

MFL in Wales: Building on Bilingualism

This fact file looks at the current position on MFL in Wales and possible developments. It will be of particular interest to governors who have a subject link to MFL.

For how many years is it compulsory to study a foreign language?

- In Wales, MFL is statutory for 3 years – at Key Stage 3.
- The Welsh Assembly Government funded a KS2 pilot project for MFL from 2003–09, and will decide whether or not to make the subject statutory in primary schools at the next curriculum review. This will probably be held in 2011.

CILT Cymru

Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL.

Tel: 029 2048 0137

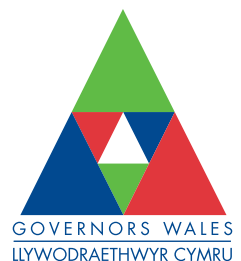
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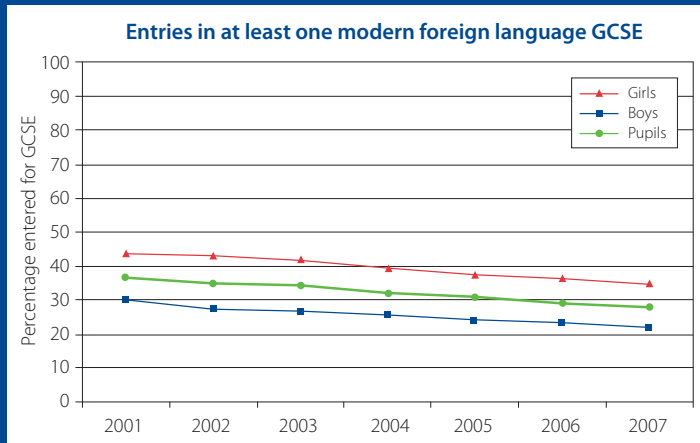
Email: contact@governorswales.org.uk

Tel: 029 2048 7858

www.governorswales.org.uk



Declining MFL take-up



Figures from Estyn show the decline in MFL take up in Wales from 2001- 2007

What are the reasons for the decline in MFL?

- A perception that 'everyone speaks English'. In fact, 75% of the world's population does not speak English.
- A tendency to view MFL as irrelevant or a subject for the more able.
- A false perception that MFL is not a 'vocational' subject.
- 'The position of languages in the KS4 option system can have a strong influence on take-up' (Estyn: 'Aiming for Excellence in MFL' (ref 1).
- Girls make up 66% of GCSE classes. This imbalance feeds through to HE and Teacher Training. Boys perceive the subject as being 'feminine'.

Economic realities

- There is increased competition for jobs – EU citizens can work in any EU state
- Over 500 foreign employers have a presence in Wales (e.g. Bosch, Airbus, Calsonic Kansei)
- 75% of UK trade is with non-English speaking countries
- 48% of firms are recruiting staff for their foreign language skills (CBI survey 2008)
- Few UK students take advantage of opportunities to train or study abroad via Erasmus and Leonardo schemes (see refs 2& 3 below)
- The MFL skills shortage in the UK leads employers to recruit from abroad

Other important considerations...

- The Welsh Assembly Government strategy 'Making Languages Count' (ref 4) recognises the role of languages in developing citizens that are outward-looking and culturally aware, as well as mobile. This is reinforced by the presence of languages within the core of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification.
- Learning Welsh from an early age enhances general cognitive skills, giving pupils a head-start when acquiring further languages.
- In total, at least 98 languages are spoken by school pupils in Wales.
- GCSE/AS/A Level success rates in MFL are generally high. This needs to be communicated to students before they opt out of languages at school.
- CILT Cymru has developed a range of resources (ref 5) highlighting the relevance of MFL skills for study and work.
- Alternatives to GCSE are becoming available, including vocational courses like NVQ, CBLC and the Languages Ladder (refs 6 & 7).
- Developing the International dimension of the curriculum can lead to participation in funded projects (see ref 8) and ICT-based exchanges.

What can Link Governors do to promote MFL in Wales?

- Ask about the languages and international dimension policies of your school.
- Refer to ESTYN's Aiming for Excellence in MFL (ref 1). It contains practical advice to schools on promoting MFL.

- Obtain a free copy of 'Getting Started' (ref 9) which provides advice on how clusters of schools can develop primary MFL.
- Ensure that Careers advice makes use of employee and business profiles from the CILT Cymru website. (ref 10)
- Develop links with local businesses that need languages and arrange visiting speakers. The CILT Cymru Languages Champions scheme (ref 11) can help you.
- Invite former pupils who use languages at work to visit school and speak to the pupils.

References

1. ESTYN – Aiming for Excellence in MFL
Published 2002 <http://estyn.gov.uk/publications/AimingforExcellenceMFL.pdf>
2. ERASMUS – learn more about this scheme at: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/erasmus>
3. LEONARDO – learn more about this scheme at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/leonardo_en.html
4. Making Languages Count – the WAG strategy for MFL in Wales http://www.ciltcymru.org.uk/english/projects/Languages_Strategy_Wales.htm
5. CILT Cymru resources to promote languages: <http://www.ciltcymru.org.uk/english/publications.htm>
6. The Languages Ladder – learn more about this scheme at: <http://www.assetlanguages.org.uk/about/default.aspx>
7. Alternatives to GCSE <http://www.cilt.org.uk/14to19/index.htm>
8. Comenius – European school links and projects <http://www.britishcouncil.org/wales-education-school-partnerships.htm>
9. Primary MFL, including 'Getting Started' pack <http://www.ciltcymru.org.uk/english/primary/GettingStarted/gettingstartedHM.htm>
10. 'Languages and careers' advice <http://www.ciltcymru.org.uk/english/opportunities.htm>
11. Languages Champions scheme <http://www.ciltcymru.org.uk/Incymru/languages%20champions.htm>