BRITISH COUNCIL

Language Trends Wales 2024

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

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Foreword from British Council Wales

At British Council Wales, we aim to create unique international opportunities for people across Wales – with the ultimate goal of contributing to peace and prosperity of our world. As Director of that mission and as a proud linguist our annual research into the Language Trends of Wales is as pertinent as ever. Wales does best when it's looking outwards. International Languages play a key role in creating that global outlook and in creating our global citizens of the future.

Learning languages from a young age changed my life for the better. They shaped my academic studies, my career pathway, my relationships and will continue to shape my future. Languages opened doors to travel, meet new people, experience new cultures, to adventure and to new business – both in cultural diplomacy and commercially. We cannot rest on our laurels in the English and Welsh speaking world and assume the world will speak our language so we don't need to speak the languages of the world. Let us not underestimate the platform, opportunities and windows on the world the joy of speaking an International Language offers. It's like having a super power. And you can use it when least expected…

British Council Wales is proud to support and advocate for International Language learning in schools and beyond. The younger our children learn a language, we hope their propensity for language learning grows. Welsh can play a role in the plurilingualism of our nation. And whilst Welsh and English are key to our identity, we believe that mastering additional International Languages is crucial for Wales to maintain its ambition as an outward-looking nation with strong global connections. In a world where cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration are increasingly important for trade, business, relationships, mobility and cultural understanding and peace, learning and speaking multiple languages empowers us to be the global citizens we aspire to be for Wales.

We hope that the findings in the *Language Trends Wales 2024* report will continue to inspire thoughtful conversations and action around language learning, ensuring Wales remains globally engaged and connected for years to come.

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 situation of International Language[1] teaching and learning. This research aims to i) track the trends of International Language learning over the years; ii) assess the impact of policy measures in relation to International Languages; and iii) reflect the current context of International Language teaching and learning, based both on quantitative data and on views expressed by teachers. This year, in lieu of a primary school questionnaire, Year 6 primary school pupils were invited to submit a poster entry on the broad theme of language learning, and we have included a new section in *Language Trends Wales* on pupil voices and opinions that showcases pupil creativity. The first *Language Trends Wales* survey was carried out in 2015, and it is part of a series of recurring research reports in the UK: there have been annual surveys in England since 2002, biennial surveys in Northern Ireland since 2019 and the first ever *Language Trends* report from Scotland will be released in early 2025. Previous reports can be found on the corresponding country's British Council website. *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 2024*. The 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 UK and other countries.

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 the Year 6 pupils who submitted wonderful poster entries. Without teacher and pupil participation, our research would not be possible. We thank you for your continued time and support.

Headline findings for 2024

• French is offered in 70 per cent of responding secondary schools in Year 7, a decrease of nearly 10 per cent to the figure reported in 2023. However, French retains its spot as the most popular International Language at both GCSE and A level;

• Nearly 70 per cent of responding secondary schools reported that none or less than 10 per cent of Year 10 students were taking an International Language for GCSE or other Level 2 qualification;

• Secondary school teachers report a lack of funding in International Languages and a need to revise harsh grading boundaries in public examinations;

• All responding post-16 colleges use AI technology in the teaching of International Languages.

1 This refers to all languages other than Welsh and English which are learned at school and can include community languages, modern languages, classical languages and British Sign Language.

Policy context and background

British Council have long underlined the importance of International Language education for economic prosperity and global connections, identifying Spanish, Mandarin, French, Arabic, and German as the most important languages to learn for economic prosperity, with Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Japanese, and Russian also seen as important (*Languages for the* Future, 2017). More recently, Ayres-Bennett (2023) has reinforced the importance of multilingualism to enrich 'individuals, communities and nations' (p. 3). Yet, there are declining numbers of language learners in higher and further education, prompting calls for 'urgent, concerted and coordinated action to address the critical situation for languages in the UK' (The British Academy et al., *Towards a National Languages Strategy*, 2020, p. 6).

Wales has undergone an era of educational policy change with the introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales in maintained schools since 2022. This framework provides statutory guidance for schools to better provide children and young people with the knowledge, skills and experiences to flourish. The New Curriculum for Wales outlays shared expectations regarding how schools should develop their curriculum, including the renaming of 'Modern Foreign Languages' to 'International Languages' (Welsh Government, 2021). International Languages include home and community languages, Modern Languages, classical languages and British Sign Language.

Further plurilingual government initiatives that promote a lifelong love for languages, including Welsh, English and Other International Languages, includes Global Futures[2], a government programme first initiated in 2015 following the dissolution of CILT Cymru, Wales' National Centre for Languages, which had existed since 2002. Key to Global Futures is the MFL Mentoring Project that too has run since 2015, 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]

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, including children, 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 two surveys, one for secondary schools and one for post-16 colleges, available in Welsh and English. The surveys comprised closed question items to be analysed quantitatively and included some open question items for qualitative commentary. For the first time, we invited Year 6 primary school pupils to create a poster on their experiences of and feelings about International Language learning; young people are experts in their own lives and the resulting dataset not only gives them a voice in *Language Trends Wales 2024*, but is also a fascinating insight into their early understanding of the importance of having a global perspective.

Questions for the survey and lesson plans for the poster competition were developed by the research team in early 2024 and refined in consultation with a panel of Welsh education professionals, convened by British Council Wales. Invitations to participate in the poster competition were emailed to 1,210 primary schools and addressed to the Headteacher.[4] The surveys were emailed to 176 secondary schools and 12 post-16 colleges in early May and addressed to the Head of International Languages. Links to participate in the surveys were also available on British Council Wales social media channels.

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 survey, closed item responses were analysed using descriptive statistics and comments to open response questions were analysed using thematic analysis. For the posters, we analysed what and how pupils expressed their ideas, feelings, and experiences of languages and language learning.

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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 Due to the lack of a publicly available and up-to-date list of primary schools and contact details, not all primary schools in Wales were contacted and many email addresses were no longer in use.

Survey response rates remain healthy at 30 per cent in maintained secondary schools and 42 per cent in post-16 colleges; comparatively, the response rate was 21 per cent for maintained secondary schools in *Language Trends England* in 2024. The response rate to the surveys has declined this year for both secondary schools and post-16 colleges; however, this was to be expected as our data collection had to be paused during the pre-election period from the announcement of a general election on 22 May 2024 and the formation of the newly elected government in early July 2024. The majority of our data was thus collected in the final two weeks of summer term 2024:

	Base	Achieved	% Response Rate
Secondary School Survey	176	53	30%
Post-16 College Survey	12	5	42%

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

Public examination figures

The approach to GCSE and A level grading returned to pre-pandemic arrangements this year. GCSE entries across all subjects in Wales were up by 4.8 per cent between 2023 and 2024, and when compared to 2019, the number of entries in 2024 increased by 5.5 per cent. The number of 16-year-olds in Wales increased by 4.2 per cent between 2023 and 2024, so an increase in GCSE entries is to be expected. It is pleasing that since last year French has grown by 5.5 per cent and German is up by 23 per cent in relation to GCSE entries, though raw numbers are still comparatively small. Spanish in Wales does not mirror trends in England or Northern Ireland, where there is a continual upward trajectory; Spanish is now the most popular International Language GCSE in Northern Ireland and is expected to be so too in England in the next two years. In Wales, French is holding its own.
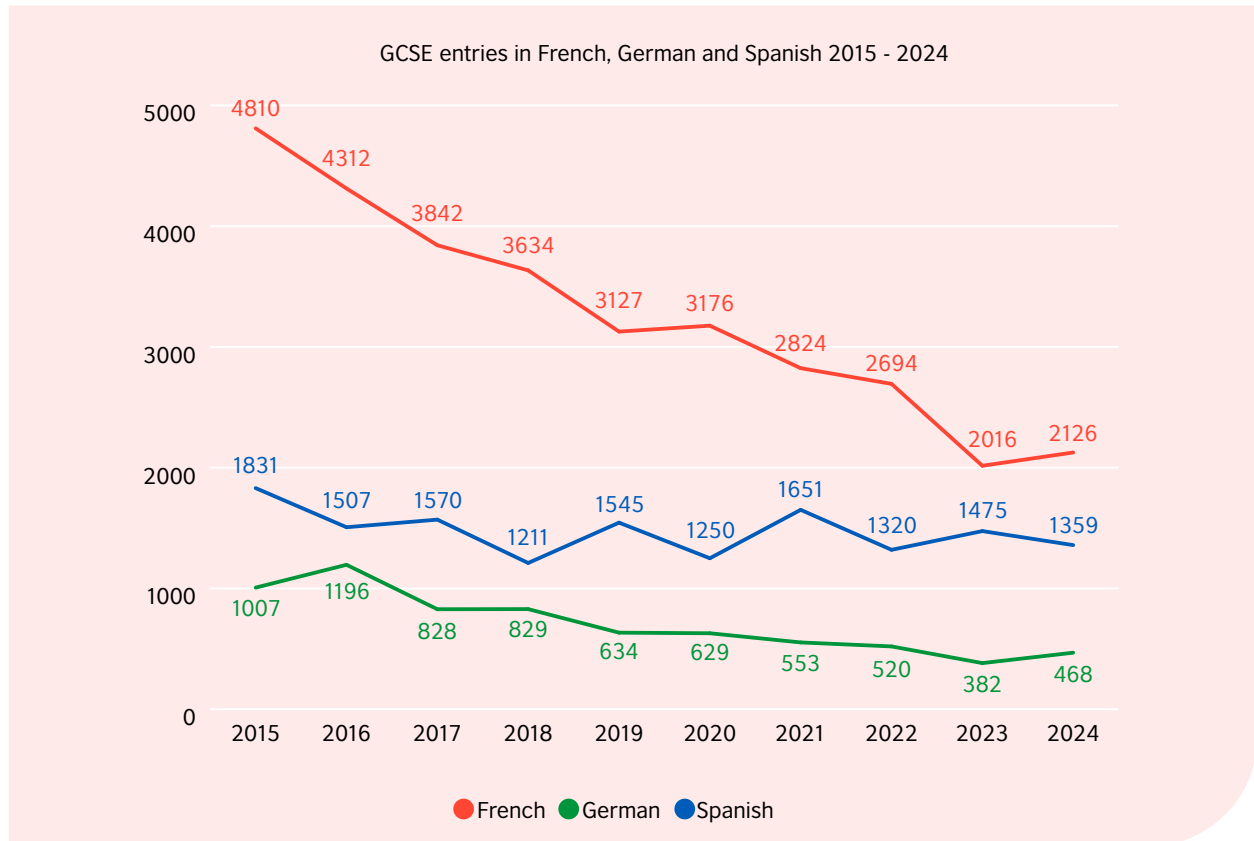
GCSE entries in French, German and Spanish 2015 - 2024

Year	French	German	Spanish
2015	4810	1007	1831
2016	4312	1196	1507
2017	3842	828	1570
2018	3634	829	1211
2019	3127	634	1545
2020	3176	629	1250
2021	2824	553	1651
2022	2694	520	1320
2023	2016	382	1475
2024	2126	468	1359

French ● German ● Spanish ●

Figure 1: GCSE entries in French, German and Spanish 2015 – 2024 (source JCQ [Provisional exam data] 2015 - 2024)[5]

GCSE entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 - 2024
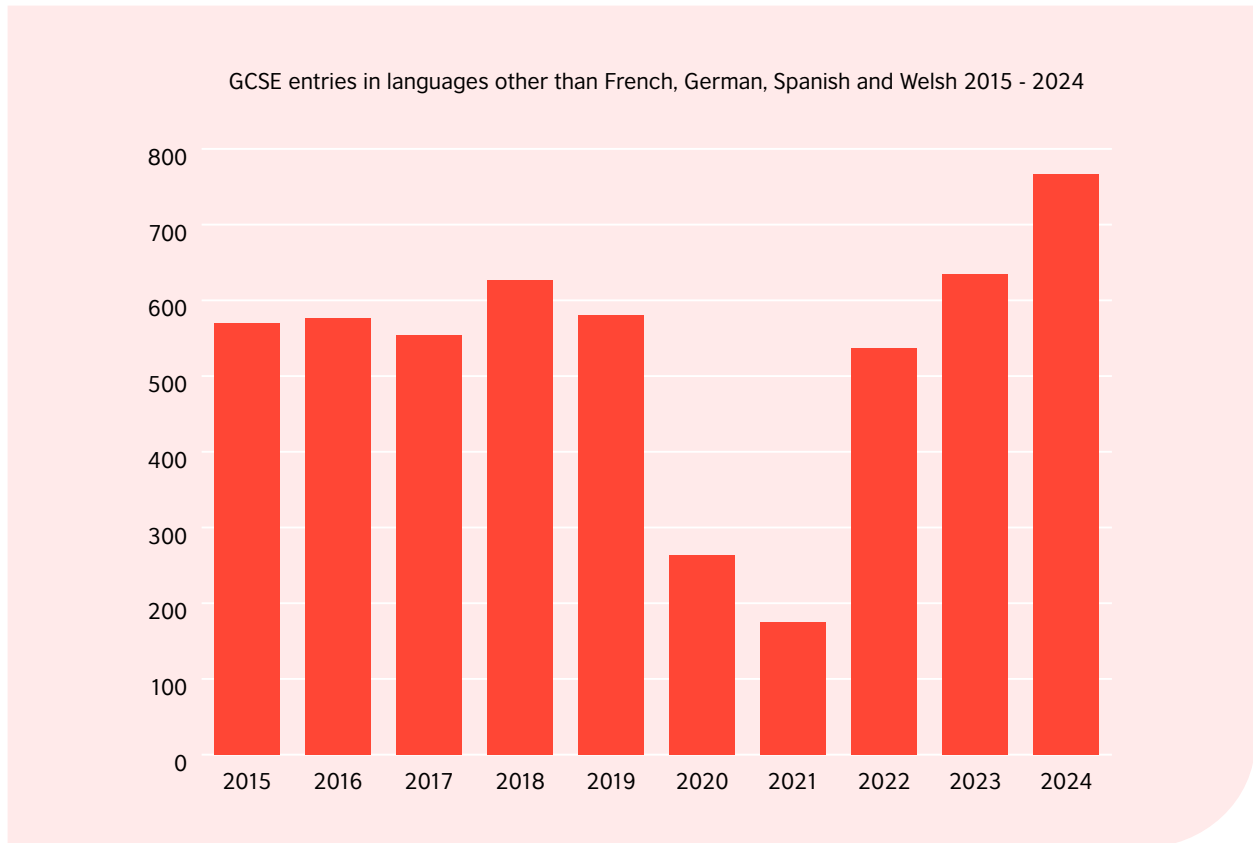

Figure 2: GCSE entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 – 2024 (source JCQ [Provisional exam data] 2015 - 2024)

Figure 2 provides more good news as entries in Home, Heritage and Community Languages, are clearly increasing and have surpassed annual entries over the last ten years. Figure 3 shows a fairly stable picture at A level; as at GCSE, Spanish entries are somewhat erratic, and the steady growth noted in other parts of the UK is not reflected in Wales.

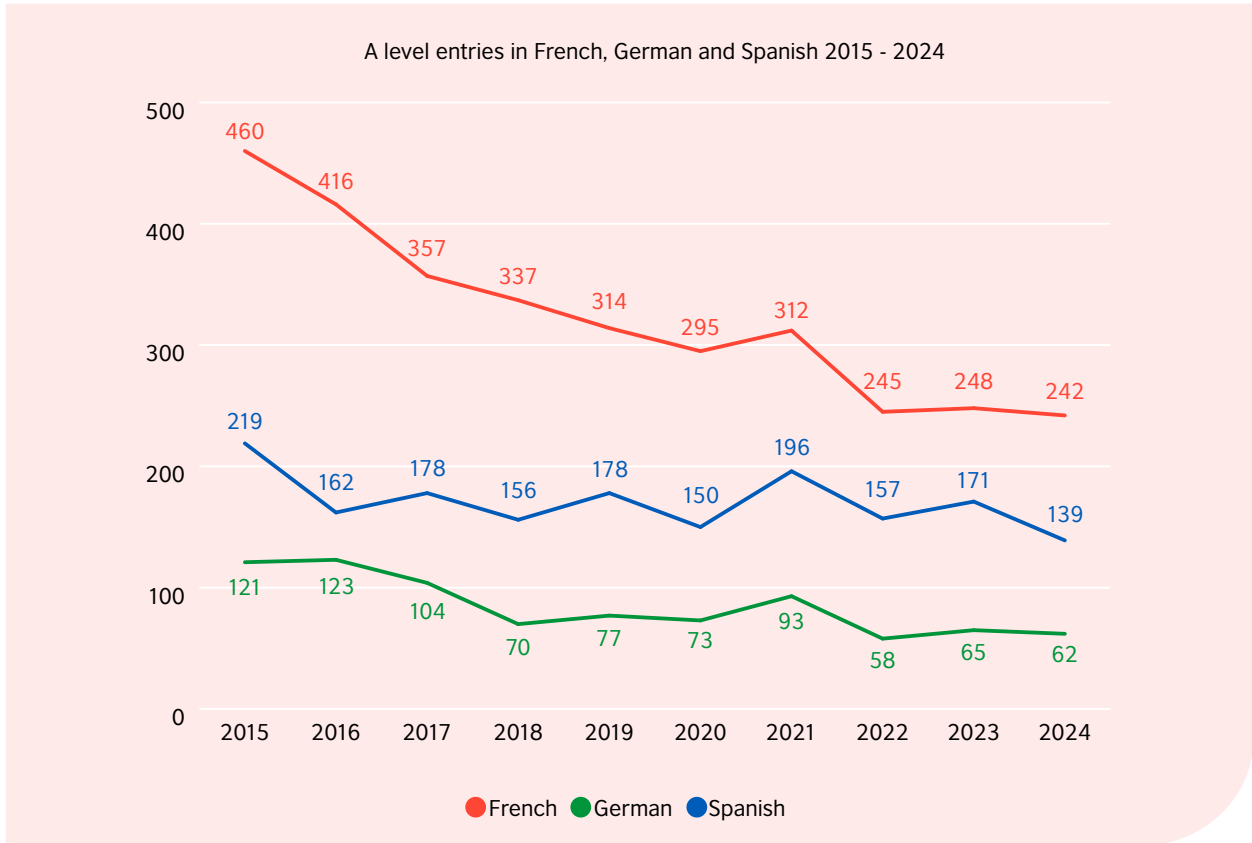A level entries in French, German and Spanish 2015 - 2024

Figure 3: A level entries in French, German and Spanish 2015 – 2024 (source JCQ [Provisional exam data] 2015 - 2024)

A level entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 -2024
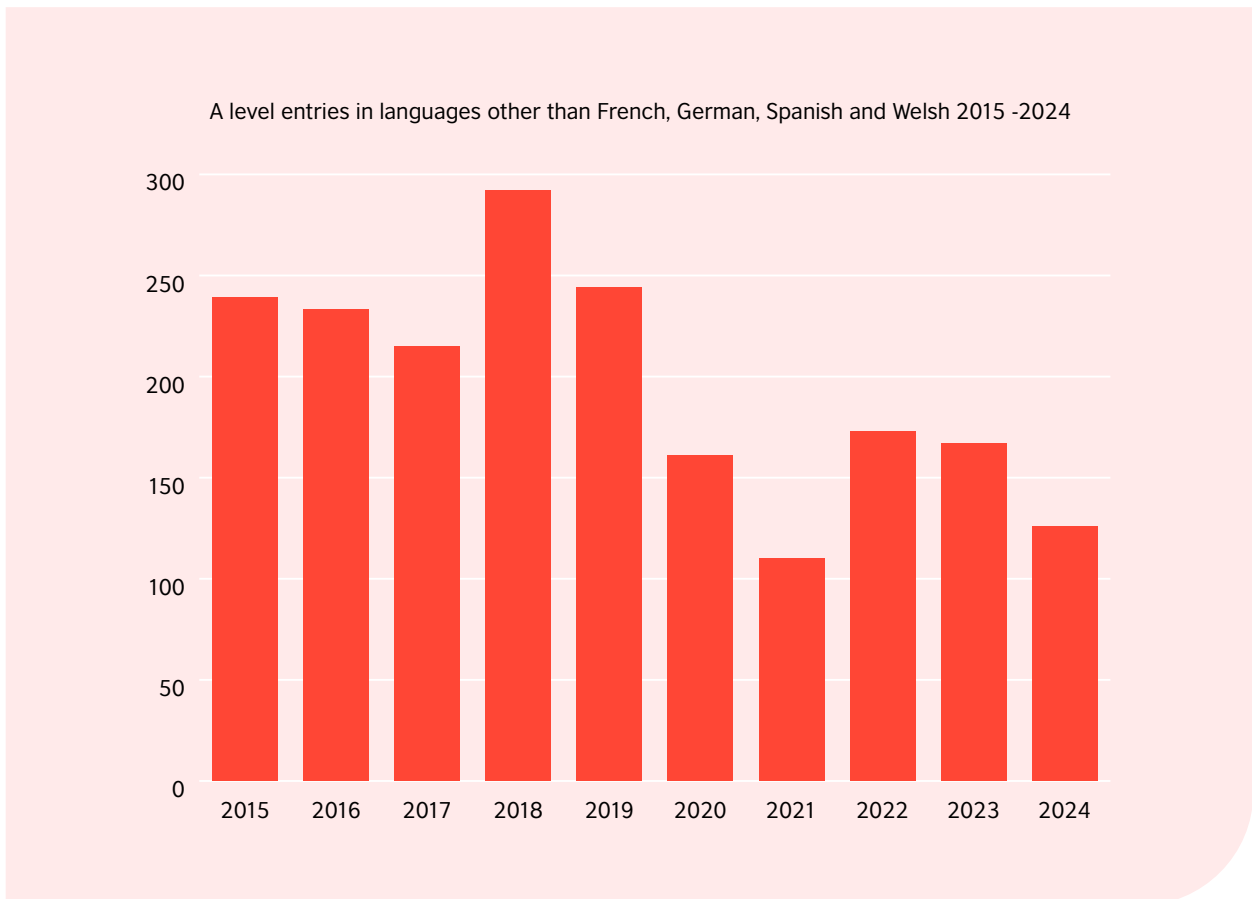

Figure 4: A level entries in languages other than French, German, Spanish and Welsh 2015 – 2024 (source JCQ [Provisional exam data] 2015 - 2024)

Findings from secondary schools

Profile of secondary schools

The 2024 schools' census recorded 176 secondary schools in Wales, of which 128 were English Medium, 8 were English Medium with significant Welsh, 18 were Welsh Medium and 22 were bilingual Welsh/ English. After data sets were cleaned and duplicates removed, the 53 usable responses from secondary schools resulted in a response rate of 30 per cent.

Eight schools responded to the survey in Welsh, and the remaining 45 schools responded in English. Table 2 shows the geographical distribution of responding schools, with around half located in North Wales.

Geographical location	Includes local authorities of	Base	Number of responding schools (n=53)
North Wales	Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham	50	25
South West and Mid Wales	Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot	48	11
Central South Wales	Bridgend, The Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff	48	11
South East Wales	Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport	30	6

Table 2: Number of responding schools by geographical location

Free School Meals

The percentage of students in each secondary school entitled to free school meals was calculated to determine any socio-economic differences in relation to language learning. Using data from the Wales School Census released in July 2024, the full cohort of 176 maintained secondary schools invited to respond to the survey were arranged into quintiles by the percentage of students (up to age 15) entitled to Free School Meals (FSM).

Quintiles		Base schools (total = 176)	Number of responding schools (n = 53)	Percentage
1	0.0-17.0%	35	11	20.8%
2	17.1-22.2%	36	13	24.5%
3	22.3-28.7%	35	9	17.0%
4	28.8-37.2%	35	9	17.0%
5	37.3% and above	35	11	20.8%

Table 3: FSME quintiles for state secondary schools in Wales

Table 3 shows that just over 45 per cent of responding schools are in quintiles 1 and 2, the least deprived areas in Wales according to the number of transitionally protected students entitled to free school meals. Although we have two more respondents in quintile 5 this year, the imbalance between respondents from all quintiles may result in a report that is more favourable than the current reality in schools.

Language learning at key stage 3

Teachers were asked what International Language(s) their students were learning at key stage 3 in the 2023/24 school year. In table 4, we see that French is offered in 70 per cent of secondary schools in Year 7, a decrease of nearly 10 per cent to the figure reported in 2023. There is a small, reported increase in the number of schools offering Spanish to all pupils at key stage 3, though the lack of statistical significance with the sample size is noted. In terms of other languages, two respondents noted the teaching of Mandarin.

	French	German	Spanish
Year 7	70%	6%	30%
Year 8	74%	4%	32%
Year 9	64%	8%	28%

Table 4: International Languages at key stage 3 for all learners

The survey asked respondents if learners in their school were learning more than one International Language in the 2023/24 school year, not including Welsh. From Year 7 to Year 10, the majority of schools reported that no learners were studying more than one language (table 5). From Year 7 to Year 9, all learners study an additional language in just under a fifth of responding schools; however, by Year 10, this figure is zero.

	All	More than half	Some (5% - 49%)	Less than 5%	None
Year 7	17%	4%	0%	2%	77%
Year 8	19%	4%	2%	2%	74%
Year 9	19%	4%	4%	6%	68%
Year 10	0%	0%	8%	19%	74%

Table 5: Proportion of learners studying more than one International Language (not including Welsh) in Year 7 to Year 10

Time for languages

Schools were asked to state the total amount of class time per week, on average, allocated to the learning of International Languages. Seventy-seven per cent of responding secondary schools allocate one to two hours of class time to languages in Year 7; by Year 9, this figure decreases to 62.3 per cent of schools. There is a small reported increase in the number of schools allocating less than 1 hour to International Languages in Year 8 (9.4 per cent in 2024, compared to 4 per cent in 2023), in Year 9 (11.3 per cent in 2024, compared to 1.5 per cent in 2023) and in Year 10 (5.7 per cent in 2024, compared to 0 per cent in 2023); however, it must be borne in mind that the smaller number of respondents in 2024 may skew the data. Just under two-thirds of responding schools allocate two to three hours of class time to languages in Year 10, comparable to data reported in *Language Trends Wales 2023*.

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Less than 1 hour	6%	9%	11%	6%
1-2 hours	77%	70%	62%	15%
2-3 hours	15%	17%	23%	58%
3-4 hours	2%	4%	4%	8%
More than 4 hours	2%	2%	2%	17%

Table 6: Average class time allocated to International Language learning per week at key stage 3 and in Year 10

Language learning at key stage 4

In 2024, 36 out of 53 responding secondary schools (i.e. 67.9 per cent) reported that none or less than 10 per cent of their Year 10 students were taking an International Language for GCSE or other Level 2 qualification. Of the 53 responding schools, only one school (seven less schools than in 2023) reported that 30 per cent of the cohort were studying an International Language (table 7).

	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

Table 7: Proportion of students in Year 10 learning an International Language for GCSE or other Level 2 qualification (e.g., Level 2 Global Business Communication). Reported in raw numbers (2022 total n=64, 2023 total n=67, 2024 total n=53)

All responding schools told us that they use GCSE qualifications; in 6 per cent (n=3), schools also use Level 2 Global Business Communication accreditations for Level 2 International Languages.

As with previous iterations of *Language Trends Wales*, we asked respondents about school-level policies in relation to learning an International Language; multiple responses were permitted, and responding schools told us that:

Classes do not run if there are not enough learners	75%
Timetabling means that not all learners are able to take an International Language	51%
Lower than average attaining learners are discouraged from choosing an International Language	23%
Other (please specify)	15%
Some learners may be advised by SLT not to take an International Language	13%
The school strongly recommends that the most academically able take an International Language	9%
The school strongly recommends that all learners take an International Language	2%
All learners MUST take an International Language	0%

Table 8: School policies as perceived by responding teachers in relation to International Language learning at key stage 4 (multiple responses permitted)

In the majority of responding secondary schools, classes do not run if there are not enough learners. Indeed, 11 responding schools told us that at least ten pupils are required for a GCSE International Language class to run, and a further 11 schools noted the minimum number of pupils to be between 12 and 15. The percentage of schools reporting that timetabling may prohibit learners from taking an International Language remains consistent with last year's figure of 51 per cent. Fifteen per cent of respondents selected 'other' and specified alternative school policies at key stage 4, including i) allowing pupils to make their own choice without interference, and ii) positively encouraging pupils to take subjects that they enjoy/need.

Responding teachers were asked to think about the past three years and how the proportion of learners studying an International Language at key stage 4 had changed, if at all. In table 9, we can see that 13 per cent of respondents consider there to be more learners now studying an International Language at key stage 4 (compared to 7 per cent in 2023). Around two-fifths of schools responded that fewer learners now take an International Language, reflecting a positive finding when compared to the figure reported in 2023 (49 per cent); for 28 per cent of schools there is no clear trend, with learner numbers fluctuating yearly.

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

Table 9: Teachers' perceptions of uptake at KS4 over the past three years

Uptake of GCSE International Languages

Responding teachers were asked what International Languages learners were studying at GCSE level in the 2023/24 school year (figure 5).
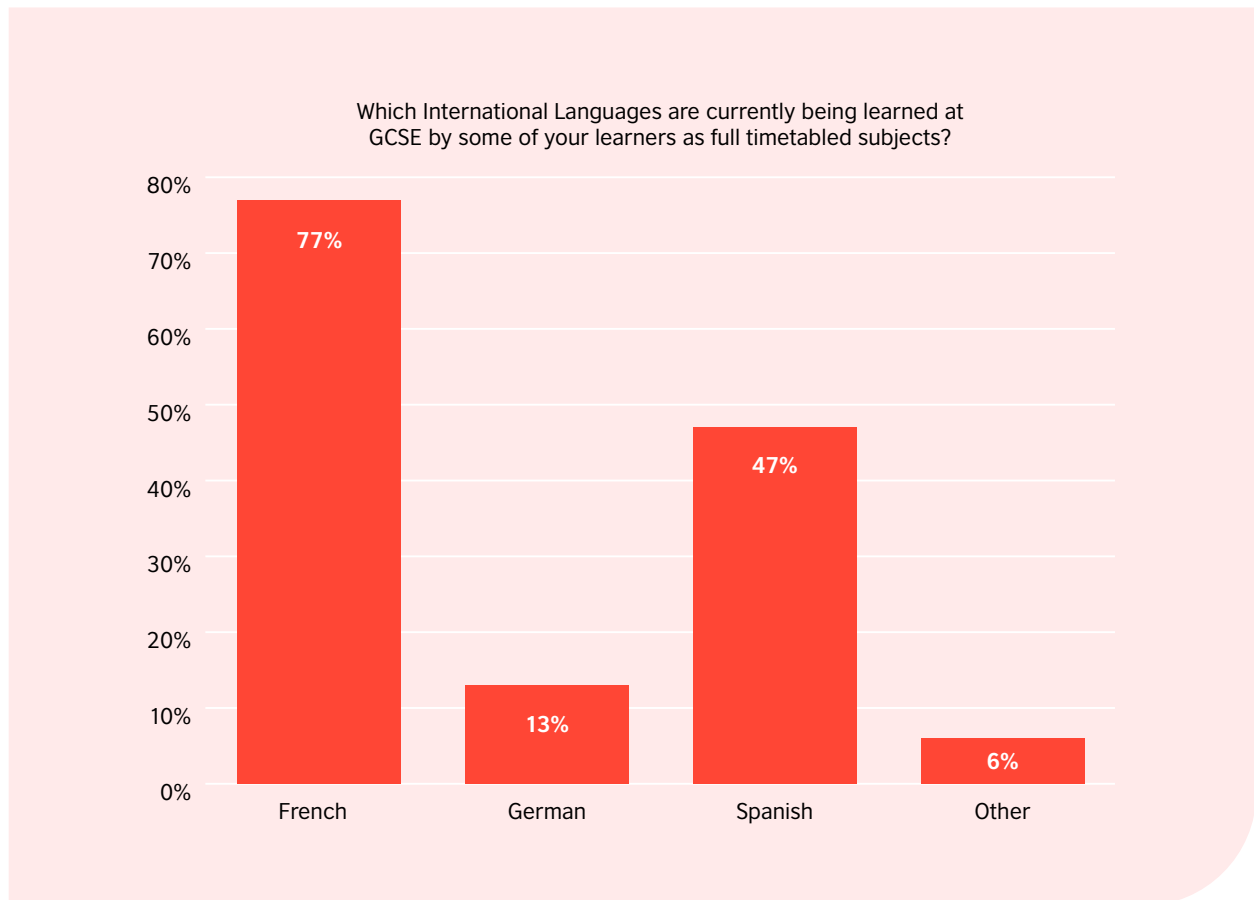
Which International Languages are currently being learned at GCSE by some of your learners as full timetabled subjects?

Language	Percentage
French	77%
German	13%
Spanish	47%
Other	6%

Figure 5: Percentage of International Languages learned at GCSE in responding schools

By far, French is the most taught language at GCSE level in 77 per cent of responding schools, while Spanish is being studied as a GCSE language in nearly half of schools, and German uptake remains low at 13 per cent. In the 'other' category, one teacher commented that no International Languages were being studied at GCSE level, and another noted that EAL pupils study their home or heritage language at GCSE level.

The survey asked teachers to reflect on what they feel are the most prominent barriers to encouraging young people to take an International Language for GCSE (options listed in table 10). A quarter of responding teachers perceived Global English and its perception as a world language to be the main challenge (25 per cent), followed closely by the nature and content of external exams (21 per cent). Another key challenge identified by teachers includes promoting languages at a whole-school level as a careers option (13 per cent).

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

Table 10: Percentage of schools that identify the abovementioned barriers as a main challenge to learners taking an International Language for GCSE

Responding teachers were asked to further comment on any other barriers to providing an effective learning and teaching environment in their school. A common thread that emerged amongst teacher comments centred on the lack of GCSE choices and learner reluctance to study an additional language. Other teacher comments included the following:

"Parents focus on Maths and English as a priority."

"Despite being informed, pupils say that languages will not be useful for their futures, they find it too hard, or they don't enjoy it, some say there were clashes in their option choices or that they would choose it if there were 4 options rather than 3."

"Very few opportunities for students to practise language outside of the classroom or believe that it is useful in the 'real' world."

The New Curriculum for Wales stipulates that the learning and teaching of Welsh is a mandatory requirement until age 16; additionally, learners are encouraged to develop plurilingual language skills by studying an International Language (CfW, 2024). Some teachers have noted that language learning is perceived as difficult, and learning multiple languages may not appeal to a young person with a limited number of GCSE choices:

"Many pupils and parents do not see the value of speaking an International Language. Pupils have to study Welsh at GCSE and often do not want to use up one of their option choices with another language."

Extra-curricular language learning

The survey asked teachers if their learners were learning any of the languages in table 11 as extra-curricular or enrichment subjects. In the majority of responding schools, there is no extra-curricular language learning throughout key stage 3, key stage 4 and post-16, commensurate with the findings of *Language Trends Wales 2023*. Nearly one fifth of schools reported the learning of Mandarin at key stage 3, which is perhaps due to school engagement with the Confucius Institute. In the 'other' category, there was some evidence of a broader range of International Languages on offer this year, including Italian, Korean, Japanese and Ukrainian.

	KS3	KS4	Post-16
Arabic	4%	6%	4%
French	2%	4%	2%
German	6%	4%	0%
Mandarin	19%	6%	4%
Polish	4%	13%	2%
Spanish	0%	6%	2%
None	68%	75%	87%
Other	8%	6%	2%

Table 11: Percentage of schools with the above International Languages studied in the 2023/24 school year as extra-curricular or enrichment subjects at key stage 3, key stage 4 and post-16 (multiple responses permitted)

Home, heritage and community languages

According to StatsWales, there were a total of 6,101 pupils in secondary education who are recorded to have English as an Additional Language (EAL).[6] In the Welsh education system, EAL encompasses three categories of learners: a) New to English; b) Early acquisition; c) Developing competence. As a percentage, the most EAL pupils are recorded in Newport (13 per cent), followed by Cardiff (7 per cent).

Recent research has highlighted the importance of valuing home language skills to contribute to the economic, social and multicultural fabric of society, as well as developing and enriching the lives of individual learners by supporting their education journey (Humphries, Carruthers and Henderson, 2024). Within our dataset, we found that the majority (75 per cent) of responding secondary schools support learners to take exams in the languages spoken in their homes or communities or in addition to those taught at school. This highlights the plurilingual approach taken by schools in Wales which ensures opportunities for learners to undertake examinations and attain qualifications for all their language skills.

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6 See StatsWales for further data: https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/pupillevelannualschoolcensussummarydata-by-localauthority.

Do any of your learners have opportunities to take exams in
the languages spoken in their homes or communities?

- ● Yes, in my school
- ● Yes, but they sit the exam elsewhere
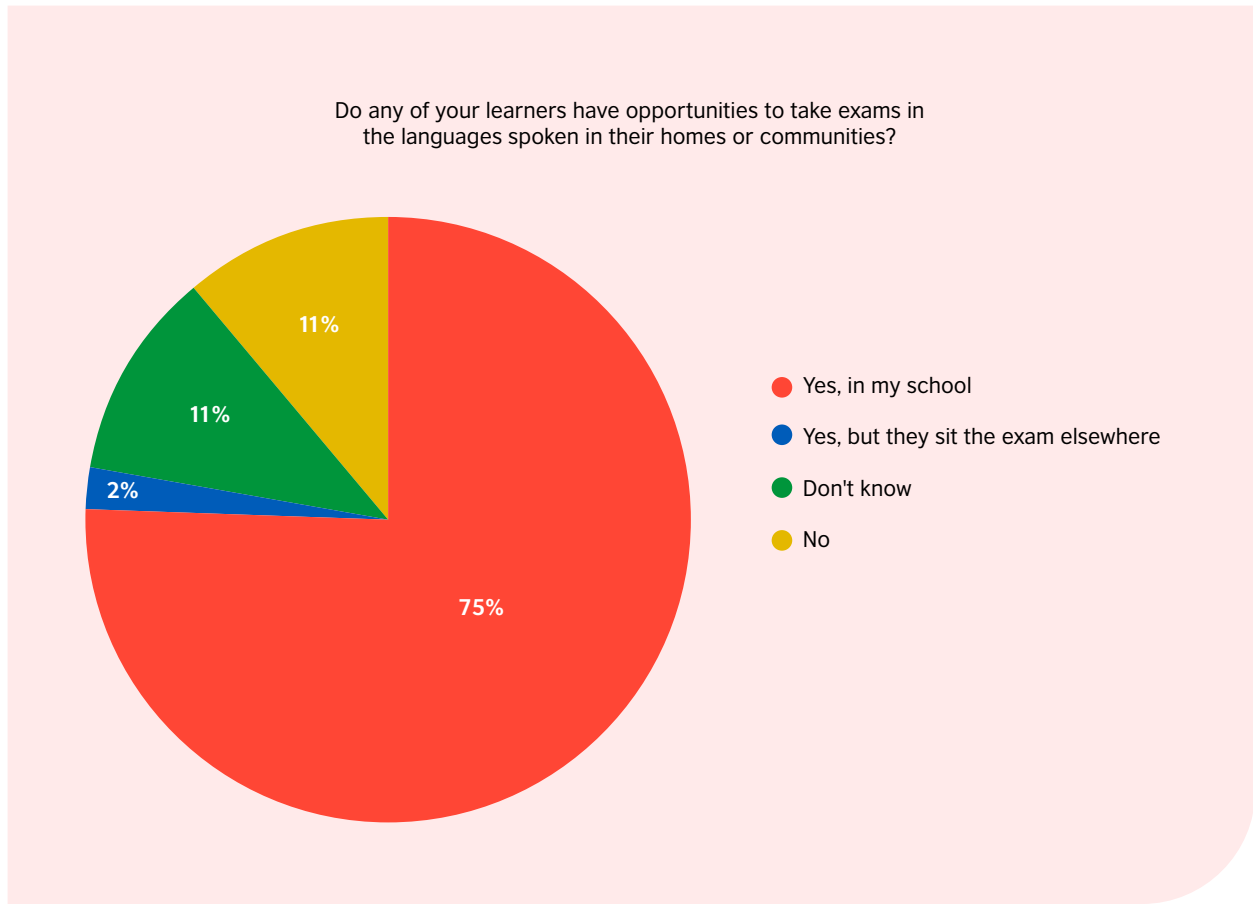- ● Don't know
- ● No

Figure 6: Percentage of schools that offer learners the opportunity to take exams in their home or community language (and not taught in their school)

International dimension

A variety of opportunities for international engagement with institutions and individuals exist in Wales that schools can avail of to support and enhance language learning, outlined in table 12. In particular, figures of engagement with MFL Student Mentoring remain high in secondary schools, with 72 per cent of responding schools continuing to engage with the successful mentoring scheme in the 2023/24 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] The data in table 12 also show a small increase in schools with one or more partner institutions abroad. In the 'other' category, some teachers commented that they take learners on international school trips.

There is, however, a decline in the number of schools who employ a Language Assistant (employed in four per cent of responding schools in 2024, compared to nine per cent in 2023). Consistent with previous *Language Trends Wales* reports, our data show that it is Mandarin speaking Language Assistants who are employed in the small number of schools with assistants. Although there is demonstrable evidence that a Language Assistant can provide a transformative and positive effect on language teaching, exam results and learning outcomes (British Council, 2023), a lack of funding often means that schools are unable to provide learners with real-life speakers of French, German, Italian, Mandarin or Spanish (*Language Trends Wales, 2023*). In the 2023/24 school year, there was also decreased engagement with British Council international opportunities, cultural institutes and Routes into Languages Cymru (see table 12). The reported decreases in international engagement in responding secondary schools highlights a need to make international opportunities more accessible yet high impact, with little preparation required by teachers.

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

Table 12: International engagement in secondary schools (multiple responses allowed)

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7 For further information, see https://mflmentoring.co.uk/.

International Languages and the New Curriculum for Wales

With the introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales underway, schools are in a period of transition and have yet to see tangible outcomes on how the New Curriculum will improve the situation for International Languages.

Teachers were asked about what was currently working well in International Language learning, as well as what could be done to improve language learning. Some noted the following opinions on the New Curriculum for Wales in relation to languages education:

> *"It is hoped that a change of teaching methods, using the Conti ideas, and changes linked to the New Curriculum with more culture and some literature may reap some results but with only 3 hours a fortnight timetabled for International Languages, it is not enough for pupils to gain confidence in their learning."*

> *"[The] New Curriculum is allowing far more cultural knowledge to be shared."*

> *"The new GCSE content looks to be more relevant to pupils - travel and work for example."*

> *"[The] lack of clarity for new MFL [International Language] GCSEs in response to CfW is a problem - we can't tell pupils what to expect in terms of how they will be assessed; pupils who are anxious about this will not choose MFL without a clear understanding of what is required."[8]*

Teachers were asked about the extent of collaboration between their languages department and Area of Learning Experience in preparation for the New Curriculum. Just under 10 per cent of respondents and their International Languages department have not been involved in preparing for the New Curriculum in collaboration with their Area of Learning Experience (figure 7). Two-thirds of respondents have already made some changes in preparation for the New Curriculum (53 per cent) or have plans which will be put in place later (15 per cent).

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8 Since data collection, the new WJEC specifications have been released for GCSE subjects: https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/qualifications-in-development/made-for-wales-wjec-is-ready-to-deliver/qualification-outlines-and-consultation-summaries/.
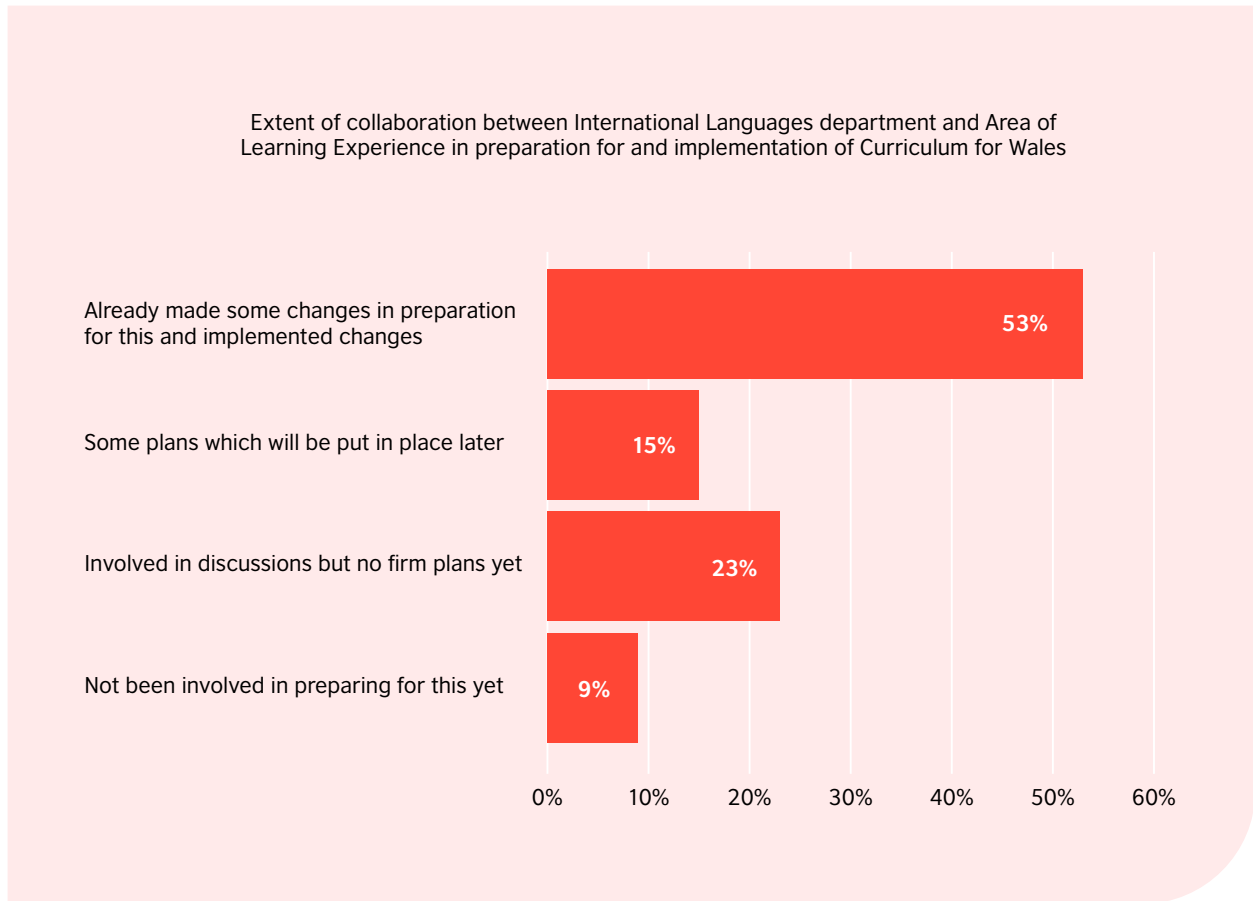
Extent of collaboration between International Languages department and Area of Learning Experience in preparation for and implementation of Curriculum for Wales

Already made some changes in preparation for this and implemented changes — 53%

Some plans which will be put in place later — 15%

Involved in discussions but no firm plans yet — 23%

Not been involved in preparing for this yet — 9%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%

Figure 7: Teacher responses 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 recent times, there has been an increased use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and AI-powered educational technology in and out of the languages classroom, including applications such as ChatGPT, Mizou, Gliglish, Diffet, Wisdolia and Magic Padlet. For the first time, *Language Trends Wales* asked teachers about their use of such technology in relation to language teaching. For the majority of responding teachers (75 per cent), AI technology is not used in language teaching and a quarter of respondents use it occasionally.

How often does your department make use of AI technology (such as ChatGPT, Diffet, etc) in language teaching?
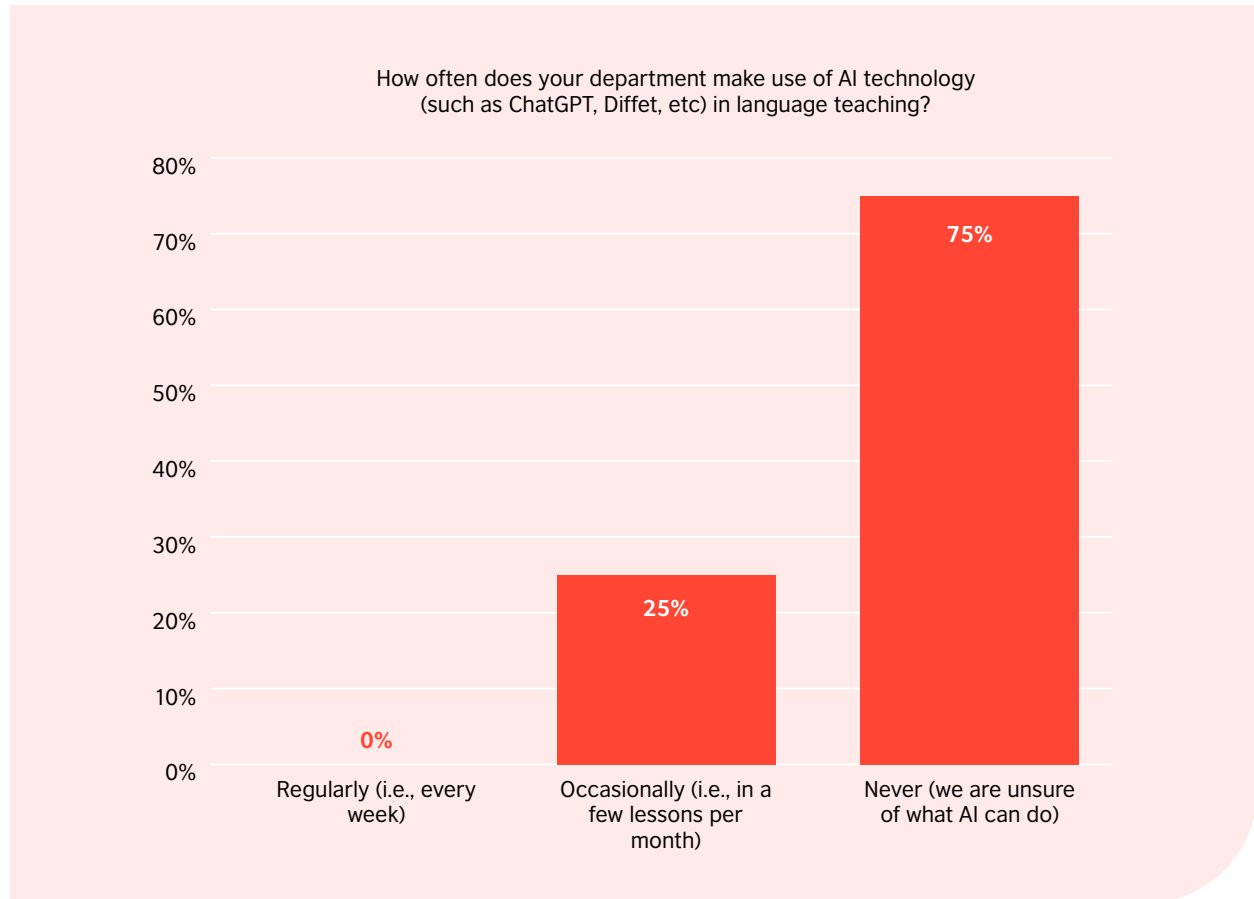
Figure 8: Secondary schools' engagement with AI technology in language learning

Teachers were also asked an open-ended question with room to expand upon their answer if learners are allowed to use AI technology to support their language learning. Many teachers commented that learners were not allowed to use AI, that learners could not access it on school devices, or, in several cases, that there are not enough IT devices to facilitate the use of AI with learners in school. Some comments included the following:

"No. I don't feel it would be beneficial for pupils as it would just give them a translation rather than an explanation or process which they could use in their future learning."

"We are not using AI technology yet. The reasons are lack of training (staff) and lack of equipment (access to devices)."

Other teachers commented that the use of AI would be explored in the future, while one teacher noted how their learners make use of technology:

"Yes, we encourage them to use ChatGPT to correct their work and suggest language specific apps such as Tutor Lily."

International Languages and post-16 provision

Nearly half (n=25) of responding secondary schools do not have post-16 provision in International Languages. In those schools with post-16 provision in International Languages (n=28), around 60 per cent have five or fewer learners in Year 12 and in Year 13. As identified in previous editions of *Language Trends Wales*, low pupil numbers often mean that many classes do not run; this is indeed the case for nearly half of responding schools with post-16 provision in 2024 (see table 13). In 'other' comments, respondents noted the following alternative arrangements when only a few learners wish to study an International Language: i) they have attempted to collaborate with other schools in the past, but have been hindered by timetable constrictions; ii) classes take place after school; and, iii) it depends on the number and their future French class will run with four pupils.

AS and A2 classes are taught together	7%
Classes do not run	46%
Classes run at a reduced timetable	36%
Shared arrangements with another school	18%
Other (please give details)	18%

Table 13: Respondents' 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)

The survey asked teachers to reflect on the last three years and consider the changes, if any, in the take-up and provision of International Languages at post-16 level in their school. Twenty-six schools responded to this question and their responses are presented as raw figures in table 14. No schools have post-16 provision in an International Language other than French, German and Spanish.

	French	German	Spanish	Other I/L
Introduced as a new A-level	1	0	0	0
Take-up has increased	2	0	3	0
Take-up stable	6	2	5	0
Take-up has decreased	9	1	5	0
Subject discontinued	3	2	1	0
Not taught in my institution	5	15	11	18

Table 14: Teachers' perceptions of what changes have there been, if any, in take-up and provision for International Languages post-16 in their school over the last three years

Teacher concerns on the future of post-16 languages

Recent research by the British Academy (2024) found that subject choices available to post-16 learners has narrowed, resulting in 'fewer students studying humanities subjects like languages, English and history', due to the range of subjects available and learner subject preferences. Responding teachers to our survey have expressed serious concerns on the future of languages in their schools due to fewer learners, difficult exams and harsh grading, parent and SLT perceptions of languages, and a lack of funding. The following are comments made by respondents on reasons for any changes in take-up or provision:

> *"We are very worried about the future of languages, now more than ever. We feel that no matter how much we try to promote the importance of languages and their relevance in the world of work, it does not change much. It would be useful to have regular support with outside speakers, showing what jobs they could do, etc. But it all costs money and budgets have been reduced."*

> *"GCSE numbers have decreased and level of challenge at GCSE is off-putting for those considering A level. I cannot understand why GCSE listening and reading papers are so difficult whilst grade boundaries are low - this is so de-motivating and is stopping a number of learners from continuing into A level - surely we should be finding out what GCSE learners know rather than what they don't know. E.g. 2023 French higher tier listening: 13/45 for a grade C, 26/45 for A*, 2019 GCSE German higher tier listening 12/45 C, 2023 French higher reading 16/60 C, German 17/60 C."*

> *"There are fewer and fewer pupils opting for AS French in my school so the course is not running until we can recruit a bigger cohort. The Spanish AS will not run next year either as there is no candidate."*

Recruitment of language teachers

For the first time ever, *Language Trends Wales* asked all secondary survey respondents whether the recruitment of qualified language teachers is an issue for their department. For two-fifths of maintained secondary schools in Wales, recruitment of language teachers is not an issue; however, around a third of schools either find it to be a major (23 per cent) or minor issue (8 per cent). In 'other' comments, respondents noted that i) they do not need to recruit teachers because of low pupil numbers, ii) they reduced their teaching hours and language provision is carried out by one teacher, and iii) no language posts have been advertised for fifteen years, but specialist language cover can prove difficult.
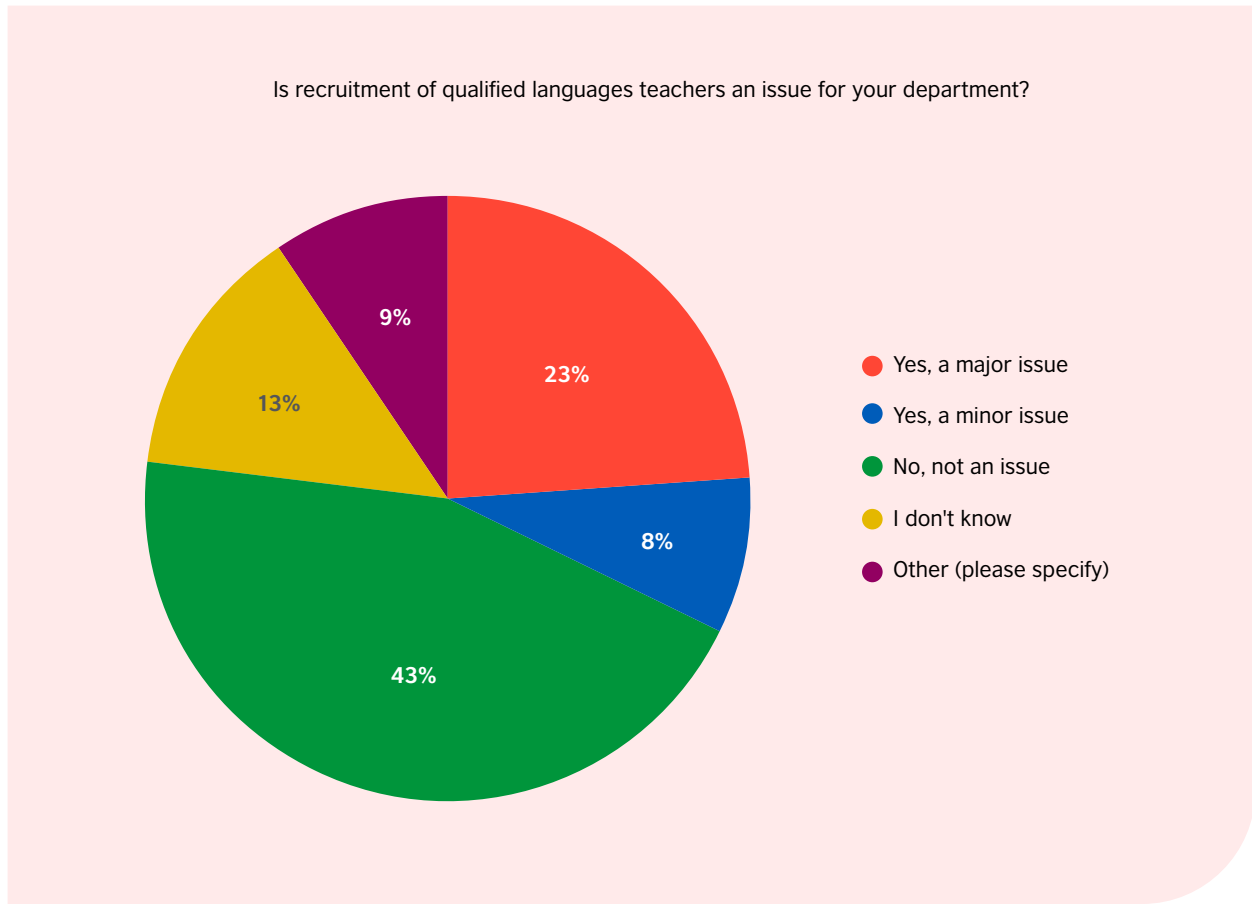
Is recruitment of qualified languages teachers an issue for your department?

- 🔴 Yes, a major issue
- 🔵 Yes, a minor issue
- 🟢 No, not an issue
- 🟡 I don't know
- 🟣 Other (please specify)

Figure 9: Respondents' answers to whether recruitment of qualified language teachers is an issue for their department

Time to listen: teacher recommendations on improving the situation for language learning in Wales

When asked what can be done either in their school and/or system-wide in Wales to improve the learning of International Languages, nearly all responding teachers took the time to comment their professional recommendations; the comments highlight the need to increase numbers of learner uptake, promote the value of languages school-wide, and, in particular, systemically review GCSE and A-level examinations:

"Information for Heads to try and raise the profile of languages. As long as languages are given so little curriculum time, it sends the idea that they are not important. The GCSE and A-Level exams are also too hard and rarely test what the pupils are taught. There has been too much content and pupils leave GCSEs deflated, often telling younger pupils not to bother with languages."

"Specialist language teaching at KS2, with a joined-up curriculum approach through transition to secondary. Classes to be allowed to run even with small numbers - there have rarely been large A level classes for languages generally in the UK and so by refusing to run

with under 10 for example as some schools do, the supply of future linguists, graduates and teachers is cut off."

"I can't do anymore that I am currently doing to promote languages as a very small department in a small school. In Wales the new GCSE has to be realistic - which includes its contents and themes. This needs to be taught starting in Year 10 on 4 hrs a fortnight. Also, the content of Year 12 is too much. You have to be a Francophile to be studying French A Level. There has been too much emphasis on Knowledge and Understanding of French society. The exam does not reflect the depth and variety of topics we have to teach in 8 months and grammar when we have no content list just a heading, for example - problems of French people. I realise it is about higher language skills but some of the content chosen for the Unit 2 exam in the last 2 years has been so specialised that you've had to know what it is about in order to answer the question correctly."

"The content of the GCSE syllabus needs to radically change, and the examinations are also so much more difficult compared with their other subjects, so pupils do not select languages. German is also still seen as an elitist subject within WJEC with more able pupils

selecting it, and in this school, German is taught to the entire year group. That is not reflected in the content or examinations."

"Huge focus on STEM subjects is at the expense of creative subjects + MFL [International Languages]- and yet most engineering companies will agree that they need people with a competence in languages - Welsh government needs to do much more to raise the profile of International Languages - at the moment MFL teachers are fighting a losing battle."

Given the comments above in relation to GCSE content for International Languages, the new WJEC specifications for French, German and Spanish for first teaching in 2025 are timely, and it is hoped that the new specifications will address the concerns expressed by responding teachers.

Several teachers also voiced the need for investment and funding in International Languages, like initiatives which appear to be working well for Welsh:

"To have funding to employ a Language Assistant where pupils can see language learning in action with someone from the place of study."

"Funding to purchase subscriptions/resources to certain websites."

"More funding for MFL."

"Smaller classes, more funding for international trips, trained specialist teachers teaching the subject."

"Better information on possible careers with languages. Funding to be able to have Language Assistants. Smaller class sizes."

"Continued focus on promoting importance of languages. This must also be matched with funding to ensure that classes are not cut when numbers are low. Whilst messages about promoting languages as part of new curriculum are being communicated this is not being supported with actions and teachers are continually facing the challenges."

Findings from post-16 colleges

International Language learning in post-16 colleges in focus

On our database, we have the contact information for 12 colleges who offer language courses. Five out of the twelve post-16 colleges that were contacted responded to the *Language Trends Wales* survey this year. Due to the small number, the figures in this section are reported as raw numbers.

The findings from post-16 colleges focus on French, German and Spanish A levels. The responding colleges do not offer vocational qualifications in languages; one college told us they offer the WJEC Language Pathways qualifications in spoken French, German, Spanish and Italian. Two respondents in 2024 offer GCSE or Level 2 qualifications in International Languages (one more than in *Language Trends Wales 2023*). One college also enables learners to re-sit GCSE or alternative Level 2 qualifications in International Languages.

For the first time, respondents were asked if the recruitment of qualified language teachers is an issue in their department; only one college reported this to be a minor issue.

All colleges reported that they had learners of International Languages in Year 12 and in Year 13, which is a positive uptake in figures when compared to *Language Trends Wales 2023*, in which three colleges reported having no learners of International Languages. Two colleges reported having more than 20 learners of Year 12 International Languages in 2023/24 (table 15).

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

Table 15: Number of International Language learners in responding colleges

Only one college had a minimum number requirement for classes to run, stipulating that for the past few years there must be at least three 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, while classes will not run in one college. In 'other' comments, one college noted that classes run regardless of numbers.

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. Two colleges reported introducing new International Language A levels (German in one college, and Spanish in another). French remains stable in two colleges, and Spanish in one. However, overall, four out of the five responding colleges noted decreases in French (n=3), German (n=2) and Spanish (n=2). All responding colleges reported the teaching of French, four teach Spanish and three teach German.

In comments on reasons for changes in take-up or provision, respondents noted some of the wider issues facing International Languages in secondary schools, including harsh grading and small numbers of language learners:

> *"Since last year, German is offered just as an AS qualification which is not interesting for students as it is not a full qualification. In several secondary schools German has been discontinued."*

> *"Only one of the local feeder schools offer Spanish at GCSE; this makes recruitment for Spanish a real challenge. I also think the nature and content of the GCSE is too challenging and demanding and 100% exam based. […] The exam boards need to look at making the GCSE more accessible and relevant and this will help with pupils' desire to continue. I also feel the AS and A level exams need to be looked at as once again compared to other subjects they are too hard and contain no coursework element."*

> *"Surrounding schools are dropping their delivery of GCSE Languages which impacts on our numbers coming to us for A Level. There is the wider impact of Welsh Language learning in schools, which originally had the dual purpose of not only enabling learners to become bilingual but also prepare them to be learners of further languages - this does not appear to have materialised."*

> *"Schools are more likely to offer only one language. They have small numbers. With the introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate, the timetable has become too crowded."*

International dimension

Table 16 lists several opportunities for international engagement and colleges were asked to select the opportunities that their students and/or lecturers engage with. Consistent with the findings of *Language Trends Wales 2023*, all responding colleges reported at least one opportunity for staff and or/students to gain international experience in their institution. Four out of the five responding colleges engage with Routes into Languages Cymru, and three have one or more partner institutions abroad.

	2022/23	2023/24
We engage with Routes into Languages Cymru	3	4
The institution has one or more partner institutions abroad	2	3
Turing Scheme for outward mobility	3	2
Taith	6	2
We employ Language Assistants	2	1
We engage with cultural institutes (e.g. Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Consejería de Educación)	3	1
British Council international opportunities	2	0
Erasmus+ projects	3	0
Other (please specify)	0	0

Table 16: Responses to 'What opportunities are there for learners and/or lecturers in your institution to gain international experience? (tick all that apply)' in 2022/23 and 2023/24

There is an overall decline in engagement with the international opportunities on offer in the 2023/24 academic year in responding colleges, particularly with the exchange programme Taith and Erasmus+ projects (see table 16). A Language Assistant was employed in one college in the 2023/24 academic year. The remaining colleges cited financial constraints and low learner numbers as the primary reasons for not employing a Language Assistant:

"Financial constraints and low numbers for both Spanish and French."

"It's too expensive and we can't afford it with the budget we get for languages. We only have very few language learners so the cost would be even less justifiable."

AI and technology in post-16 languages education

For the first time, we asked post-16 colleges to think about their use of AI technology in relation to language teaching. In figure 10, we can see that all colleges use educational AI technology in their department for language teaching (regularly in one college, occasionally in the remaining four).
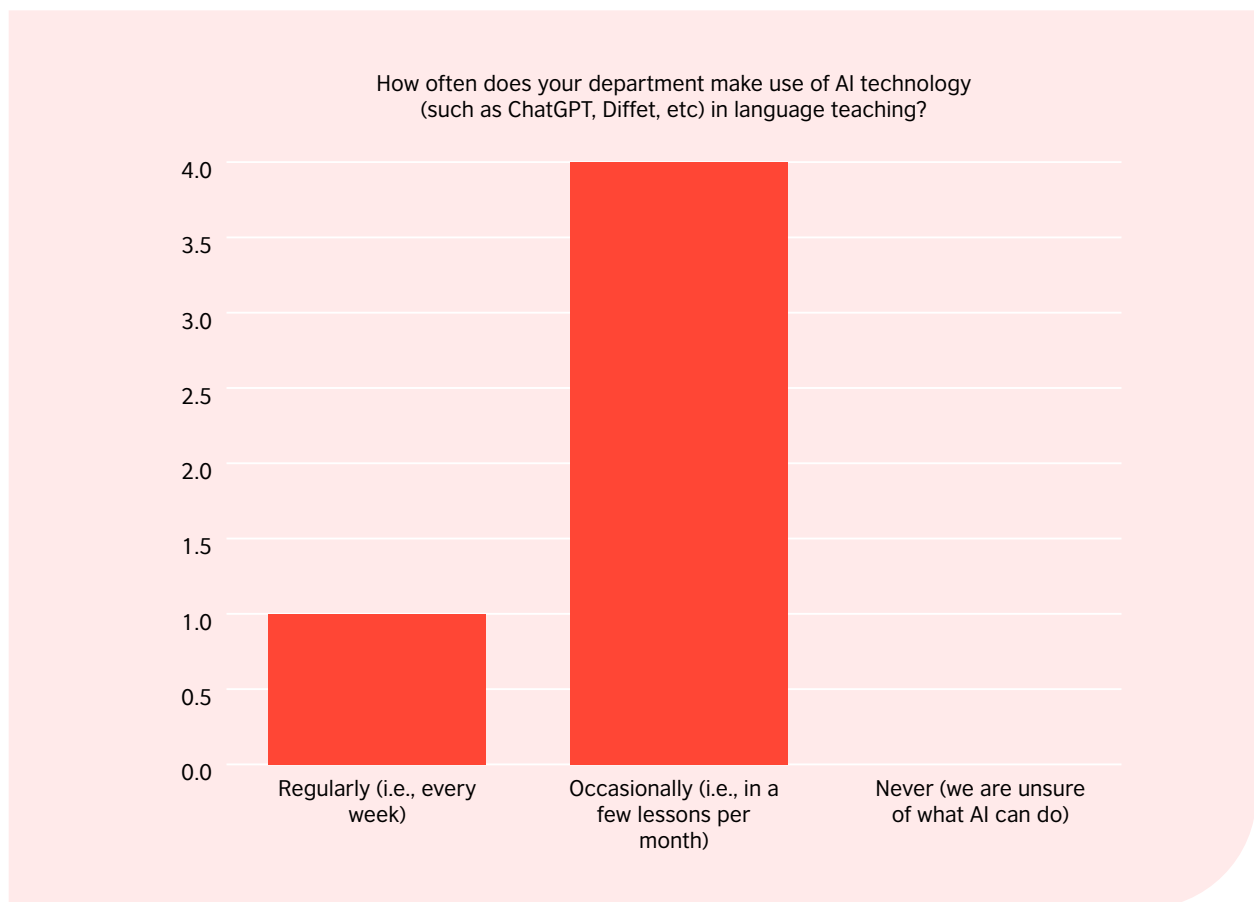
Figure 10: Number of colleges whose language departments make use of AI technology in language teaching

When asked if learners are allowed used to use AI technology to support their language learning, some responding colleges commented no, or that they discourage the use of AI:

"No, I have discouraged my learners from doing this as I am trying to teach them to be able to put their own sentence together without pre-preparing or learning."

Other colleges are in the process of implementing guidance on how learners can use such technology:

"As a college we are currently completing our policy on AI technology which will help inform teachers and learners on what they may and may not do regarding AI. We are also going through a series of CPD in the coming months aimed at enhancing the use of AI in the classroom throughout all departments."

"Although we are still waiting on a policy, students use AI, and I have encouraged them in some instances to use AI (such as Mizou where the chatbot takes the part of an oral examiner). I am now considering a system where AI could be used for some aspects (not all) of homework (e.g. evaluate a translation completed by AI, plan an essay, receive AI feedback on your writing)."

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:

"Promoting International Languages, introducing two International Languages to curriculum for KS3 and 4 as in England and majority of European countries."

"I think other areas of the college should offer either Agored units in language learning or the WJEC language pathways as option. I think evening classes for beginners and intermediate level are very much missed."

"The connections between HE, FE, Secondary and Primary could be stronger in order to share resources and to promote language learning at grassroots in order to increase the learners we see picking up languages at Level 3 and above."

"Exams need to change. Grading needs to change."

Celebrating primary languages

This year's *Language Trends Wales* includes a new multimodal pupil dataset. Year 6 pupils across all primary schools in Wales were invited to express their ideas, feelings, and experiences of languages and language learning through the creation of a poster. From April to June 2024, the *Language Trends Wales 2024* Poster Competition ran in schools across Wales. It resulted in a total of 69 entries which evidence pupils' breadth and depth of knowledge about languages and experiences of primary language learning.

Acknowledging that annual or biennial surveys can lead to research respondent fatigue, the recruitment of participants and the collection of pupil data for this year's *Language Trends Wales* were designed to be creative opportunities for pupils and relevant classroom activities for teachers. To support school participation, teachers were provided with *Language Trends Wales 2024* Poster Competition materials. This included poster lesson plans, which included the aims and descriptions of learning for the *Language Trends Wales* poster lesson mapped to the Areas of Learning: Expressive Arts, Languages, Literacy and Communication in the National Curriculum; teacher notes and guidelines on how to deliver the lesson; and visual teaching aids for use in classrooms (see Annex).

Invitations to participate in the poster competition were sent to publicly available email addresses to all primary school Head teachers in Wales. Head teachers were also provided with parental opt-out forms if parents/guardians did not wish for their child/children to participate. Children were also asked for their informed consent to participate. Only posters which included these completed consent forms were included in the dataset.

In recognition of their participation in the research, schools were informed that posters will be on display at the *Language Trends Wales 2024* report launch and invitations were sent to winners of the competition to attend the launch, accompanied by a parent/guardian.

The analysis of the pupil poster dataset was driven by the research priority to evidence pupils' ideas, feelings, and experiences about languages and language learning. First, this entailed collating information on which languages were represented and how and the different types of visual features present in the data set. Second, the ideational representations of languages present in the poster dataset were identified and coded thematically. Third, the dataset was examined to identify personal feelings and experiences pupils expressed about learning languages. It is important to note that in the guidelines teachers and pupils were reminded that they were free to choose what they want to put on the poster including positive and/or negative views of language and language learning. To analyse this pupil dataset in a replicable and robust manner, the analysis was undertaken by the research team using qualitative data management software. This was used to track the qualitative coding of the data and allow for inter-rater reliability measures ensuring rigorous and transparent analysis of the qualitative multimodal dataset.

One of the immediately striking features of the pupil poster dataset is the number of different languages mentioned by children in Year 6. Of the posters submitted there was a total of 70 different named languages referenced. The top ten most frequently occurring named languages are listed below:

Rank by frequency of occurrence	Named language
1	French
2	Spanish
3	Japanese
4	German
5	Portuguese
6	Mandarin
7	Arabic
8	Italian
9	Welsh
10	Russian

Table 17: The top ten most frequently occurring named languages in the Pupil Poster dataset

The names of different languages were written on the posters in several ways, including original or simplified versions (e.g. にほんご), anglicized and/or romanized versions. Some posters included images of signed languages, and some posters made specific reference to varieties of the same named language (e.g. American English, British English).

Figure 11: Poster extracts (039; 049; 063)

Accompanying the many references to different named languages, most of the posters (81 per cent) produced by primary pupils included multilingual phrases and greetings.

Figure 12: Poster extracts (055)

Most of the multilingual posters in the dataset included three or more languages (other than Welsh or English), evidencing the early multilingualism of the young people who took part in the research. Not only do these posters from Year 6 pupils in Wales display a wide knowledge about world languages, but they also illustrate how pupils are using the languages that they know.

Figure 13: Poster extracts (035)

With recent primary curriculum developments in Wales, this may be evidence, or potentially indicative, of learning in this area. What is clear is that the pupil dataset evidences pupils' multilingual repertoires in action, and it demonstrates how primary pupils already understand that many and different languages are part of their world around them. To what extent this early multilingualism nourished in primary contexts can be facilitated and sustained in the transition to post-primary contexts and materialized into post-primary uptake of languages is a matter for further attention.

In addition to the multilingual features, the posters in the primary poster dataset evidence a wide variety of visual features which signal pupils' global and cultural knowledge. Visual features include images of globes, flags, maps, geopolitical landmarks, and food. Most posters (over 80 per cent) incorporated images of flags and visual representations of the earth as a globe. Some posters include country maps and world maps from multiple perspectives. Examples of these visual features taken from the posters are shown in Fig.14:
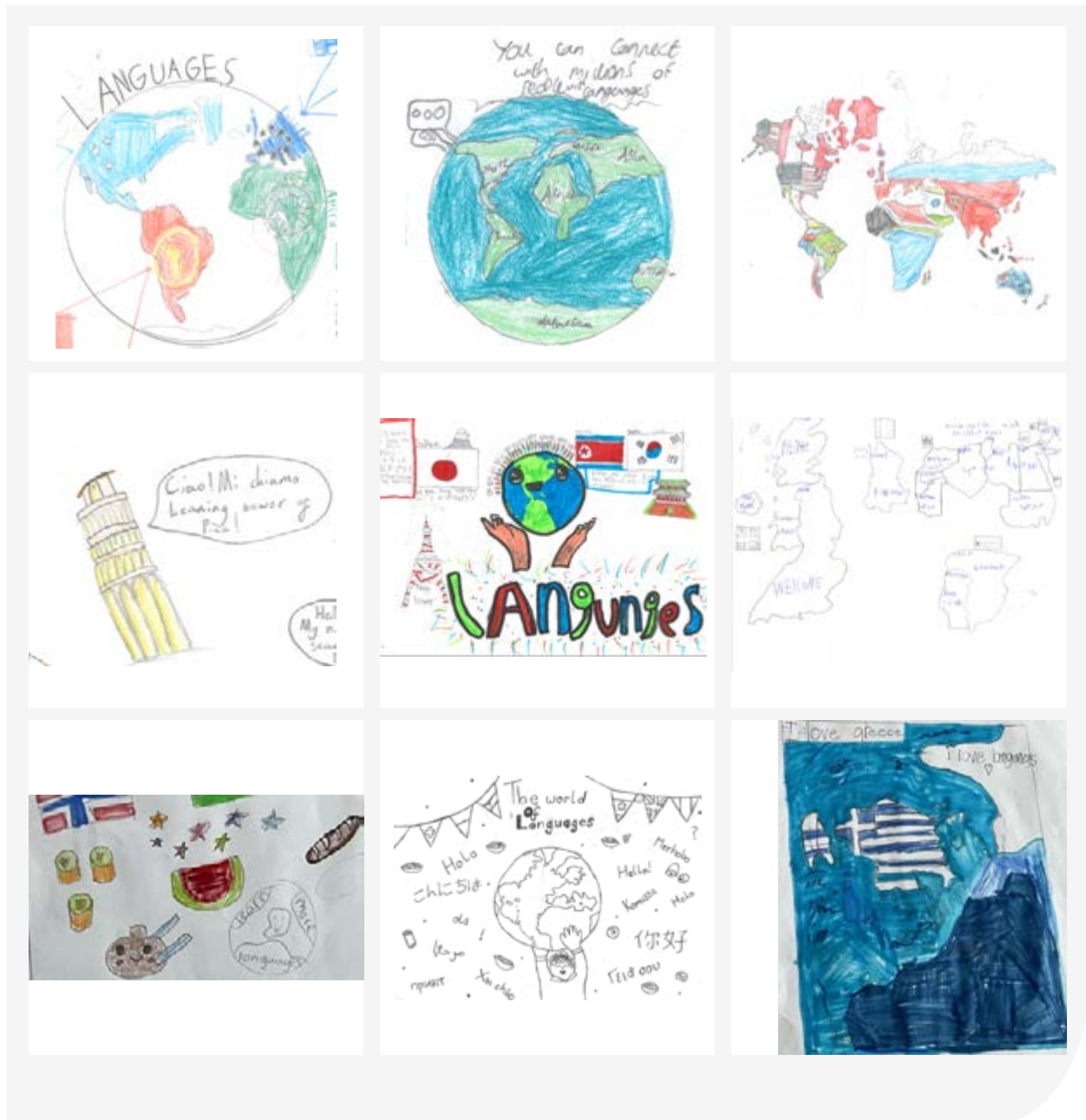
Figure 14: Poster extracts (005; 012; 017; 018; 024; 026; 029; 039; 045)

These visual features present in the pupil poster dataset afford an insight into the associated meanings that multiple languages have for young people and how, for them, languages are part of their developing curiosity about cultures of the world. To further explore these ideational representations in the posters the research team examined the data and used inductive coding to identify several themes which categorised the meanings portrayed in the posters. Of the themes identified to capture the ideational representations in the dataset, two key themes emerged: 'languages as global' and 'languages as connections'.

Languages as global: Prominent throughout the poster dataset are images of the world as a globe. While the image of a globe, with its blue seas and green land, carries dominant geographical content, the images of globes in the dataset are often depicted as having human characteristics, such as eyes, mouth, hands, arms, and legs (see Fig. 15). These depictions of globes also convey socioemotional qualities such as being happy, smiling, welcoming, healthy, cool, and strong.
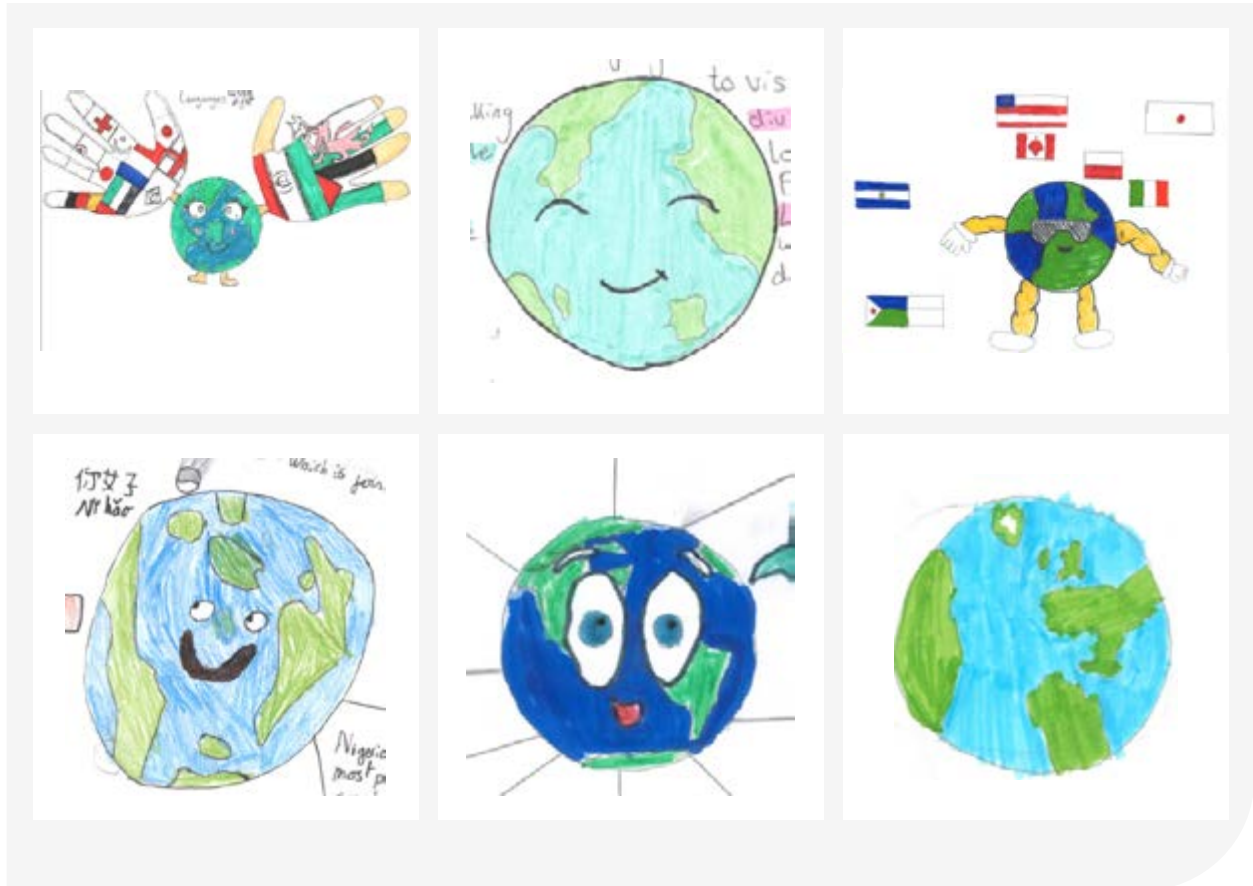

Figure 15: Poster extracts (027; 036; 055; 056; 057; 066)

In other posters which include images of the world as a globe, the earth is presented as talking directly from the poster to the viewer, telling the viewing audience how many languages 'it' speaks, why learning languages is important, and what you can do with languages. For example, in figure 16 these two posters present these ideas of the world speaking alongside the notion of power associated with languages (e.g. 'the strength of languages', 'feel the power all around the world', 'the power of language').

Figure 16: Poster extracts (068; 069)

These representations of languages and learning languages using images of globes, which occur consistently throughout the dataset, illustrate how young people's understandings of languages are tied to their understandings of the world. From these posters, it seems that primary school children who took part in the research perceive languages as global, belonging to the world, and aligned to notions of being communicative, geopolitically aware, strong, and healthy.

The second key theme in the dataset captures pupils' depictions of languages as important for social interactions, for travel, and for better communication. The theme of **'languages as connections'** occurs in one out of every four posters submitted. In one poster, the world is drawn with bridges extending outwards to connect representations of different countries and different languages.
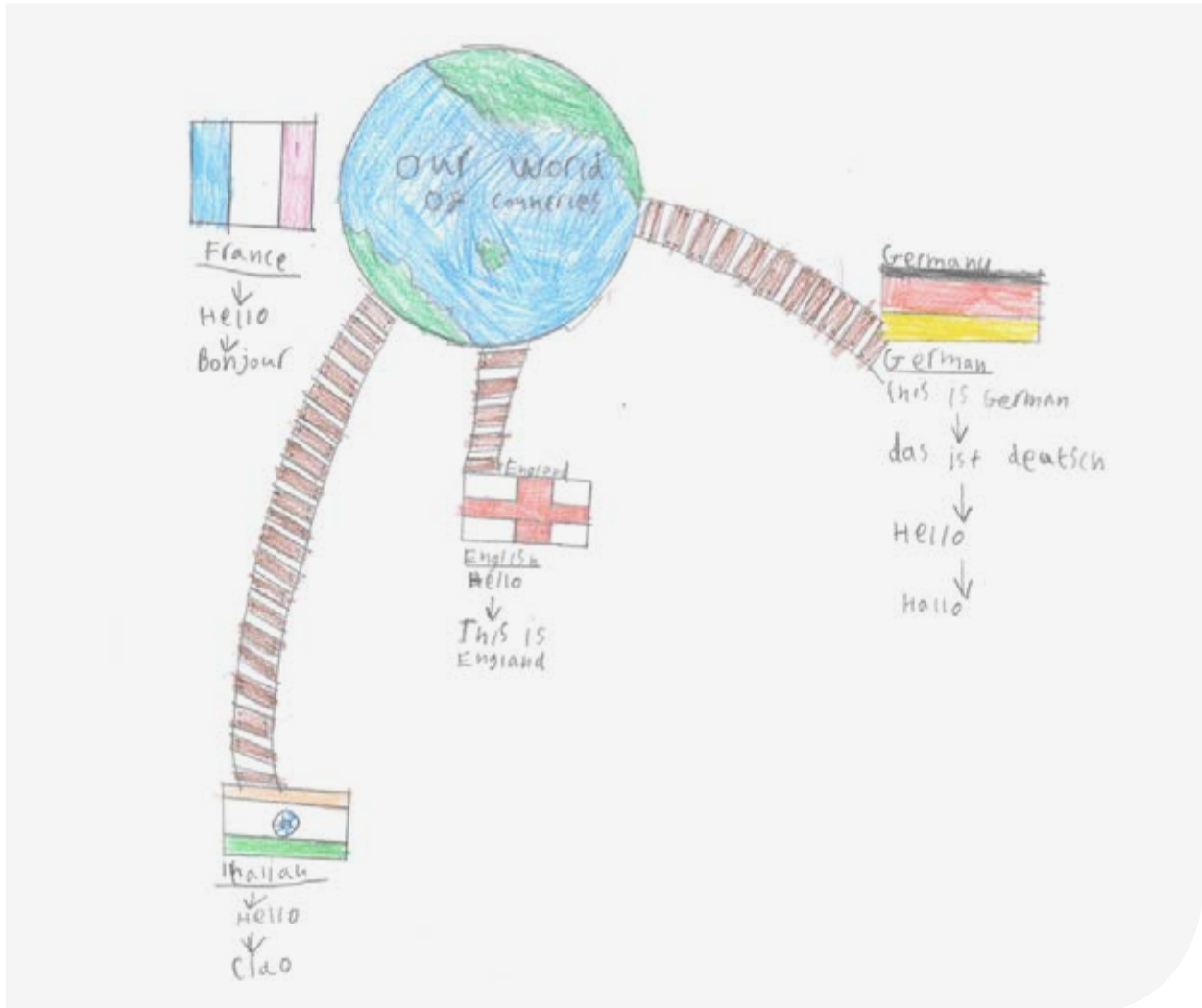
Figure 17: Poster extracts (050)

Languages are also represented in the pupils' posters as being necessary for very local and individual connections too. Pupils make explicit reference to how they use the different languages they know to speak to their friends and when they visit family who live in different places (see Fig. 18 below).
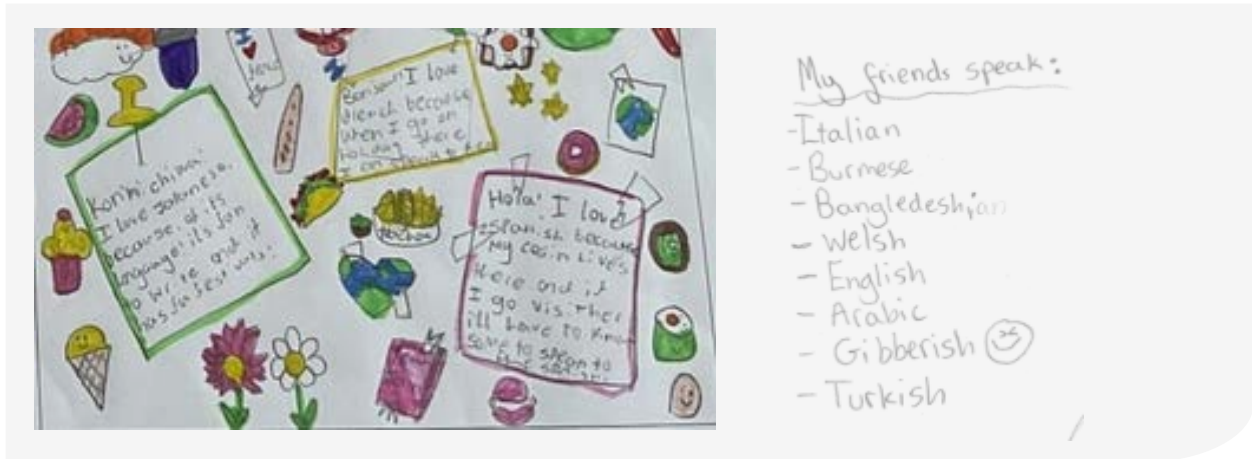
Figure 18: Poster extracts (014; 052)

Taken alongside the evidence of emerging multilingual repertoires and informed cultural awareness from the linguistic and visual analysis, these findings from the thematic analysis offer further insight into young people's knowledge and understanding about languages and the roles of languages in their lives, and in their world. It seems clear that the young people who contributed to this dataset have a breadth of knowledge about how the world works through different languages, how languages can be geographically and iconically situated, and the many relationships that languages have with health, social interaction, and cultural inclusion.

Finally, we present findings on pupils' feelings about languages and their experiences of learning languages at school, as depicted in their posters. It is important to note that in the poster competition guidelines teachers and pupils were reminded that they were free to choose what they wanted to include on the poster and that this could include positive and/or negative views of language and language learning. Notwithstanding this advice, no posters portrayed negative views of languages and/or language learning. Six out of ten posters presented positive perspectives on learning languages, which included imagery such as hearts, smiling faces, and phrases such as 'love learning languages' and personal statements such as: 'I enjoy learning languages because…'. The remaining four out of ten of all posters in the dataset presented neither positive or negative views about languages or language learning and were therefore considered neutral. Posters in this category presented facts regarding languages spoken in different countries, populations of different countries, and in some cases historical descriptions. Examples of posters identified as positive and neutral are presented below in Fig. 19:

Figure 19: Poster extracts (007; 011; 057; 067)

Positive messages about languages and language learning are also communicated by the Year 6 pupils through their posters: 'life is great' reports one poster and the imperative to 'learn one' is presented in another. Overall, the messages that young people have created through these posters is one which views multiple languages as positive. In addition to the general positive expressions and feelings portrayed by pupils through their posters, some Year 6 pupils included words and phrases to communicate specific reasons why languages and language learning are important to them, (i.e. 'it boosts my confidence'; 'acceptance'; 'the world is better with different languages and places to visit'; 'I enjoy learning languages because it is a chance to experience places around the world') alongside imagery of the natural world (e.g. flowers, leaves, trees, sun).

Figure 20: Poster extracts (053; 056; 064)

In relation to pupils' own experiences of language learning as presented in the posters, these too were portrayed as overwhelmingly positive. Their experiences of language learning were described on their posters as 'interesting' and 'just fun'. Although no negative learning experiences are evident in the dataset, it should not be assumed that negative experiences of language learning do not occur. Despite the reminder in the guidelines that pupils were free to include both positive and negative experiences, the genre of a poster competition and the promotion through languages advocates and institutions is likely to have had some influence on pupils and their teachers presenting only positive or neutral perspectives of language learning in their submissions. What is evident in the poster dataset are some pupils' attuned notions of language proficiency. For example, pupils present statements such as 'I can speak some Portuguese, but I'm not fluent'; 'languages I speak fluently, languages I kind of know'; 'I can speak a tiny bit of French'. Again, the findings from this poster dataset highlight that primary school pupils are already aware of and use their multilingual repertoires. They also clearly identify their needs and desires to learn and continue to learn languages.
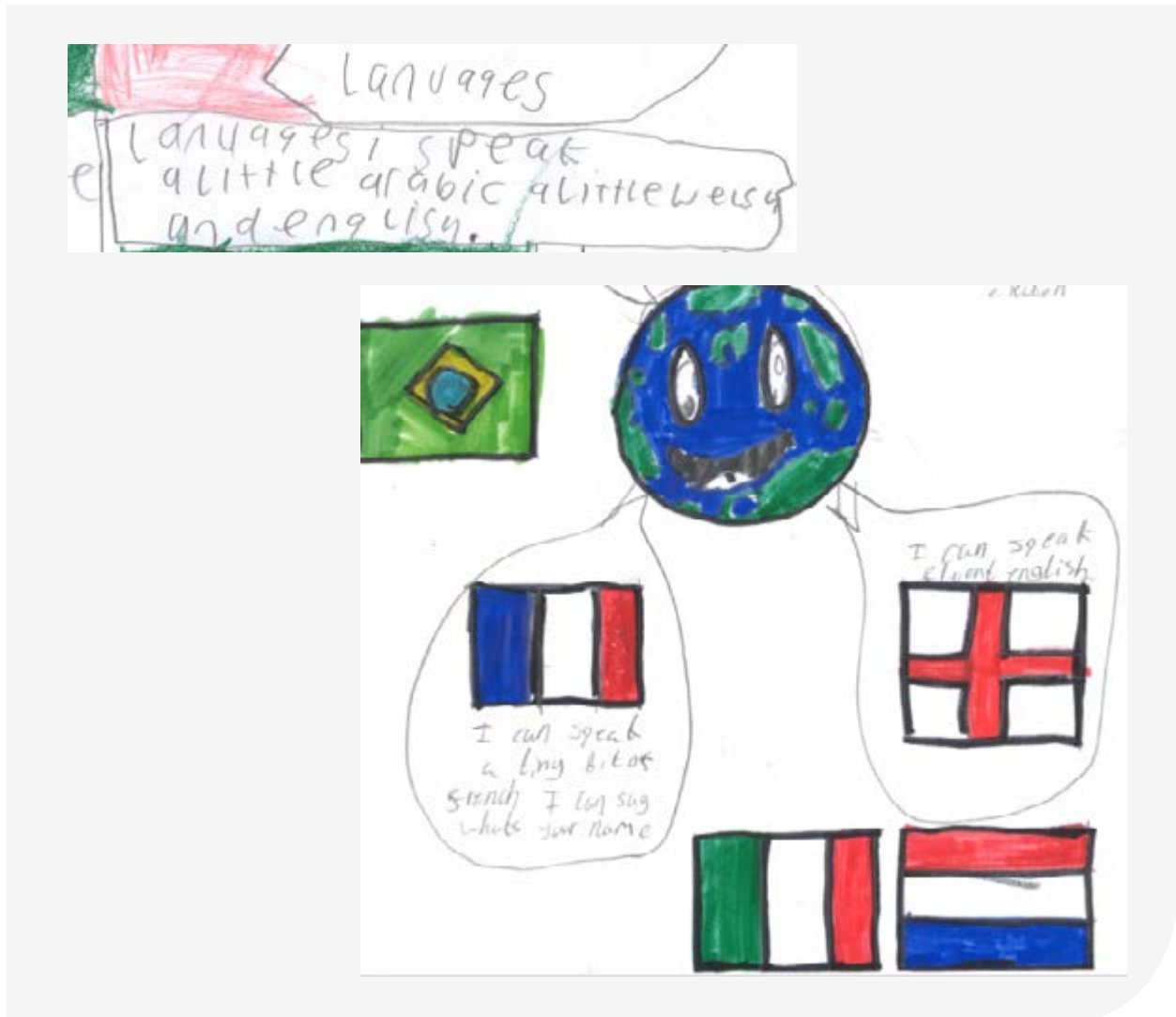
Figure 21: Poster extracts (030; 048)

Conclusion

The new multimodal pupil dataset for *Language Trends Wales* created as a result of Year 6 pupil's submission to the *Language Trends Wales 2024 Poster Competition* illustrates primary school children's understandings and experiences of learning and using multiple languages. Our analysis shows that those primary school pupils who took part in the competition are positive and highly informed about languages and cultures, and they are willing to use the different languages that they know. First, from an examination of the linguistic and visual features of the posters, there is evidence that young people have a wide and diverse knowledge of world languages alongside their use of growing multilingual repertoires. Second, our examination of ideational representations signals the depth of knowledge that young people express about how the world works through different languages; they understand that languages are good for health, languages are a means of cultural inclusion, and languages are geopolitically contextualised. Two prominent themes in the poster dataset were 'languages as global', and 'languages as connections'. In their expressions and understandings about languages and language learning, international and global perspectives are the 'norm', and languages are represented as key to making and keeping connections with people locally and globally.

Finally, in relation to the activity of language learning, the majority of Year 6 participants present their experiences as positive. From their perspectives there are many reasons for learning languages, and it is fun to do so. There is little indication that they wish to interact in the world with one or two languages alone and they already express nuanced notions of language proficiency as context dependent.

In contrast to the post-primary findings in this report on opportunities for learning languages, multilingual repertoires and areas of learning appear to be developing positively through the primary stages of schooling in Wales. However, the extent to which this confident and growing multilingualism can be nurtured and sustained in post-primary contexts may need considerable attention.

Conclusion

As always, the excellent work being undertaken in the languages classroom by teachers across Wales has shone through the data collected in this year's report, despite the many challenges affecting the future of International Languages education.

Several survey questions allowed teachers and lecturers to share their professional opinions and experiences on the situation for International Language learning in Wales; respondents have expressed deep concerns about the financial constraints, low pupil numbers, exam content and harsh grading that negatively affect the situation for language learning in secondary schools and post-16 colleges in Wales. Nearly 70 per cent of secondary schools have none or less than ten per cent of Year 10 pupils taking an International Language for GCSE in our dataset; concerns have been raised about the lack of GCSE choices and learner reluctance to study a subject that is perceived as difficult with severe grading as key barriers to young people studying an International Language in addition to Welsh. Although the numbers of teachers reporting that fewer learners take an International Language at key stage 4 has decreased from 49 per cent in 2023 to 38 per cent in 2024, there is a considerable way to go to encourage more learners to pursue a languages education and to sustain an enthusiasm for languages throughout their educational journey.

From this year's primary school poster competition, it is clear that primary practitioners are working hard to foster a plurilingual learning environment that encourages the development of creative and inquisitive young people, by opening up avenues to explore different languages, cultures and lands. From the wonderful posters created by Year 6 pupils, the research team identified 70 languages that primary learners have knowledge of. At this young age, learners have a developing global mind-set; it is imperative that this is developed through secondary, further and higher education.

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Annex of Useful Resources

British Council England:
https://www.britishcouncil.org/

British Council Northern Ireland:
https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/

British Council Scotland:
https://scotland.britishcouncil.org/

British Council Wales:
https://wales.britishcouncil.org/en

CSC (Central South Consortium):
https://www.cscjes.org.uk/

Cerdd Iaith:
https://listeningtolanguage.com

EAS (Education Achievement Service):
https://sewaleseas.org.uk/

GIMAGINE by the Goethe-Institut:
https://www.goethe.de/ins/gb/en/spr/drm.html

GwE (North Wales Regional School Improvement Service): https://www.gwegogledd.cymru/?lang=en

Languages Gateway:
https://www.thelanguagesgateway.uk/

Language Gym: https://www.language-gym.com/

MFL Mentoring: https://mflmentoring.co.uk/

MWP (Mid Wales Education Partners):
https://www.pacc.cymru/?lang=en

Neath Port Talbot:
https://beta.npt.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/

Partneriaeth: https://www.partneriaeth.cymru/

Routes into Languages Cymru:
https://routesintolanguagescymru.co.uk/

Think German: www.thinkgerman.org.uk

UK-German Connection:
https://ukgermanconnection.org/

Poster Competition Teaching Materials:

Language Trends Wales Poster Competition 2024- Lesson

Language Trends Wales Poster Competition 2024- PPT

Tueddiadau Ieithoedd Cymru Cystadleuaeth Poster 2024 - Gwers

Tueddiadau Ieithoedd Cymru Cystadleuaeth Poster 2024- PPT