

Plenary 30 June 2017

Report from Wales

1. Language Trends Wales 2016/17

The [Language Trends Wales 2016/17 report](#) commissioned by British Council Wales was published on 27 June 2017. It dresses a dark picture of what is happening to foreign language teaching in secondary schools across Wales.

GCSE

The take up for GCSE continues to fall: more than a third of schools now have fewer than 10 % of pupils taking the subject. Figures from the Joint Council for Qualifications show that, in 2016, French entries fell by 10.4% compared with 2015 and this confirms a long-term trend. Spanish fell by 17.7%; this has been a surprise as Spanish has until now been more resilient. German increased by 18.8% which compensates for the recent decline but this does not increase overall numbers for MFL beyond the level since 2014.

A level

The situation is increasingly fragile. Two thirds of schools have fewer than five pupils for A2. In 2016, French entries to AS fell by 10% compared with 2015; German fell by 20%. Spanish increased by 13%. In 2016, a total of 1,306 pupils took an AS in MFL across Wales (out of 49,144 which represents 2.7%).

Progression through secondary schooling is poor

Of the 2011 Year 9 cohort, only 28% opted to prepare for a GCSE in MFL (i.e. about one in five pupils), and of these only 8% took it to A level (i.e. less than two per cent of the original cohort).

Teachers

Nearly two thirds of MFL departments have only one or two full-time teachers and many (34%) rely on non-British EU nationals for teaching.

Global Futures

[Global Futures](#) is the Welsh Government's five-year plan to improve and promote MFL in Wales (2015-2020). Eighteen months since its launch, the report says that some successful impact is seen and some schools have reported increases in numbers both for GCSE and post-16. The mentoring scheme for KS3 run by Routes into Languages now covers 44 schools. The cultural institutes undertake a range of activities. It is also perceived as a positive initiative by nearly three quarters of

respondents particularly in terms of subject specific CPD and sharing of practice with peers.

A complex set of reasons

Estyn, who inspects quality and standards in education and training in Wales, published a report in July 2016 that reinforced previous Welsh Language Trends surveys. According to the report, factors that may explain this situation include:

- The predominance of compulsory subjects (reduction of option blocks from four to three).
- The extra time given to English, Maths and Welsh (at KS3, schools only offer 1.5 hours per week on average – Estyn recommends two hours per week).
- The majority of respondents do not believe English and Welsh in primary schools support the acquisition of a third language.
- The introduction of the Welsh Bacc for all pupils.
- The fact that other optional subjects such as PE, Music and Drama tend to be seen as easier and more fun.

A systemic change is needed

According to the report, to address the above factors a systemic change is needed. Much hope is given to the new [National Curriculum for Wales](#) that will be implemented from September 2021. The Curriculum will be divided into six Areas of Learning and Experience from age 3 to 16. MFL will be under 'Languages, Literacy and Communication', alongside English and Welsh. The report sees this as a unique opportunity to develop 'triple language' with the same status and value as 'triple science'. The report also says that the development of this Area of Learning and Experience should draw on the extensive expertise of bilingualism found in schools, in particular Welsh medium schools.

The report can be found here: <https://wales.britishcouncil.org/en/language-trends-wales>

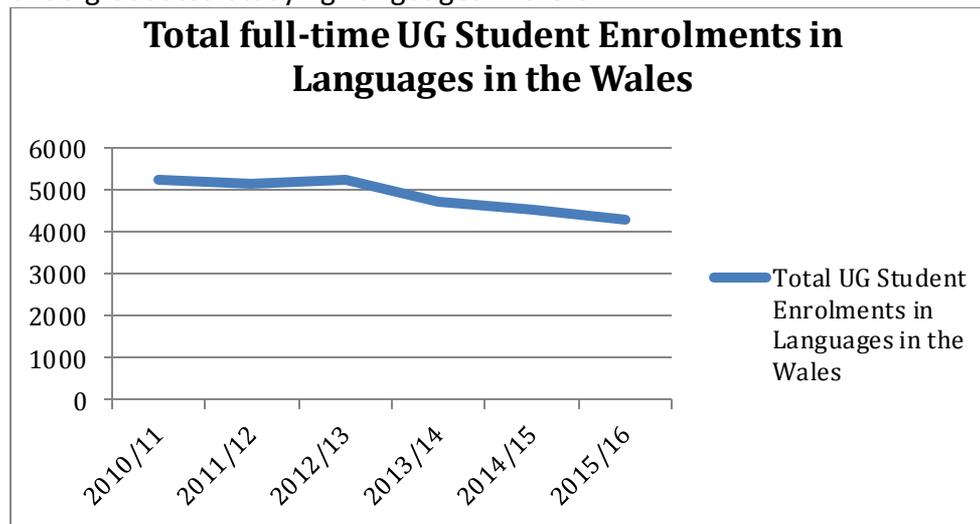
2. Languages in Higher Education in Wales between 2010/11 and 2015/16

The following brief analysis is based on HESA data (Data and Analysis – Yearly overviews) collected by HE student enrolments by level of study, subject area¹, mode of study and location of HE provider.

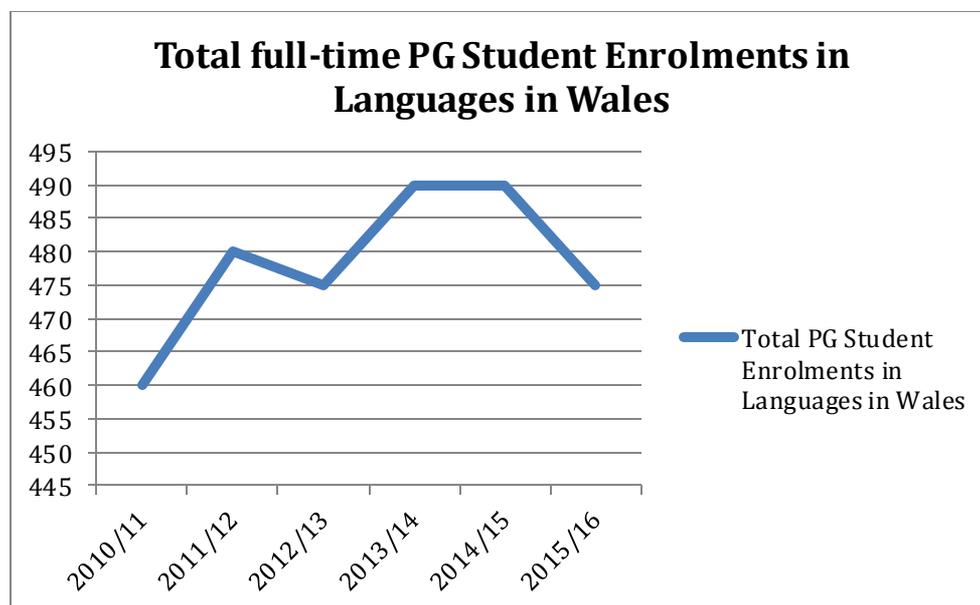
Between 2010/11 and 2015/16, the number of UG students studying Languages in Welsh HEIs has decreased from 5,250 to 4,290 with a steeper decrease from 2013/14. These undergraduates now represent 5.5% of the overall UG student

¹ Analyses of subject information show Full-person equivalent (FPE). These are derived by splitting student instances between the different subjects that make up their course aim.

population in Welsh HEIs and 5.7% of the overall number of full-time undergraduates studying Languages in the UK.



Over the same period, the number of PG students studying Languages in Welsh HEIs has steadily grown from 460 to 490 until 2014/15 and went down on the following year to 475. These postgraduates now represent 3.5% of the overall PG student population in Welsh HEIs and 4.6% of the overall number of full-time postgraduates studying Languages in the UK.



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27 June 2017