of Welsh education professionals, convened by British Council Wales. The surveys were emailed to schools for the attention of the Headteacher or Head of International Languages, and arrived in the inboxes of 866 primary schools, 165 secondary schools and 11 post-16 colleges. Links to participate in the surveys were also available on British Council Wales social media channels, making an exact response rate difficult to determine.

Schools were invited to submit one response only to the surveys; where multiple responses were received from the same institution, the first response to be received was included in the dataset. For the surveys, closed item responses were analysed using descriptive statistics and comments to open response questions were analysed using thematic analysis.

After datasets were cleaned and duplicates removed, the following response rates were achieved:

	Base (emails delivered)	Number of usable responses	Response Rate
Primary School Survey	866	50	6%
Secondary School Survey	165	57	34.5%
Post-16 College Survey	11	6	54.5%

Table 1: Response rates to the primary, secondary and post-16 college surveys

Public examination figures

The 2025 provisional GCSE entries in Wales show increases in French (2,269 entries in 2025, 2,126 in 2024) and Spanish (1,591 in 2025, 1,359 in 2024), while entries for German have decreased slightly to 432 in 2025 (Figure 1). Figure 2 shows a slight decrease in Other Modern Language entries, from 766 in 2024 to 735 in 2025.

GCSE entries in French, German and Spanish 2015–2025

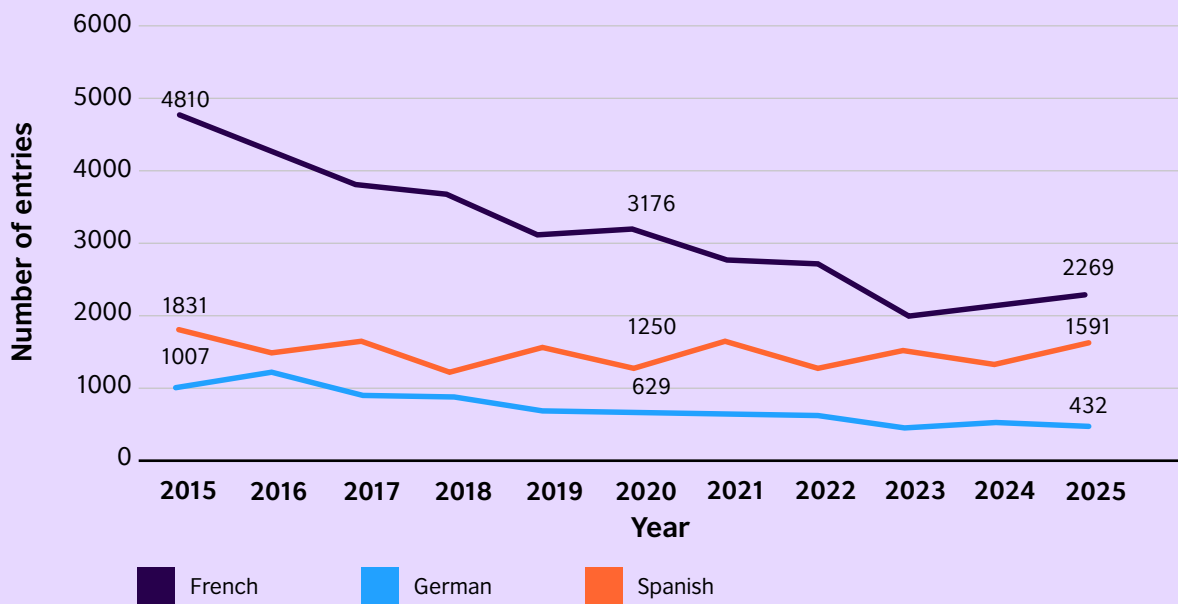


Figure 1: Provisional GCSE entries in French, German, and Spanish 2015-2025 in Wales (Source: Joint Council for Qualification (JCQ))

GCSE entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015–2025

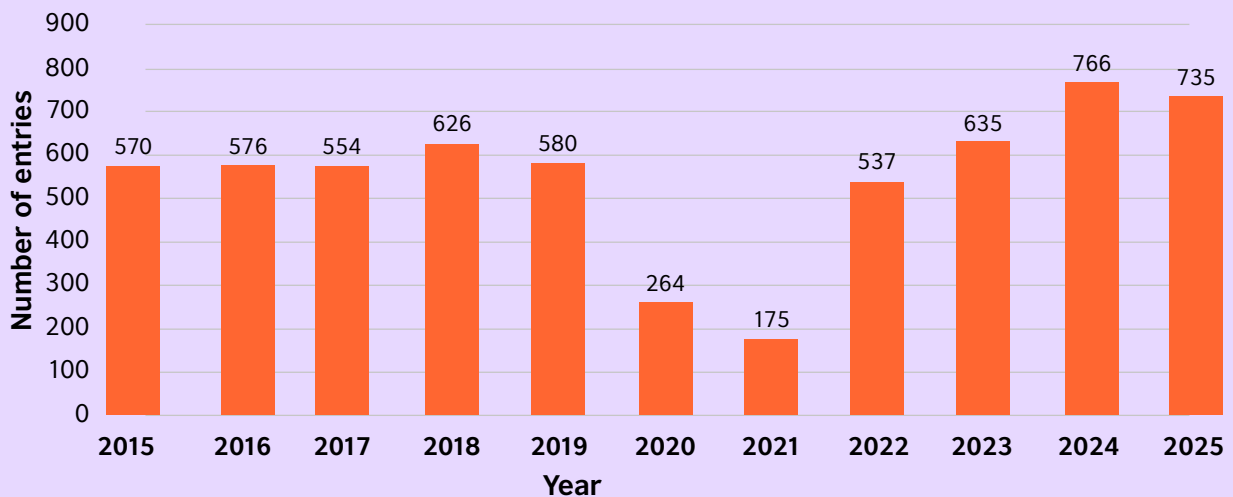


Figure 2: Provisional GCSE entries in Other Modern Languages 2015-2025 in Wales (Source: JCQ)

The 2025 A level entry figures reveal steeply declining entries for French (169 in 2025, compared to 242 in 2024) and German (42 in 2025, compared to 62 in 2024) in Wales (Figure 3). Spanish entries have increased slightly from 139 in 2024 to 141 in 2025. It is positive to note the increase in Other Modern Language entries from 126 in 2024, to 143 in 2025 (Figure 4).

A level entries in French, German and Spanish 2015–2025

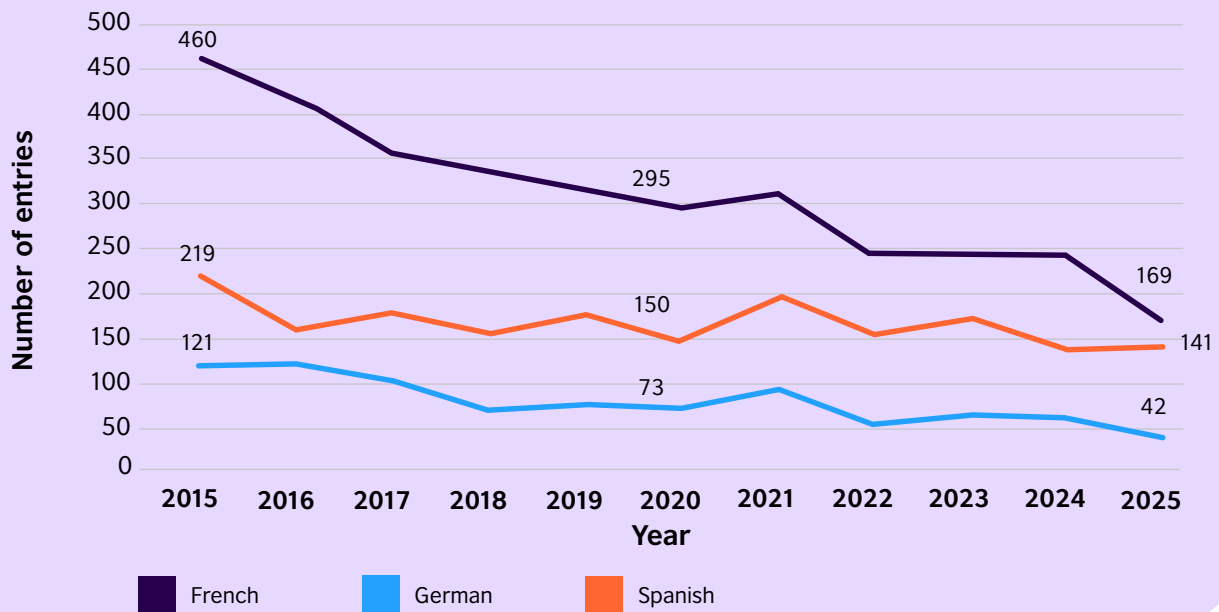


Figure 3: Provisional A level entries in French, German, and Spanish 2015–2025 in Wales (Source: JCQ)

A level entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015–2025

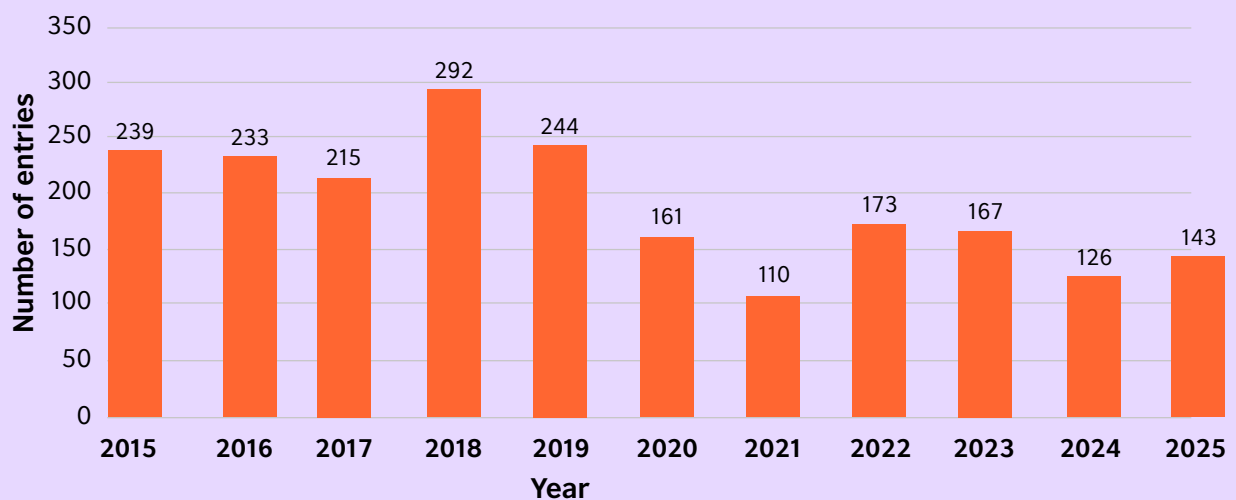


Figure 4: Provisional A level entries in Other Modern Languages 2015–2025 in Wales (Source: JCQ)

Findings from primary schools

Profile of primary schools

In 2025, the Welsh Government school census recorded 1,199 primary schools in Wales. For *Language Trends Wales 2025*, 866 schools were emailed directly and invited to participate in the surveys. Follow-up phone calls and emails with 80 schools selected at random were also carried out in Summer 2025 to support survey completion rates. Screening and removal of duplicates and incomplete surveys resulted in 50 usable completed surveys. The survey responses from primary schools in *Language Trends Wales 2025* cover a range of school medium types, geographical locations, and local authority areas (see Tables 2 & 3).

School medium	Percentage of respondents
English medium	88.1%
English with significant Welsh	2.4%
Welsh medium	9.5%

Table 2: School medium of participating primary schools

Geographical location	Local authorities in area	Number of responding schools (total no. = 50)	Percentage of responding schools
North Wales	Isle of Anglesey Gwynedd Conwy Denbighshire Flintshire Wrexham	10	20%
South West and Mid Wales	Powys Ceredigion Pembrokeshire Carmarthenshire Swansea Neath Port Talbot	13	26%
Central South Wales	Bridgend Vale of Glamorgan Rhondda Cynon Taf Merthyr Tydfil Cardiff	15	30%
South East Wales	Caerphilly Blaenau Gwent Torfaen Monmouthshire Newport	12	24%

Table 3: Geographical profile of responding primary schools

The completion rate for primary school surveys in this year’s *Language Trends* is lower than in previous years (6 per cent in 2025; 8 per cent in 2023; 10 per cent in 2022). It had been anticipated that with the outworking of the implementation of the New Curriculum for Wales there would be additional demands on leaders, teachers and schools which could affect response rates in the years that followed. In 2024 the primary survey data was replaced with the pupil poster dataset to offset potential survey fatigue in this context. This year’s response rate to *Language Trends* primary survey may be reflective of the volume of workflows and shift in priorities for primary schools, together with the ever-present risk of research fatigue.

Free School Meals

As a measure of socio-economic positioning, the percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals in responding schools was calculated based on current data available from Welsh Government (see Table 4). The table shows a range from 17%–24% in each quintile indicating a somewhat proportioned representation of levels of affluence in this year’s primary survey dataset.

Quintile	Quintile range	Percentage of responding schools
1 – most affluent	0.0–10.0%	24%
2	10.1–17.1%	17%
3	17.2–25.0%	19%
4	25.1–37.4%	17%
5 – least affluent	37.5% and above	24%

Table 4: FSM quintiles and percentage of responding primary schools in each quintile (using census 2025 data on FSM in primary schools)

International Language education in primary schools

In 2024/25, over 80 per cent of responding primary schools reported that they teach an International Language within curriculum time as part of the school day. This figure is double the percentage of schools that were teaching languages in primary schools in 2022 (*Language Trends Wales, 2022*). With the majority of respondents reporting that their schools started teaching an International Language as part of the school day less than two years ago, this figure is indicative of a substantial implementation of the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Expertise objectives as set out in the new Curriculum for Wales (2022).

In the current school year 2024/25, does your school teach an International Language within curriculum time?

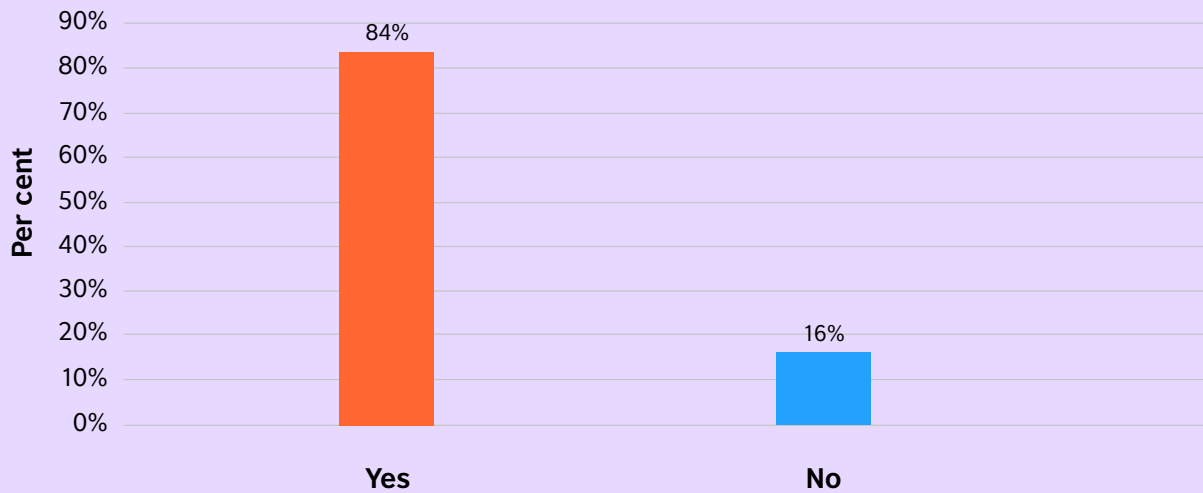


Figure 5: Responses to teaching an International Language within curriculum time

In terms of which languages (not including Welsh and English) are on offer in primary school from Early Years to Year 6, French is the most frequently reported named language, with Arabic, German, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Spanish, and Urdu also reported.

	Ancient Greek	Arabic	French	German	Italian	Japanese	Latin	Mandarin	Spanish	Urdu	Other
Early Years	0.0%	0.0%	23.8%	2.4%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.5%	2.4%	28.6%
Year 1	0.0%	0.0%	31.0%	7.1%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.9%	2.4%	26.2%
Year 2	0.0%	0.0%	31.0%	4.8%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	14.3%	0.0%	21.4%
Year 3	0.0%	2.4%	42.9%	7.1%	4.8%	2.4%	0.0%	7.1%	16.7%	0.0%	21.4%
Year 4	0.0%	0.0%	42.9%	9.5%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	28.6%	0.0%	21.4%
Year 5	0.0%	2.4%	57.1%	7.1%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	33.3%	0.0%	23.8%
Year 6	0.0%	2.4%	61.9%	11.9%	4.8%	2.4%	0.0%	4.8%	31.0%	0.0%	21.4%

Table 5: Percentage of International Languages offered in responding primary schools (which teach International Languages) in Early Years to Year 6

Demonstrating some change in responses over time, in 2024/25 more schools selected 'Other languages' from the list of named languages than in previous *Language Trends* surveys which asked the same question. The percentage of responses in the 'Other languages' category is at its highest in the Early Years, with 29 per cent of schools reporting the teaching of 'Other languages'. This percentage decreases to 21 per cent of all responding schools selecting this as a category for the languages they teach in Year 6. Not all responding schools provided details of which languages they included in this category. However, of those who did detail the languages in this category, British Sign Language was the most frequent, with Makaton, Polish, and Portuguese also reported. It may be the case that in the Early Years there is a greater reflection of diverse language communities at school, accounting for this evidence in more variation in the

languages taught. These may include the teaching of different home and heritage languages, which was one of the multilingual expectations of the new curriculum (Gorrara et al. 2020).

Time spent learning languages at primary school

In relation to the amount of time allocated to the teaching of International Languages in primary schools, there is some evidence of a mixed landscape and school-specific approaches. Over 40 per cent of primary schools who report teaching International Languages in the Early Years report that they do not have any time allotted to language education. It may be the case that for those respondents language teaching is integrated with classroom routines and regular activities and are not perceived as a separate activity. Alternatively, it may also be the case that this response indicates that there is no directed time given over to the teaching of languages in the school week. As Table 6 indicates, the most frequently reported period of time spent is 30–45 minutes a week, which remains below the one-hour period evidenced in previous research as indicative of the amount of time needed to attain measurable progress in language proficiency (Graham et al. 2017).

In relation to gauging levels of progress in International Language learning in primary schools, over half of the schools who responded (57 per cent) do not assess or record learners' progress in their language education. Around a quarter of schools report informal assessment of pupils (24 per cent) and 10 per cent of schools who completed the survey report a formal assessment of each learner. Methods of recording progress include group records of progress and the use of Area of Learning Progression Maps and International Language continuum.

In contrast to previous year's *Language Trends*, this year's primary data indicates that a small number of schools are offering more than one hour and, in some cases, two hours of language education per week, at all years of primary education.

	No time	Less than 30 minutes	30–45 minutes	46 minutes – 1 hour	Between 1 and 2 hours	More than 2 hours	Other
Early Years	40.5%	40.5%	7.1%	2.4%	0.0%	2.4%	4.8%
Year 1	35.7%	28.6%	26.2%	2.4%	0.0%	2.4%	2.4%
Year 2	35.7%	31.0%	21.4%	4.8%	0.0%	2.4%	2.4%
Year 3	16.7%	31.0%	26.2%	21.4%	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%
Year 4	14.3%	28.6%	31.0%	21.4%	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%
Year 5	7.1%	19.0%	35.7%	28.6%	4.8%	2.4%	0.0%
Year 6	7.1%	16.7%	33.3%	33.3%	4.8%	2.4%	0.0%

Table 6: Time per week allocated to International Languages in responding primary schools

Delivery, staff, and approaches to teaching International Languages

Evidence from this year's survey demonstrates that it remains within the role of the class teacher to teach International Languages at primary school. Eighty per cent of primary schools reported that languages are delivered by the class teacher with ten per cent being delivered by an external specialist and only five per cent through a secondary school link. Schools report that over the last year, they have accessed language-specific Professional Learning through online platforms, in-house training, and/or training via local consortia. Some schools report undertaking Professional Learning in the past year which has led to British Sign Language accreditation for staff. Most schools do not report any International Language qualifications gained through Professional Learning over the last year. When asked about the main challenges for their school about meeting requirements of the curriculum to teach International Languages, three-quarters of all responding schools highlight staff proficiency in International Languages.

With the growth of the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in education, primary schools were asked about their approach and use of AI technology. Over 50 per cent of respondents reported that it is not used, and teachers are unsure of how best to use it (Figure 6).

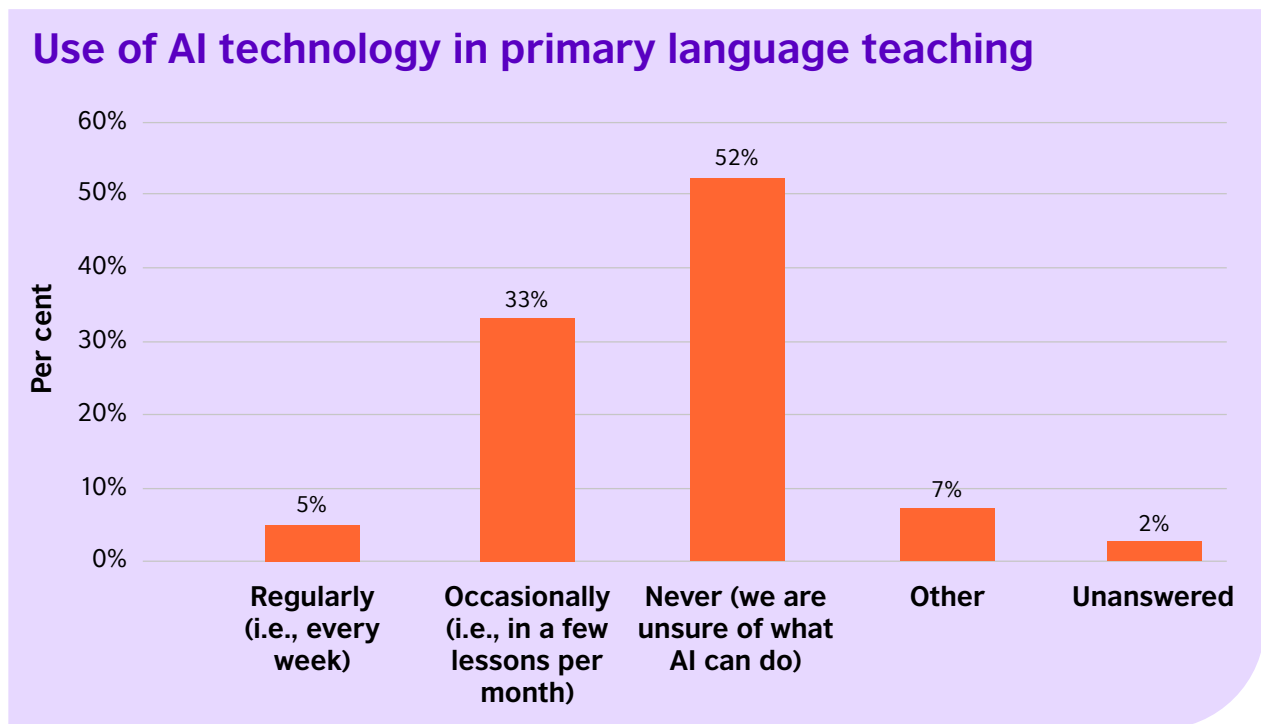


Figure 6: Respondents' use of AI technology for teaching International Languages in the primary classroom

The primary school survey data for 2024/25 show that two-thirds of schools report being very ready and somewhat ready to include an International Language as part of the statutory curriculum for Wales. This presents a similar landscape to the *Language Trends Wales 2023* report. When it comes to planning for International Languages, over a quarter of responding schools note they are in the early stages of planning and just less than one third seek to align with what is on offer in the local secondary school (Table 7).

Planned approach to teaching International Languages in 2024/25	Percentage of respondents
We are not in a position to teach International Languages	8%
We are in the early stages of planning International Language provision	26%
We plan for learners to make progress in one International Language and to align this with our local secondary school	30%
We plan to introduce learners to multiple International Languages	26%
We plan to teach British Sign Language	6%
I don't know	0%
Other (please specify)	4%

Table 7: Planned approaches to teaching International Languages in 2024/25

Contact with secondary schools can be a key feature to support transition from primary and build on language learning gains and motivation for continued language learning. Over two thirds of primary schools who participated in the survey reported that they have contact with language departments in local secondary schools.

Contact with secondary schools in relation to language learning

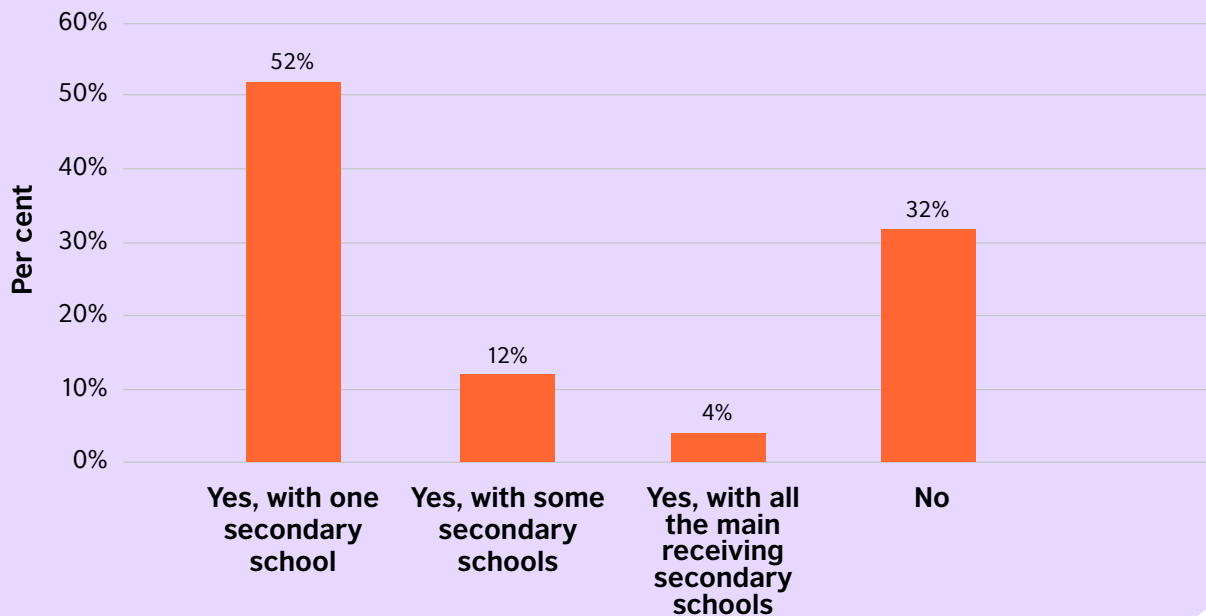


Figure 7: Percentage of responding primary schools in contact with the language departments of local secondary schools in relation to language learning

External links and relations at primary school

Beyond the links to local secondary schools, 50 per cent of respondents reported having opportunities for international engagement for learners and teachers in their school. These include a partner school outside of the UK, British Council events and training, hosting Language Assistants, and involvement with international projects.

International engagement opportunities	Percentage of respondents
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	26%
British Council events and training such as Cerdd Iaith	22%
Involvement with international projects	28%
We host Language Assistants	4%
None	50%
Other (please specify)	2%

Table 8: Opportunities for international engagement for learners and teachers in responding primary schools (respondents ticked all that applied)

Schools also reported having links to other organisations which promote International Language learning.

Links with outside organisations to promote International Language learning

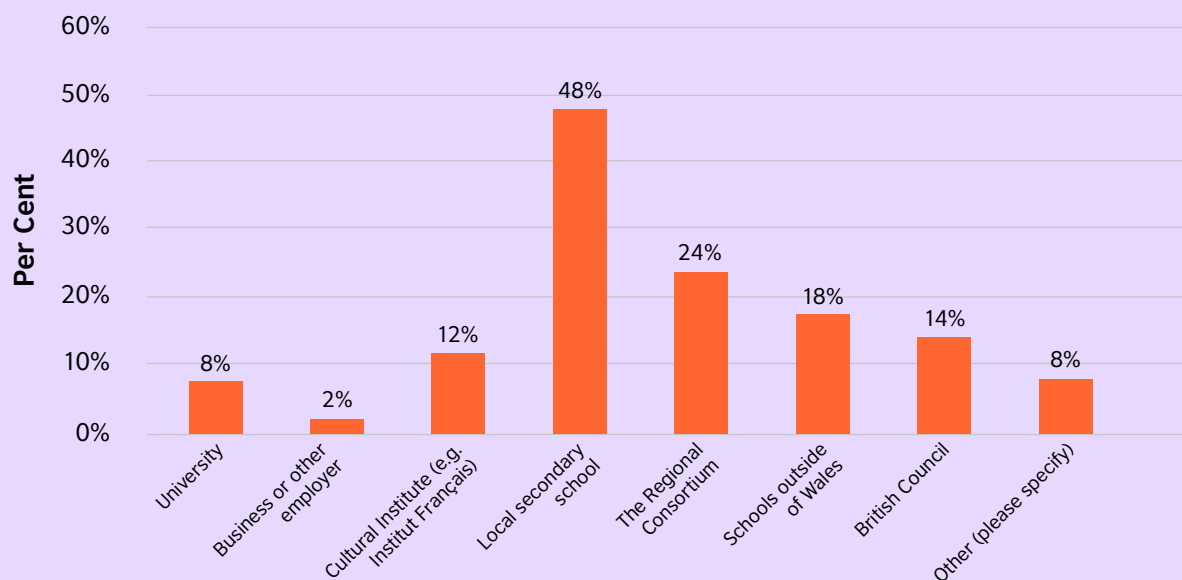


Figure 8: Primary school links to external organisations to promote language learning (respondents ticked all that applied)

External links such as these are used by teachers to help resource their delivery of International Languages in the curriculum. Respondents cited using resources from a range of sources including charity organisations which support signed languages, consortium produced materials, and university-based initiatives.



Figure 9: Word cloud of responses from primary schools on the types of resources they use

Challenges and supports for International Languages in primary schools

Although it is clear that there are external organisations and outside resources which primary schools can use to support their International Language education, challenges remain. Detailing the challenges for their schools in meeting the new requirements of Curriculum for Wales 2022 for International Languages, this year's *Language Trends* respondents identified the main challenges as insufficient time for languages, competition from other languages, and staff proficiency (see Table 9).

The main challenges in meeting the requirements of the new CfW for International Languages	Percentage of respondents
Staff proficiency in International Languages	74%
Insufficient curriculum time in general	60%
Competition for curriculum time from Welsh and English	58%
Funding and resources	38%
Finding teachers capable of teaching an International Language	36%
Accessing language-specific Professional Learning	36%
Need to focus curriculum time on 'catch-up' in other subjects due to Covid-19	28%
Impact of Covid-19	14%
Achieving support from parents	10%
We do not experience any particular challenges	6%
Other (please specify)	4%

Table 9: The main challenges perceived by primary respondents in meeting the new requirements of CfW 2022 for International Languages (respondents ticked all that applied)

However, schools are also responsive to what is currently working well for them. Their responses include:

“Our International projects in Early Years and Year 6 work very well. Children are motivated and quick to learn a new language alongside Welsh. They see a purpose on learning French as they are connected together. We use books and real-life events to explore our languages and cultural differences and similarities.”

“Lower down the school (N-Y4) the children learn about different cultures as part of our Learning Projects, and this includes learning about different languages. For example, when Y1 learn about Rio de Vida, they learn about Brazil and some Portuguese. All of the children are encouraged to speak their home language, for example, when answering the register or when we are learning about different festivals/celebrations.”

“Celebrating home languages of our pupils. Teaching of French and Spanish in a progressive way across year groups (termly rotations). Have just achieved the Foundation Award of the International Schools award and looking to link up with another school in Europe. Lots of support from the local consortia to help assist us in developing teaching strategies with courses available.”

Pointing out the kind of additional support that would be welcomed in their school, survey respondents noted what they consider would be helpful:

“A dedicated local support officer for languages”

“Resources suitable for basic language patterns from numerous languages”

Findings from secondary schools

Profile of secondary schools

The annual school census in Wales recorded 174 local authority maintained secondary schools in January 2025, comprising 40 Welsh medium schools and 134 English medium schools.⁵ In the 2024/25 school year, 57 maintained secondary schools in Wales completed the *Language Trends Wales 2025* survey (see Tables 10 and 11 for profile of responding schools). The survey invite was delivered to 165 email inboxes, allowing for an approximate response rate of 34.5 per cent, bearing in mind that the survey links were also made available via British Council Wales social media channels. Eight secondary schools responded to the survey in Welsh, and 49 in English.

School medium	Percentage of respondents
Bilingual	14.0%
English medium	68.4%
English with significant Welsh	7.0%
Welsh medium	10.5%

Table 10: School medium of responding schools

Geographical location	Local authorities in area	Number of responding schools (total no. = 57)	Percentage of responding schools
North Wales	Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham	11	19.3%
South West and Mid Wales	Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot	19	33.3%
Central South Wales	Bridgend, The Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff	19	33.3%
South East Wales	Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport	8	14.0%

Table 11: Geographical profile of responding secondary schools

⁵ For a further breakdown of Welsh and English medium secondary schools, see the following:

<https://www.gov.wales/schools-census-results-january-2025-html#177355>.

The percentage of students in each secondary school entitled to free school meals (FSM) was calculated to identify the socio-economic profile of responding schools. The research team calculated quintiles by using the 2025 census data on the percentage of students (up to age 15 and transitionally protected) entitled to FSM, and divided responding schools into five quintiles ranging from most affluent (lower percentage of students entitled to FSM) to least affluent (higher percentage of students entitled to FSM). Table 12 shows an imbalanced profile of schools, as most responding secondary schools are in more affluent quintiles 1 and 2, and this may lead to more positive findings than the reality in most schools.

Quintile	Quintile range	No. of responding schools	Percentage of responding schools
1 – most affluent	0.0–16.4%	20	35.1%
2	16.5–20.9%	11	19.3%
3	21.0–27.1%	9	15.8%
4	27.2–35.7%	7	12.3%
5 – least affluent	35.8% and above	10	17.5%

Table 12: FSM quintiles and percentage of responding secondary schools in each quintile (using 2025 census data on FSM in state secondary schools for eligible and transitionally protected students up to age 15)

International Language education in key stage 3

In the 2024/25 school year, all Year 7 learners studied French in over 80 per cent of responding schools, however this figure drops to 63 per cent in Years 8 and 9. A low number of schools reported that all or some learners were studying German in key stage 3; Spanish was learnt by all Year 7 learners in less than one quarter of responding schools, only one of which is a quintile 5 school. Other languages noted by respondents included Italian and Mandarin.

	French	German	Spanish	Other
Year 7 all pupils	82.5%	7.0%	22.8%	3.5%
Year 7 some pupils	5.3%	5.3%	5.3%	1.8%
Year 8 all pupils	63.2%	10.5%	38.6%	3.5%
Year 8 some pupils	8.8%	5.3%	8.8%	1.8%
Year 9 all pupils	63.2%	5.3%	29.8%	3.5%
Year 9 some pupils	22.8%	10.5%	19.3%	3.5%

Table 13: Secondary school respondent answers to 'Which International Language(s) are your learners studying at KS3?'

Respondents were asked what proportion of their Year 7–10 learners were learning more than one International Language in the 2024/25 school year (see Table 14); less than one fifth of schools reported that all their key stage 3 learners studied an additional language (not including Welsh). When the respondent answers are broken down into quintiles, those schools in which all learners are studying more than one International Language are mainly in quintiles 1 to 3, with none in quintile 4 and one in quintile 5 (see Figure 10). Consistent with *Language Trends Wales 2024*, no schools reported that all learners study an additional language in Year 10.

	All	More than half	Some (5%–49%)	Less than 5%	None
Year 7	12.3%	1.8%	0.0%	7.0%	78.9%
Year 8	17.5%	1.8%	1.8%	8.8%	70.2%
Year 9	17.5%	5.3%	7.0%	10.5%	59.6%
Year 10	0.0%	1.8%	12.3%	24.6%	63.2%

Table 14: Respondent answers to 'What proportion of learners in your school is studying MORE THAN ONE International Language (not including Welsh)?' in Years 7–10

Number of schools in which all learners study more than one International Language

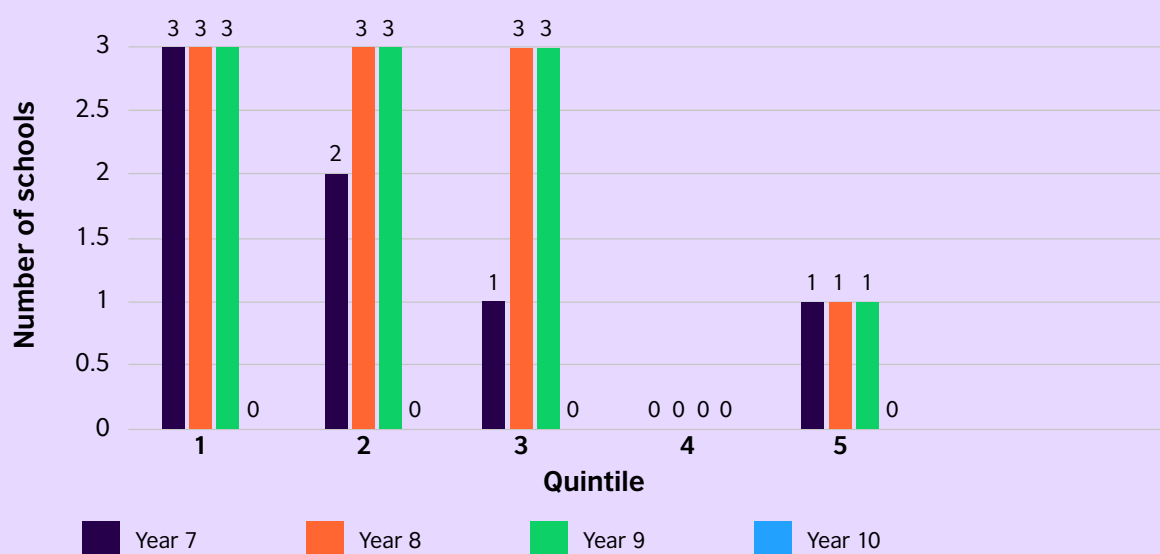


Figure 10: Number of responding secondary schools in which all learners study more than one International Language, broken down by quintile

Time for languages in Years 7–10

In the 2024/25 school year, a smaller percentage of schools reported that less than one hour is allocated to language learning; for example, 5.3 per cent of responding schools reported less than one hour of teaching for Year 9 learners in the 2024/25 school year, compared to 11 per cent in the 2023/24 school year. On average, two-thirds of responding schools spend one to two hours on language teaching per week for Years 7–9, with a quarter of schools spending two to three hours. By comparison, Year 10 learners spend more time on language learning with 60 per cent of schools reporting that learners are timetabled for two to three hours of language learning per week, 17.5 per cent spend three to four hours per week, and 14 per cent spend more than four hours per week on language learning (see Table 15).

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Less than 1 hour	1.8%	1.8%	5.3%	3.5%
1–2 hours	66.7%	71.9%	61.4%	5.3%
2–3 hours	26.3%	21.1%	28.1%	59.6%
3–4 hours	5.3%	7.0%	7.0%	17.5%
More than 4 hours	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.0%

Table 15: Average class time allocated to International Language learning per week in Years 7–10

Language learning at key stage 4

Nine schools reported that no Year 10 learners were studying an International Language for GCSE in the 2024/25 school year, compared to 19 schools in the previous year. One school in the most affluent FSM quintile reported that 100 per cent of their Year 10 cohort are learning a GCSE in International Languages. Seven out of ten schools in quintile 5 reported that 10 per cent of their Year 10 were studying a language GCSE. Overall, it is most positive to note the increased percentage of Year 10 learners studying language pathways in 2025 (see Table 16).

Percentage of Year 10 learning an International Language for GCSE											
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
2022	14	30	14	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2023	20	25	12	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
2024	19	17	15	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2025	9	21	19	2	4	0	1	0	0	0	1

Table 16: Proportion of students in Year 10 learning an International Language for GCSE or other Level 2 qualification (e.g., Level 2 Global Business Communication) and rounded to the nearest ten per cent. Reported in raw numbers of responding schools (2022 total respondent n=64, 2023 n=67, 2024 n=53, 2025 n=57)

Languages learnt in responding schools in the 2024/25 school year are listed in Table 17. In 'other' comments, one teacher noted the study of Chinese, while others stated that no International Language was timetabled. Over half of the schools teaching German are in quintile 1; French and Spanish are taught in schools in all five quintiles, however French remains the most taught language at GCSE, reported to be timetabled in nearly 80 per cent of responding secondary schools.

Timetabled International Language	Percentage of responding schools
French	78.9%
German	15.8%
Spanish	54.4%
Other	7.0%

Table 17: Respondent answers to 'Which International Languages are currently being learned at GCSE by some of your learners as full timetabled subjects within your school?'

Responding secondary schools were asked about school-level policies in place concerning the learning and teaching of International Languages:

School policy	Percentage of responding schools
Classes do not run if there are not enough learners	66.7%
Timetabling means that not all learners are able to take an International Language	38.6%
Other (please specify)	17.5%
Some learners may be advised by SLT not to take an International Language	15.8%
Lower than average attaining learners are discouraged from choosing an International Language	14.0%
The school strongly recommends that all learners take an International Language	5.3%
The school strongly recommends that the most academically able take an International Language	1.8%
All learners MUST take an International Language	0.0%

Table 18: School-level policies as perceived by responding teachers in relation to International Language learning at key stage 4 (multiple responses permitted)

In over 65 per cent of schools, classes do not run if there are not enough learners (compared to 75 per cent of responding schools in 2024). Schools in all five quintiles reported this to be the case, however it disproportionately affects less affluent schools – classes with low learner numbers will not run in six out of seven quintile 4 schools and eight out of ten quintile 5 schools, compared to approximately half of schools in quintile 1. There is variation in the minimum number of learners required to run a GCSE International Language class, with respondent answers varying from zero to as high as 18 learners in a responding quintile 1 school. Twenty-four schools noted a minimum requirement number of between 10–15 learners, although one school stated that classes may run on lower numbers.

Timetabling remains a constraint on learners being able to take an International Language, reported by 39 per cent of respondents from schools in all five quintiles; however, this figure has decreased from 51 per cent in 2024 and 2023. No schools reported the mandatory study of International Languages at GCSE. ‘Other’ teacher comments on policy included:

“We have an options process in Year 8 which means that learners do not need to learn an International Language in Year 9. Those learners who opt to in Year 9 are then required to further streamline their options at the end of Year 9. This has had a very negative impact on those continuing in Year 10.” (Quintile 1 school)

“Mae’n opsiwn astudio Sbaeneg yn agor i bawb. Mae Sbaeneg mewn 1 bocs opsiwn allan o 3 bocs opsiwn ar gyfer Bl.10”⁶ (Quintile 2 school)

6 “The option to study Spanish is open to all. Spanish is in 1/3 option boxes for Y10.”

Uptake in International Languages at GCSE level

Building on previous trends data, secondary school respondents were asked to reflect on the past three years and consider the changes, if any, in the uptake of learners studying International Languages in key stage 4 (see Table 19). Consistent with previous findings, no schools reported the study of International Languages to be mandatory for all key stage 4 learners. The percentage of respondents who consider there to be more key stage 4 learners studying International Languages has more than doubled since 2024, increasing from 13 per cent to 30 per cent in 2025. When this figure is broken down, however, more than three quarters of the schools reporting increased language learner numbers are in the most affluent quintiles, 1 and 2; further research is required to determine how the socio-economic profile of a school affects uptake. While nearly a quarter of respondents responded that there is no clear trend, a further quarter of schools identified fewer learners studying an International Language in key stage 4.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
International Languages are compulsory for all pupils at KS4	0%	0%	0%	0%
More learners now take an International Language at KS4	10%	7%	13%	30%
Fewer learners now take an International Language at KS4	55%	49%	38%	25%
Similar numbers to before	16%	15%	21%	19%
No clear trend: numbers fluctuate from year to year	17%	27%	28%	23%
Other (please specify)	2%	2%	0%	4%

Table 19: Teachers' perceptions of uptake at key stage 4 over the past three years

Teachers continue to consider Global English, as well as the nature and content of external exams, as the two main challenges to learners studying an International Language for GCSE (see Table 20). While the third main barrier in 2024 was the promotion, or lack thereof, of languages at a whole-school level as a careers option, this is not the case in 2025; instead, insufficient curriculum time and timetabling of International Languages in both key stages 3 and 4 are considered higher ranking barriers to GCSE uptake.

Prominent barriers to GCSE uptake	Percentage of schools that consider this barrier to be the main challenge	
	2023/24	2024/25
Global English (i.e. the importance of English as a world language)	25%	28%
The nature and content of external exams	21%	19%
Languages not promoted at whole-school level as a careers option	13%	5%
Insufficient curriculum time	11%	14%
Timetabling of International Languages at key stage 4	8%	9%
Languages a low priority for senior management	6%	2%
Timetabling of International Languages at key stage 3	6%	11%
The way external exams are marked and graded	4%	7%
Lack of opportunities for learners to practise their language outside the classroom	4%	4%
The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic	2%	0%
The implications of the UK's decision to leave the EU (Brexit)	0%	2%
Lack of access to Professional Learning (PL) for teaching staff	0%	0%

Table 20: Percentage of schools that identify the above-mentioned barriers as a main challenge to learners taking an International Language for GCSE

Teachers were asked a follow-up question on any additional barriers that they face in providing an effective learning and teaching environment; several respondents commented no, while some commented additional challenges:

“The lack of options available at GCSE are a massive barrier to uptake. The lack of NQTs, teachers leaving the profession due to burn out and a total lack of discussion/ experience of teaching/ monopoly of WJEC makes it a less attractive GCSE.” (Quintile 3 school)

“Attitudes of parents from our local area-very deprived area-many pupils have never left the local area let alone gone abroad.” (Quintile 4 school)

“The socio-economic situation of our school unfortunately means that languages are not a priority for most of the children. I haven't had long enough as a new HOD to develop an open mindset towards International Languages, but I am hopeful for the future.” (Quintile 5 school)

Extra-curricular language learning

Table 21 shows the languages learnt as extra-curricular subjects in responding schools throughout the key stages. Consistent with previous editions of *Language Trends Wales*, few schools have extra-curricular language learning. Only 10.5 per cent of schools reported Mandarin in key stage 3, a dip of nearly 10 per cent since 2024. In ‘other’ comments, teachers noted the learning of Italian, Japanese, Swahili, Turkish, and Russian.

	Arabic	French	German	Mandarin	Polish	Spanish	None	Other
KS3	3.5%	5.3%	3.5%	10.5%	3.5%	12.3%	63.2%	8.8%
KS4	3.5%	8.8%	0.0%	8.8%	10.5%	10.5%	73.7%	0.0%
Post-16	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	0.0%	1.8%	87.7%	0.0%

Table 21: Percentage of secondary schools with extra-curricular language subjects

Home, heritage, and community languages (HHCL)

The annual school-level census recorded 6,531 secondary school pupils in the 2024/25 school year for whom Welsh or English is an additional language (EAL learners), increasing from 6,101 in the previous school year (StatsWales, 2025). Cardiff and Newport recorded the highest number of EAL learners enrolled in secondary education, totalling approximately 3,000 students.

Eighty-four per cent of responding secondary schools have learners for whom Welsh or English is an additional language. Respondents were asked to list the languages spoken by their learners, amounting to around forty-five different languages and/or dialects in responding schools (see Table 22).

Language	Frequency count
Afrikaans	1
Arabic	20
Basque	1
Bengali	4
Bulgarian	4
Catalan	1
Chinese	3
Czech	1
Dialects From African Countries	2
Dutch	1
Farsi	3
Finnish	1
French	4
German	3
Greek	3
Gujarati	1
Hausa	1
Hindi	2
Hungarian	4
Indian	1
Italian	4
Japanese	3

Language	Frequency count
Kannada	1
Korean	1
Latvian	1
Lithuanian	4
Malayalam	1
Mandarin	7
Polish	33
Portuguese	8
Punjabi	1
Romanian	10
Russian	10
Slovak	1
Spanish	6
Swahili	1
Swedish	1
Tagalog	1
Tamil	1
Thai	1
Tulu	1
Turkish	12
Ukrainian	17
Urdu	11
Vietnamese	1

Table 22: HHCL languages spoken by learners in responding secondary schools

Responding secondary schools were asked if learners could take HHCL exams; the number of schools offering such opportunities either in the school or elsewhere has decreased from 77 per cent in 2024, to 65 per cent in 2025.

Opportunities to take HHCL exams

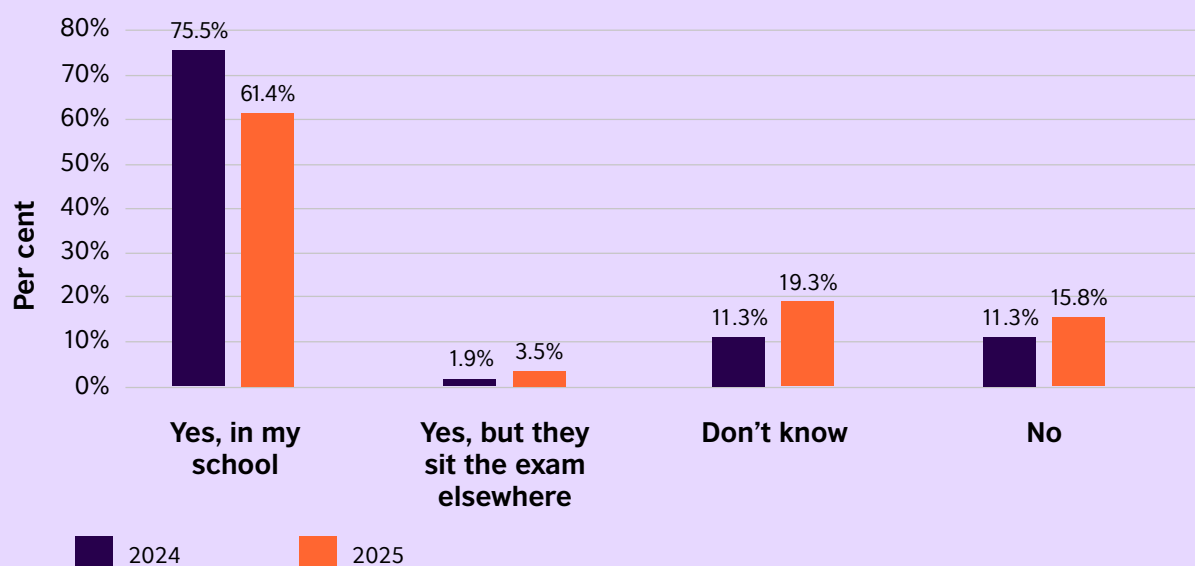


Figure 11: Secondary school responses to 'Do any of your learners have opportunities to take exams in the languages spoken in their homes or communities?' in 2024 and 2025

International engagement in secondary schools

Table 23 outlines the percentage of responding secondary schools engaging with international opportunities over the last four years. Consistent with last year, 21 per cent of schools reported having a partner institution abroad; however, Figure 12 shows that, in the 2024/25 school year, this figure is mostly made up of quintile 1 schools. The percentage of schools with Language Assistants remains low at five per cent, employed only by schools in quintiles 1–3.

Engagement with MFL Student Mentoring remains high, with 74 per cent of responding secondary schools taking part in the mentoring scheme in the 2024/25 school year. MFL Student Mentoring encourages the learning of International Languages at GCSE level and beyond via a programme of in-classroom and online mentoring sessions and resources, all of which is available to young people in Wales for free.⁷

⁷ See the MFL Student Mentoring website for further information: <https://mflmentoring.co.uk/>.

In 'other' comments, teachers noted school trips abroad, including to France and Spain, and a student exchange, while three schools commented that there was no international engagement in their school.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
The institution has one or more partner institutions abroad	17%	18%	21%	21%
British Council international opportunities	6%	15%	6%	7%
We employ Language Assistants	8%	9%	4%	5%
We engage with cultural institutes (e.g. Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Consejería de Educación)	38%	31%	21%	33%
We take part in MFL Student Mentoring Scheme	56%	72%	72%	74%
We engage with Routes into Languages Cymru	78%	66%	58%	56%
Other (please specify)	N/A	19%	19%	23%

Table 23: International engagement in secondary schools over the past four years (multiple responses allowed)

International engagement in secondary schools by quintile

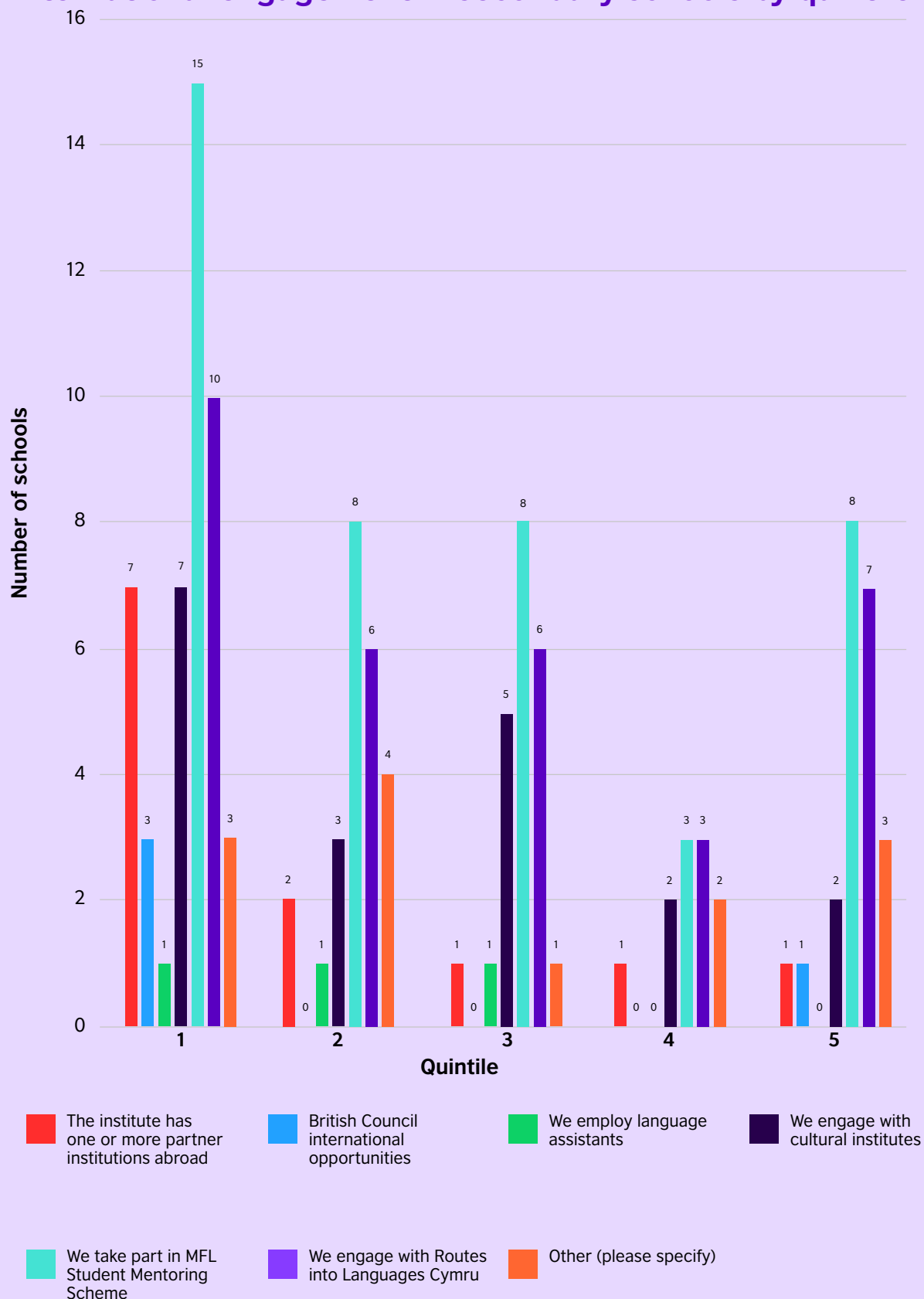


Figure 12: International engagement in secondary schools by quintile in the 2024/25 school year

International Languages and the New Curriculum for Wales

With the New Curriculum under way in Welsh schools, a quarter of respondents reported that it was very likely (1.8 per cent) or quite likely (22.8 per cent) that the situation for International Languages would be improved. The extent of collaboration between languages departments and Area of Learning Experience in preparation for the New Curriculum remains largely the same as reported in 2024, with just over half of schools having already made changes in preparation for the new curriculum, while just less than one quarter have discussed the changes, but not implemented plans yet (see Figure 13).

Collaboration between International Languages departments and Area of Learning Experience in preparation for and implementation of CfW

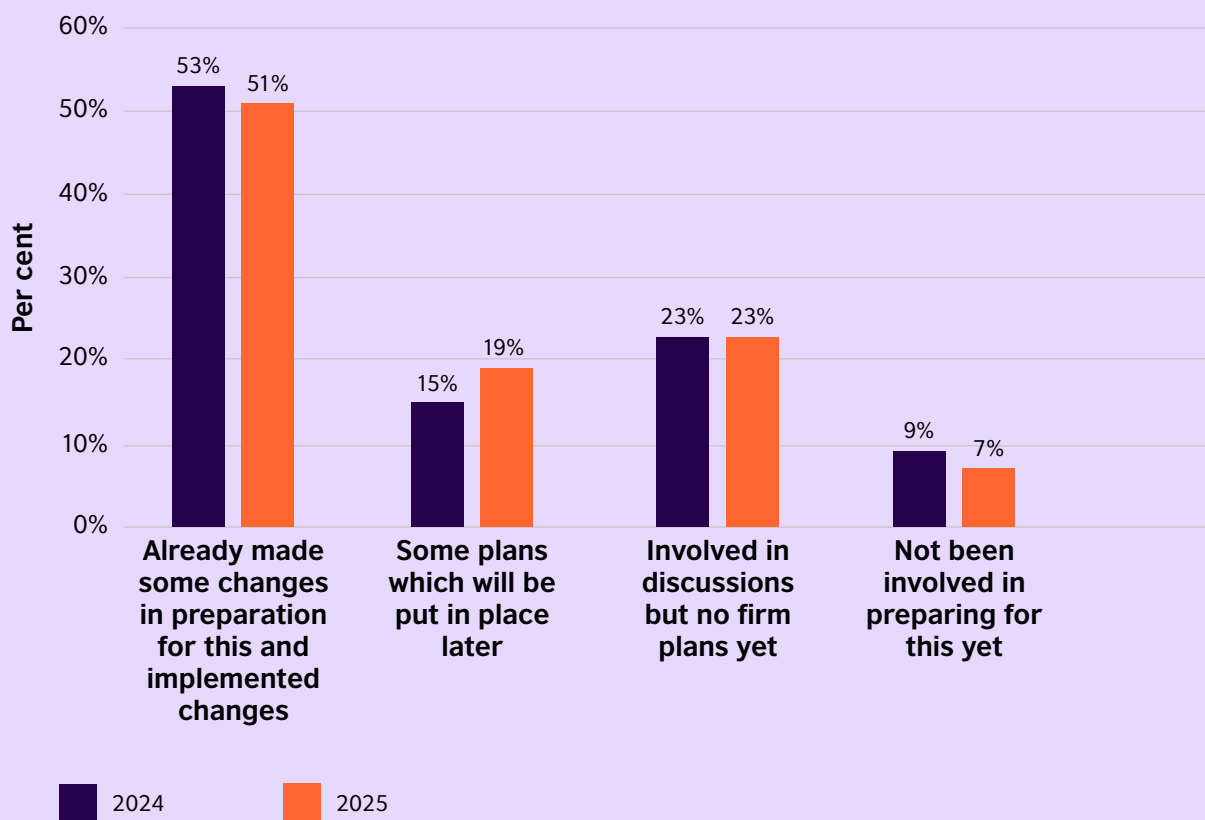


Figure 13: Teacher responses in 2024 and 2025 to 'To what extent has your International Languages department been collaborating within your Area of Learning Experience and across the whole school in preparation for and implementation of Curriculum for Wales?'

AI and technology in the languages classroom

In 2025, more schools are using AI technology in the languages classroom (see Figure 14). Nine per cent of respondents use AI regularly (compared to zero in 2024), and a further 44 per cent of teachers use it occasionally in a few lessons per month (compared to 25 per cent in 2024).

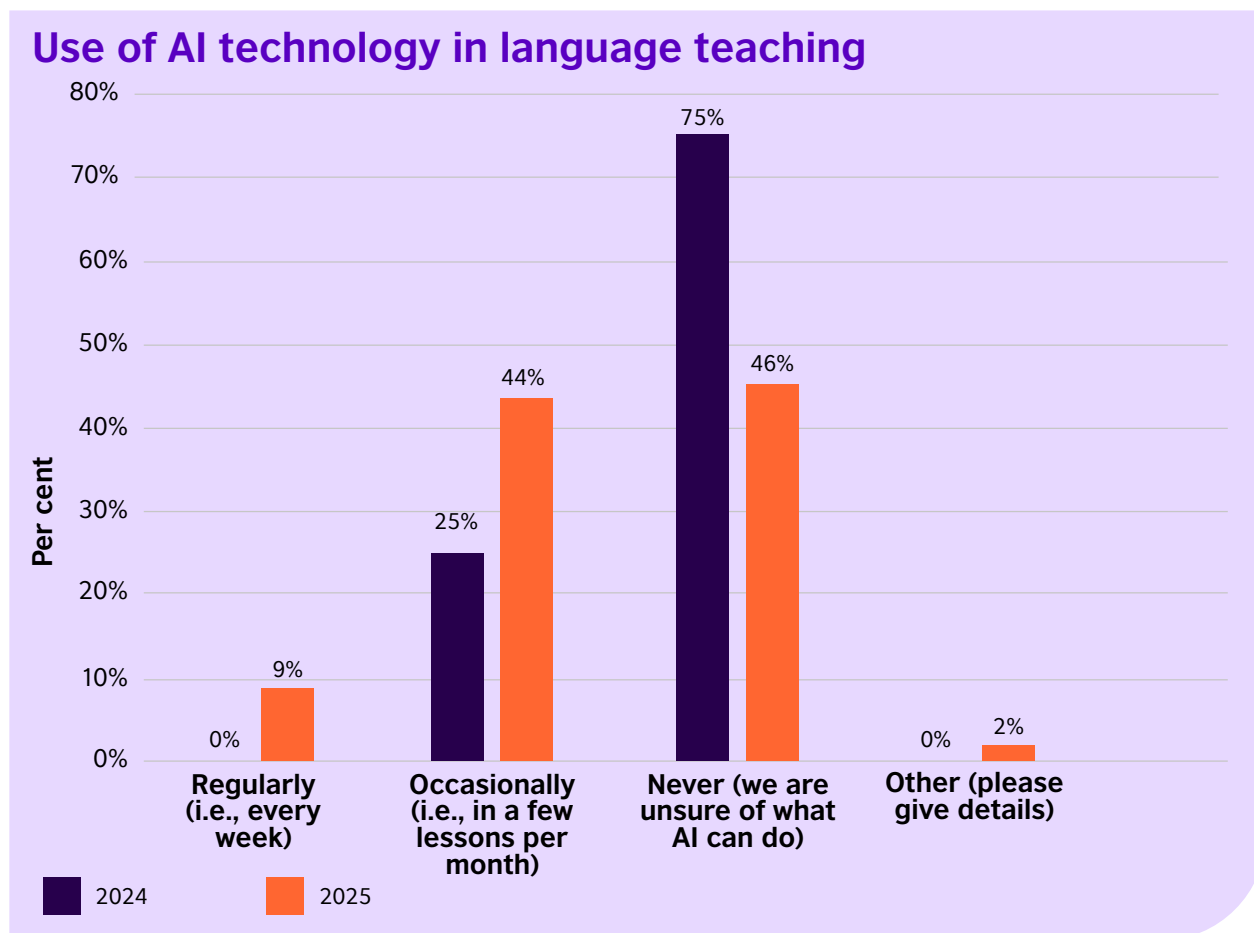


Figure 14: Frequency of AI usage in language teaching in 2024 and 2025 in responding secondary schools

Fourteen schools reported that their learners are allowed to use AI technology to support their language learning; comments included the following:

“KS4/5 students have been encouraged to use AI, albeit very carefully, to check accuracy of writing, help with planning essays, or generate higher ranking vocab and structures. Primarily through the Quizlet AI function. All work produced is checked by teachers.” (Quintile 1 school)

“We use Sanako for weekly activities – Pronounce Live uses AI to grade pronunciation of a phrase. Match up tasks are AI assessed too for vocabulary, and it uses AI to mark multiple choice for Listening and grammar activities. AI is not allowed for producing written pieces.” (Quintile 1 school)

One respondent noted the following:

“They are allowed but not given the opportunities in lessons which tend to be teacher-led. We would need to support learners to learn how to utilise AI for language learning.” (Quintile 5 school)

International Languages and post-16 provision

Sixty per cent of responding secondary schools reported that they have post-16 provision in International Languages (see Table 24; figure included those who commented 'other'); subsequently two-fifths of schools reported no such provision, the majority of which are quintile 4 and 5 schools. Only five of the quintile 4 and 5 schools in our dataset reported post-16 provision in International Languages, with one noting in 'other' comments that it will not run in the next school year.

Post-16 provision	Percentage of respondents
Yes, delivered wholly in my school	35.1%
Yes, delivered between my school and another school	14.0%
Yes, but delivered wholly by another school	5.3%
No	40.4%
Other	5.3%

Table 24: Respondents with post-16 provision in International Languages

No schools reported more than 11–15 learners studying post-16 languages, with the remaining schools reporting low learner numbers or none (see Table 25). No quintile 4 or 5 schools reported having any learners in Year 12, with five or fewer in Year 13.

Number of post-16 learners	Year 12 (% of schools)	Year 13 (% of schools)
5 or fewer	47.1%	58.8%
6–10	8.8%	17.6%
11–15	11.8%	0.0%
15–20	0.0%	0.0%
More than 20	0.0%	0.0%
None	32.4%	23.5%

Table 25: Number of post-16 learners in responding secondary schools with post-16 provision (percentages calculated out of number of schools with post-16 provision; n=34)

In half of the schools surveyed with post-16 provision, classes do not run if learner numbers are too low, a slight increase of four per cent since 2024 (see Table 26). Fewer schools reported that classes run at a reduced timetable, while there are more schools sharing arrangements with another school in 2025 than in 2024. In 'other' comments, teachers noted: i) lessons taking place in one school within the county; ii) classes run regardless of low numbers; and iii) French classes taught through the Esgol collaborative programme, 'a cross-regional hybrid programme with learners either present in their host school or joining remotely online' (verbatim from teacher comment).

Post-16 arrangements for low learner numbers	Percentage of schools that implement these arrangements	
	2024 (n=28)	2025 (n=34)
AS and A2 classes are taught together	7%	3%
Classes do not run	46%	50%
Classes run at a reduced timetable	36%	29%
Shared arrangements with another school	18%	26%
Other (please give details)	18%	18%

Table 26: Respondent answers to 'What arrangements are in place, if any, when only a few learners wish to study an International Language post-16?' (multiple answers permitted)

When asked if there is a required minimum number of learners for classes in International Languages to run at A level, answers varied across the five quintiles of schools from as low as one learner to as high as ten; others stated that a minimum number is not applicable, the number changes yearly, or that there exists a lack of clarity and transparency.

Respondents were asked to reflect on the last three years and if there had been any changes to uptake and provision for International Languages post-16 in their school. Only one responding school reported stable uptake for an Other International Language; French is stable in 35 per cent of schools, German in 9 per cent, and Spanish in 18 per cent of schools. Spanish is the only language for which schools reported increased uptake (n=3); French and German were introduced as a new A-level in two schools. However, uptake for French has decreased in 35 per cent of schools, and in 29 per cent of schools for Spanish.

Regarding reasons for changes in uptake or provision, teachers commented the following:

“The number of pupils in the county wishing to take an AS/A2 level in a language has significantly decreased. The Esgol system facilitates International Languages teaching at AS/A2 in this region by putting all learners together with one school facilitating the teaching either in person with home students or online. German has disappeared as an AS/A2 in the county altogether despite some requests.” (Quintile 1 school)

“Spanish is increasing, and we have discontinued Mandarin at GCSE due to low numbers and at KS5 due to no suitable course and assessment for non-natives.” (Quintile 2 school)

“Prevalence of numbers leaving high school to attend 6th form college. Perceived difficulty of GCSE exams.” (Quintile 5 school)

Recruitment of language teachers

Fewer teachers responding to the 2025 *Language Trends Wales* survey reported the recruitment of qualified language teachers to be an issue in their department; in 2025, recruitment was not an issue for 58 per cent of respondents, compared to 43 per cent in 2024 (see Table 27). Two schools in quintile 5 reported recruitment issues; the remaining respondents are in quintiles 1–3. In ‘other’ comments, teachers stated that: i) maternity cover for German has been challenging; ii) the school is concerned for the future of recruitment and are aware of issues in other schools; and iii) there is general awareness that there are fewer language teachers available.

Is recruitment an issue?	2024 (n=53)	2025 (n=57)
Yes, a major issue	23%	11%
Yes, a minor issue	8%	16%
No, not an issue	43%	58%
I don't know	13%	7%
Other (please specify)	9%	9%
Unanswered	4%	N/A

Table 27: Secondary school teacher responses to ‘Is recruitment of qualified languages teachers an issue for your department?’

International Languages in Wales: voices from the secondary classroom

At the time of survey distribution, proposals had circulated concerning the closure of the MFL department in Cardiff University; while this has been partly reversed, teachers were asked for their thoughts on the potential impact such action would have on the uptake of languages. The responses demonstrate the important role Cardiff University plays in language learning for Wales.

“I believe that this decision has now been reversed, but that there will still be a reduction in the number of languages offered in Cardiff. I believe that the press coverage has made it appear that languages are not worthwhile or required. Some younger learners have mentioned this, and some are of the view that a degree in a language is pointless and not something that they would consider in the future. [...] The MFL schemes and external speakers that we bring in work hard to bust myths!” (Quintile 1 school)

“Enfawr – nid yw’n beth da i Gymru fod Prif Ysgol y brif ddinas heb adran ieithoedd modern o gwbl. Dyhead nifer o ddisgyblion yr ysgol yw astudio yng Nghaerdydd ac felly ni fyddent yn medru gwneud ieithoedd.” (Quintile 1 school)⁸

“Mae’n un peth arall sy’n ychwanegu at yr heriau sy’n bodoli’n barod, mae’n ychwanegu at y ddelwedd o’r pwnc fel un sydd ddim yn bwysig ac yn tynnu oddi ar statws.” (Quintile 3 school)⁹

“The publicity around the closure will have reinforced in people’s minds that languages are not important.” (Quintile 4 school)

8 “Huge – it is not a good thing for Wales that the Main School in the capital city has no modern languages department at all. The aspiration of many of the school’s pupils is to study in Cardiff and therefore they would not be able to do language”.

9 “It is one more thing that adds to the challenges that already exist, it adds to the image of the subject as unimportant and delegitimizing”.

“I think that it’s an unofficial death sentence for languages in Wales. The area in which I work finds itself towards the top of the most impoverished areas in South Wales, so to encourage pupils to set their sights on a university degree is difficult enough. To then tell them there is no local university that they could attend to study languages would be very off-putting and will create a wide range of difficult choices.” (Quintile 5 school)

Responding teachers commented their recommendations to improve the situation for language learning and teaching at a school and system-wide level; this includes providing information on careers in languages and the importance of languages, timetabling more time for the curricular teaching of languages, more funding (for Language Assistants, technology, Sanako subscriptions, external speakers, school trips), and a review of exam grading:

“Promotion of the importance of languages for careers, reinforcement from SLT, Global Futures – where are they?! Industry reinforcing the message.” (Quintile 1 school)

“Curriculum time is an issue, at school level as well as Welsh level as there are so many other things that need timetabled. Languages is

usually one of the first lessons to take a hit.” (Quintile 2 school)

“Budget cuts have also made a huge impact on the software or technology we can afford to enhance our students’ learning experiences. With extra funding we could afford things like Language Gym/Sanako subscriptions, and this would help with student engagement and progression and therefore impact GCSE uptake too.” (Quintile 2 school)

“Funding for external speakers to come to school to speak to pupils about the importance of learning languages. Continue funding for organisations such as MFL Mentoring and Routes.” (Quintile 3 school)

“Despite the changes to the GCSE spec, I feel that final exams in French are still unfair. The constant issue of languages being harshly marked has created a reputation that only the most intelligent pupils can succeed in the subject. This elitism has not helped the situation, with lots of pupils put off by the subject given this reputation. I feel that a better way of examining/

assessing pupils would provide for a much fairer approach.” (Quintile 5 school)

Despite the challenges, teachers responding to the *Language Trends Wales 2025* survey have reinforced the importance of International Languages, commenting on what is working well in the languages classroom:

“Having passionate, qualified IL teachers has the GREATEST impact upon the student – FACT. [...] David Binns from Sanako – amazing advocate and guest speaker who definitely impacted learners at KS3. Support from Goethe Institute and Swansea University for hosting the Careers Roadshow – huge impact on our learners. [...] Hugely supportive SLT/Head Teacher who endorses IL and importance of learning a language.” (Quintile 1 school)

“Speaking in lessons is going well – we are using idiomatic and familiar expressions to encourage students to discuss issues in a way that stops them feeling self-conscious. IT such as Adobe voice record is also paying dividends.” (Quintile 2 school)

“MFL Mentoring is working really well for us and has resulted in a slight rise in uptake this year into KS4.” (Quintile 3 school)

“We organise a language week in September around the European Day of Languages (26th September), focusing on culture and traditions, offering basics in a variety of International Languages, including food in the canteen.” (Quintile 4 school)

Findings from post-16 colleges

Eleven post-16 colleges were invited to participate in *Language Trends Wales 2025* and six responded: all offer International Languages at A level; one also facilitates resitting of GCSE International Language qualifications where required. One college stated that it would welcome an alternative Level 3 course in International Languages which carries UCAS points. Three colleges employ Language Assistants; those that do not state that budget is the biggest obstacle. As in previous years, the findings from post-16 colleges focus on French, German, and Spanish A levels.

Colleges offer both full-time and part-time courses in a wide range of subjects. Some colleges may also offer Traineeships and Apprenticeship opportunities. Given the small number of colleges, data are presented as raw numbers.

All colleges reported that they had learners of International Languages in Year 12 and in Year 13, which is a positive when compared to *Language Trends Wales 2023*, in which three colleges reported having no learners of International Languages. Once again, two colleges reported having more than 20 learners of Year 12 International Languages in 2024/25 (Table 28).

	2023		2024		2025	
	Year 12	Year 13	Year 12	Year 13	Year 12	Year 13
5 or fewer	1	3	1	0	1	1
6–10	1	1	1	2	1	2
11–15	2	0	0	1	0	0
15–20	0	0	1	2	2	3
More than 20	1	1	2	0	2	0
None	3	3	0	0	0	0

Table 28: Number of International Language learners in responding colleges

Three colleges have a minimum number requirement for classes to run, stipulating that for the past few years there must be at least ten learners. When only a few learners wish to study a language post-16, two colleges run classes at a reduced timetable; one college has composite AS and A2 classes, whilst another college is concerned that their numbers are steadily going down each year. Recruitment of qualified language teachers is not reported to be an issue for most colleges; just one told us that it is a minor issue.

Languages taught in post-16 colleges

Respondents were asked to reflect on the changes, if any, in the uptake and provision for International Languages post-16 in their institution. No college reported the teaching of an Other International Language in their institution. Five out of the six responding colleges have seen uptake decrease in at least one of French, German, or Spanish, while only one college has noted an increase in a language (Spanish).

	Introduced as a new A-level	Take-up has increased	Take-up stable	Take-up has decreased	Subject discontinued	Students can do a language as part of a vocational course	Not taught in my institution	Other
French	0	0	3	1	1	0	0	0
German	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	0
Spanish	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	0
Other international language	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0

Table 29: Changes in uptake and provision of International Languages post-16 in responding institutions

Comments from lecturers included:

“Post pandemic we have tracked a significant decline in students wanting to opt into French and Spanish, culminating in very few enrolling. An increase in those opting into the Welsh language qualifications has otherwise increased.”

“French and Spanish are both taught. We normally notice that our recruitment is based on what local schools offer i.e., one year French will be more popular because local schools have offered French at KS4 and the following year, Spanish will be more popular as the school will have offered Spanish at KS4. Last academic year no student did French and Spanish with us. This year, five out of 20 French students are also studying Spanish.”

AI and technology in post-16 languages education

For the second time, we asked post-16 colleges to think about their use of AI technology in relation to language teaching. All colleges allow their learners to use AI technology, though staff expressed a reluctance on the part of some learners to embrace AI:

“I have encouraged them to use AI to improve essay writing after I had marked them (copilot), to practise their speaking skills (e.g Mizou). Some learners were reluctant to use it.”

Improving language learning in post-16 colleges

In open-ended comments, college respondents elucidated the struggle that they face in improving recruitment for languages and teaching a substantial amount of content in a short period of time. When asked what could be done to improve the situation for language learners, colleges commented the following:

“Although our recruitment took a big dip in 2019 (Welsh bac became compulsory meaning that the Welsh bac became the learners’ 4th AS subject) we are still normally recruiting in double figures. We have also started to collaborate with a local University and local schools to drive up recruitment. We are at the planning stage at the moment, but we are looking into setting up initiatives to promote languages locally.”

“I feel quite lucky in my institution. However, language learning must be more important at the Wales level. I fear students will no longer be exposed to different cultures as well as the actual language learning and this could lead to a more narrow-minded society which is exactly the opposite of what the world needs at the moment.”

Conclusion

The *Language Trends Wales 2025* data identified several challenges in International Languages education, including learner retention at A level (with French in particular affected by a steep decline in A level entries in 2025), low learner numbers and, as noted in qualitative comments by teachers, curriculum time, and budget cuts. While the decision to close the MFL department in Cardiff University has been reversed, the publicity surrounding the proposed action has raised concerns about the perception of International Language education and challenged the important place of International Languages education in Wales.

Despite the backdrop of an uncertain future for International Languages in Higher Education in Wales, there is much to be celebrated in this year's *Language Trends Wales* at school-level. Notably, there is a plurilingual ethos taking root in the primary classroom, demonstrated by the range of languages taught during curriculum time. In the secondary sector, it is encouraging to report the increased percentage of Year 10 learners studying International Languages in 2025 (including one school that reported all their Year 10 cohort were studying an International Language for GCSE); furthermore, nearly a third of responding secondary schools reported that more learners now take an International Language at KS4, compared to 13 per cent in the previous school year. In post-16 colleges, International Languages are retaining learners with all colleges reporting that they had learners of International Languages in Year 12 and in Year 13 (compared to 2023 when three colleges reported no such learners).

Teachers and language educators have reiterated the need to invest in International Languages education; while some data has raised cause for concern, there is also much more to celebrate within the plurilingual classroom, and we sincerely thank the teachers who have taken the time to provide their professional opinions and recommendations to this research.

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