

“Successful Futures” for our “Global Futures”? Implications of the 2022 Curriculum for Teaching and Learning International Languages

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the future of teaching and learning international languages in Welsh schools in light of the changes being introduced by the 2022 curriculum. It is a well-known fact that the numbers studying foreign languages as GCSE and A Level subjects have fallen significantly in recent years. The aim of the government’s *Global Futures* strategy (Welsh Government: 2015) was to increase these numbers. With this five-year strategy about to come to an end and with preparations for the 2022 curriculum underway, it is timely to ask whether we can anticipate an increase in the number of pupils choosing languages such as French, Spanish and German as a GCSE subject over the next few years. To explore this question, we will look at research into the teaching and learning of foreign languages in primary schools in England and Scotland, and the practical challenges involved (Finch, Theakston & Serratrice, 2018; Holmes & Myles, 2019; Giraud-Johnstone, 2017). Secondly, we discuss the role of motivation in learning a foreign language and argue that the limitations of the option boxes in years 8 or 9 prevent some pupils from choosing a modern language as a GCSE subject (Estyn, 2016; Abrahams, 2018). Thirdly, we elaborate on the widespread view among pupils that learning a foreign language is difficult and challenging (Coleman, Galaczi & Astruc, 2007; Coffey, 2018; Rodeiro, 2017; British Council, 2019). To conclude, some recommendations are proposed on how to ensure the success of the international languages element of the new

curriculum to try and address the current shortage of pupils choosing the subject and teachers to teach the subject.

Keywords: international languages, option boxes, 2022 curriculum.

Introduction

The British Council's annual reports over the last five years, *Language Trends Wales*, have shown the fall in the numbers studying French, Spanish and German as a GCSE subject. From hereon in this article, these subjects are referred to as:

- 'modern foreign languages' or MFL, as defined in the 2008 curriculum (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008),
- the term 'international languages' is used to refer to these languages and any other foreign language that may be introduced as a result of the 2022 curriculum.

The British Council's 2019 report shows that there has been a 60 per cent fall in GCSE entries for MFL in Wales since 2002 and that there has been a decrease each year. The Gorrara & Jenkins report (2020) notes that only 18 per cent of pupils in maintained schools in Wales studied MFL as a GCSE subject in 2017. Figures at an UK level show a similar picture. It is noted that the proportion of pupils studying MFL at Key Stage 4 has fallen from 76 per cent in 2002 to 47 per cent in 2017 (Gorrara & Jenkins, 2020). This decline has come to the attention of the British and Welsh press and the following headlines have been seen in recent years, for example, 'Why is UK language teaching in crisis?', 'Foreign language learning "declining rapidly" in Wales', 'Fall in number of students taking up languages prompts Brexit concerns' and 'Language learning: German and French drop by half in UK schools'.¹

It can be argued that headings such as these, which emphasise that there is a crisis in the field, are counterproductive as they reinforce the view of some pupils and parents that these subjects are 'unpopular'. Indeed, Lanvers & Coleman (2013), in their study of newspaper article headings discussing language learning between 2010 and 2012, observed that negative terms permeate headlines across Britain (e.g. *decline*, *deplorable*, *dump* and *slump*). Coffey (2018), having investigated the reasons 14-year-olds continue with a

foreign language, argues that portraying this reduction in the numbers speaking a foreign language as a ‘deficit’ is not helpful in encouraging pupils to choose MFL.

To address this shortage, the Welsh Government published *Global Futures*, a five-year strategy from 2015 to 2020 to increase the take-up of a modern language as a GCSE and A Level examination subject. The scheme was a testament to the ambition of the then minister for education and skills, Huw Lewis, for Wales to be a ‘Bilingual plus 1 ... nation, with learners “studying English, Welsh and, from Year 5, at least one modern foreign language”’ to examination level (Welsh Government, 2015: 2). The plan had three strategic stages:

- promote and raise the profile of modern foreign languages as an important subject,
- ensure the availability of teachers to deliver modern foreign languages effectively from year 5 onwards,
- provide enhanced learning opportunities to engage learners

The plan received £480,000 in the first year and in May 2017 the Foreign Language Mentoring project was given a further boost of £140,000. As part of this mentoring project, students from university modern languages departments were placed in schools as mentors with the aim of encouraging pupils to choose modern languages for their GCSE options (for an evaluation of the project, see Blake & Gorrara, 2019).

On page 8 of the *Global Futures* document, the strategy is said to be linked to the development of the new curriculum and the ‘Language, Literacy and Communication’ Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE). The fact that ‘Languages, Literacy and Communication’ is now the name of this AoLE suggests that linguistic diversity will be at the heart of Welsh learners’ skills and experiences from 2022 (as Gorrara et al. argue., 2019). Hopwood (2017) argues that this offers hope for international languages in the new curriculum. In her article, she says that the use of ‘languages’ in the plural insists that the person knocking on the door is preparing to embrace multilingualism (Hopwood, 2017: 80).

Indeed, there are references to the terms ‘multilingual’ and ‘plurilingual’ in the introduction to the curriculum: ‘This *multilingual* and *plurilingual* approach is intended to ignite learners’ curiosity and enthusiasm and provide them with a firm foundation for a lifelong interest in the languages of Wales and the languages of the world’ (Welsh Government, 2020).

In this AoLE, there are four statements ‘of what matters’, namely:

1. Languages connect us
2. Understanding languages is key to understanding the world around us.
3. Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication.
4. Literature fires imagination and inspires creativity.

There are separate achievement outcomes:

- for Welsh and English,
- for Welsh in English-medium settings/schools/streams,
- and for international languages

for statements 2, 3 and 4 above. One example can be provided here of a description of learning in Progression Step 3 to illustrate these different outcomes and to illustrate the language continuum that underpins them:

Description of learning in Progression Step 3, statement 3
‘Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication’

International languages	Welsh in English-medium settings/schools/streams	Welsh/English
I can communicate using familiar phrases and sentences	I can use and adapt familiar language, varying vocabulary and tone to suit the audience	I can recognise the appropriate language for different audiences and purposes, varying my expression, vocabulary and tone to engage the audience

Source: Welsh Government, 2020.

The continuum of language competence is illustrated in this table, which begins with little or no language in an international language and working towards proficiency and fluency in English/Welsh. Although these achievement outcomes are presented separately, the importance that the new curriculum places on creating links between different languages should be emphasised and it aims to ‘encourage learners to transfer what they have learned about how languages work in one language to the learning and using of other languages’ (Welsh Government, 2020).

By promoting the teaching of English, Welsh and an international language, the Welsh curriculum resembles some educational models in Europe referred to as trilingual education. Mercator’s 2011 report describes 11 trilingual education contexts, for example in the Basque Country, Catalonia, Finland, the Netherlands and Austria, where learners are taught a minority language, the majority language of the community and a foreign language. It is interesting to note that English is the foreign language in 8 of the 11 contexts presented. We can cite some sentences that show how English is held in high regard in many European countries. Cenoz and Extague state, when talking about the Basque Country (2011: 36): ‘English is becoming increasingly important as a medium of intra-European and international communication.’ Björklund (2011), in discussing Swedish immersion education in Finland, notes that pupils see English as a more important language than Swedish, and in the Netherlands, when describing education in Fryslân, it is noted that English has been compulsory in primary schools there since 1986 (Riemersma & de Vries, 2011).

This shows the importance of English at an European level. English, of course, is not the foreign language in UK schools and other foreign languages do not have the same status as English globally. This suggests that the situation of foreign language teaching in English-speaking countries is more challenging. In Scotland, where a system of teaching two foreign languages in primary schools was adopted in 2012, French was found to be the most common language in 88 per cent of primary schools there and 89 per cent of secondary schools (Scottish Government, 2020). Scotland’s 1 + 2 Language Strategy is intended to ensure that, by 2021, all schools will give pupils the opportunity to learn a first additional language at 4–5 years of age and a second additional language at 8–9 years of age, with this provision continuing until pupils are aged 13–14 (Hancock, 2019). Despite this ambitious language policy, the numbers studying French as a GCSE subject are decreasing. According to the SCILT report (2019), the numbers studying French have halved between 2012 and 2018. It is therefore appropriate here to turn our sights to the recent experiences in Scotland and England of the challenges of introducing a foreign language in the primary sector.

Teaching and learning foreign languages in primary schools

Given that the introduction of a foreign language has been statutory at Key Stage 2 in England since 2014 (Department for Education (DfE), 2014), it is

worthwhile examining their experiences to see if there are lessons to be learned. Holmes & Myles (2019) make a number of recommendations based on the barriers identified when starting to introduce a foreign language in primary school. The challenges they identified were:

- i. lack of time to teach the foreign language,
- ii. the differences in primary and secondary expectations of pupils' progress,
- iii. there was insufficient progress planning,
- iv. there was a lack of cross-stage planning,
- v. shortcomings in teachers' subject knowledge,
- vi. lack of opportunities for professional development,
- vii. monitoring and assessment arrangements,
- viii. transition arrangements and the lack of communication between primary and secondary,
- ix. the fact that various primary schools feed the secondary school,
- x. shortcomings in the development of subject knowledge in Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development courses, and
- xi. school accountability. (2019: 7–9)

To achieve the aim of this article, namely to look at the implications of the 2022 curriculum on the future of foreign language teaching and learning, these problems can be encapsulated into two main focuses:

1. Ensuring that teachers have appropriate subject knowledge to teach the languages confidently and effectively (challenges v, vi and x above),
2. And appropriate progress planning from primary to secondary school through improved communication and collaboration (challenges ii, iii, iv, viii and ix above).

The challenges identified in Scotland related to the preparation of teachers. According to Giraud-Johnstone (2017: summary): 'Concerns around teachers' language competence, further training and need for on-going support were repeatedly highlighted as top challenges to 1+2 implementation.'

Other studies have identified primary teachers' lack of confidence and linguistic knowledge as an issue in the success of the scheme in England (focus 1. above). A study by Finch, Theakston & Serratrice (2018) identified the 'unique' pedagogy of foreign language teaching as challenging for

teachers. Similarly, the Tinsley report (2019: 5) notes that teachers’ lack of language competence is one of the main stumbling blocks: ‘Improving staff proficiency in languages and boosting the expertise and confidence of staff teaching languages, are increasingly being identified as key challenges for primary schools.’

This has important implications for us here in Wales to ensure that current and prospective teachers are trained in preparation for the introduction of an international language in 2022. It should be noted, of course, that teachers in Wales already teach in a bilingual context, which is different from the experiences of teachers in England, but it is assumed that they will lack confidence in delivering an international language.

The second focus identified above was issues with transitional arrangements. Holmes & Myles (2019) point out that secondary schools do not always take into account pupils’ previous experience of learning a foreign language. This may mean that secondary schools teach a different language to the language introduced in the primary. In addition, it can mean that pupils resume learning the same language again leading to boredom. This is an important factor to consider in our discussion on increasing the numbers choosing a language as a GCSE subject, as Holmes & Myles note: ‘This can lead to demotivation and can result in an early loss of interest and curiosity in language learning, which may be a contributory factor to low uptake of languages at key stage 4’ (Holmes & Myles, 2019: 7).

From the author’s personal experience of teaching a foreign language in a primary school, problems can arise. In my case, various primary schools fed the secondary school and one primary school, because it was part of a 3–19 school, had the opportunity to start learning French in Year 6. Teaching only one school from the secondary school’s catchment cluster meant that some had had a year of a foreign language while pupils from the other primary schools had not been introduced to French. Those who had had a year of French were in danger of becoming bored, as noted in Holmes and Myles’ quote above, because the work was too easy. Chambers (2019: 20) lists the same problems relating to effective transition and, accordingly, states: ‘Transition is recognised as the key factor on which the success of the PMFL [Primary Modern Foreign Language] initiative hinges.’

It can be suggested here that, if Wales were successful in overcoming the issues of preparing teachers and improving transition provision, there would be less of the boredom highlighted in Holmes & Myles’ quote above and that this would potentially lead to an increase in the number choosing a language as an optional subject. Let us not forget that the ultimate aim of the

suggestion in *Global Futures* that modern languages be introduced in primary schools was to raise the numbers choosing a modern language as a GCSE and A Level subject.

We therefore now explore research that has suggested that starting to teach a foreign language at primary level will increase the take-up of a foreign language as a GCSE subject. It is believed that the view that it is better to start learning a foreign language from a young age stems from the Critical Period Hypothesis which argues that unless language learning is started by a certain stage, it will not be possible to learn that language successfully (see Abello-Contesse, 2009, for further discussion). Gürsoy (2011) provides a review of the theory in the light of research findings into different contexts in which young children, teenagers and adults learn languages. Gürsoy found that the main difference between young children and teenagers is that the younger children are better able to pronounce the foreign language but that teenagers learn grammar and vocabulary better than young children. It asks the question, therefore, why does the learning of foreign languages start earlier and earlier in European and Asian countries? Similarly, Myles (2017) found that primary aged children (aged 5 and 7) learn languages more slowly than older children. She suggests that the older children, aged 11, learn a foreign language more quickly as they are better at using a range of cognitive strategies to support learning and have higher literacy skills to support foreign language learning. Gürsoy gives more reasons why older children learn a foreign language more quickly. He refers to Piaget's formal operations that enable pupils from around the age of 12 to recognise similarities and differences and that the development of metacognition helps learners to be more analytical and they can therefore learn a foreign language more quickly (Gürsoy, 2011: 762).

Despite the evidence suggesting that older children are more successful at aspects of grammar and syntax and that they learn a foreign language faster than younger children, Gürsoy says that early learning of a foreign language is justified. As learning a foreign language necessarily means limited contact with the language, by starting earlier, there is more input into that language. It has also already been noted above (by Gürsoy, 2011) that younger children's pronunciation can surpass that of older children. This is important in increasing learners' confidence in attempting to use the language.

The role of motivation in choosing a language as a GCSE subject

Indeed, above all, Gürsoy (2011) and Myles (2017) believe that the greatest advantage of starting to learn a foreign language from a young age is the positive attitudes fostered towards languages. As Myles (2017) notes: 4): ‘If ... “better” means developing an enthusiasm for learning languages ... then much of the evidence suggests that younger is better.’

Research evidence appears to favour starting to learn a foreign language from a young age if the aim is to foster enthusiasm and positive attitudes towards language learning. It could be assumed that enthusiasm and positive attitudes towards language learning lead pupils to choose to study the foreign language as a GCSE subject.

Taylor & Marsden (2014: 902) argue, however, that very little research has systematically explored the relationship between pupils’ attitudes towards the language and their final choice of studying that subject as a GCSE subject: ‘there is limited evidence about the extent to which perceptions of and attitudes towards languages, lessons, and learning are associated with the actual decision whether or not to study a FL [Foreign Language]’.

Their study compared two different strategies presented to 604 pupils aged 13/14 in three secondary schools in England to discover if pupils’ perceptions and attitudes could be directly linked to their choice of MFL. Their conclusion was that a specific intention to study a MFL did not equate to the final choice of a quarter of pupils. They offer no reason for this.

Despite popular opinion maintaining that pupils’ lack of interest or enjoyment of studying a foreign language is at the root of the fall in the numbers choosing it as a GCSE subject, this does not reflect the experiences of a large number of teachers. The author’s personal experience of teaching a foreign language for 19 years, together with the anecdotal evidence of a large number of other teachers, emphasises that pupils enjoy studying a foreign language. This reflects the findings of Estyn’s latest survey of MFLs in Wales in 2016: ‘Many Year 9 learners reported that they liked learning languages and wanted to continue to study a language in Year 10’ (Estyn, 2016: 20).

In a study of motivation by Coleman, Galaczi & Astruc (2007), in which 10,000 KS3 pupils participated across the UK, they concluded that overall motivation towards languages is positive but nevertheless they go on to note the decrease in the numbers choosing MFL as a GCSE subject. Although there is research evidence, the findings of the Estyn report and teachers’ views confer that there are positive attitudes towards language learning among pupils, nevertheless it must be acknowledged that the numbers

choosing a language as a GCSE subject are falling. A number of researchers point out that English-speaking countries are reluctant to learn foreign languages because of the esteem that English has internationally (e.g. Rodeiro, 2017) and this may be a factor in the decline. However, it can be argued that another factor, namely the constraints of the option boxes, is behind the reduction in the numbers studying MFL, although pupils intend to do so (see e.g. Taylor & Marsden, 2014) and that there is conclusive evidence that pupils enjoy them (refer to the Estyn 2016 quotation above).

Option box constraints

Year after year, teachers feel frustrated that there is evidence that pupils want to continue with languages but are unable to do so because of the constraints of the option boxes. Blake & Gorrara (2019) support this in saying:

Following the mentoring intervention, the number of pupils who continued to study a modern foreign language at GCSE could potentially have increased ... even when mentees had selected a modern foreign language at GCSE helping to generate a group, it was not permitted to run. This was due either to financial constraints and/or the organisation of option columns and school timetabling. (Blake & Gorrara, 2019: 34)

The quotation shows that the factors limiting pupils' ability to continue to study languages were financial factors (which prevented small sized groups from being held) and the organisation of option boxes and timetabling.

The constraints of the option boxes appear not only in frequent conversations between MFL teachers but also in government documents, the Estyn report and the British Council report. A quotation from the Estyn report showing that pupils enjoyed the subject has already been noted. They also say:

The structure of option choices at the end of key stage 3 often means that learners do not study a modern foreign language because the subject was in an option column with another subject that they particularly wanted to study. As a result, there are a small number of schools in Wales where learners do not study a modern foreign language at key stage 4. (Estyn (2016: 6)

It is worth noting what the British Council's report also says on this point: 'Three quarters of the respondents who had fewer pupils than the previous year in either Year 10 or Year 11 said the reason for this was a limited number of option slots' (British Council, 2019: 20).

Global Futures in 2015 had already identified that ‘increased competition for subject time in school timetables ... have ... contributed to the decline in take up of modern foreign languages at examination levels’ (2015: 4). The document emphasises (in bold) the need to: ‘review the approach taken by schools in devising GCSE and ‘A’ level option blocks for Year 10 and 11 respectively’ (Welsh Government, 2015: 7).

It is important to note, as Blake & Gorrara did (2019: 29), that this situation has worsened since the introduction of the Welsh Bacc as a compulsory element of the curriculum in 2017 as option boxes have fallen from 4 to 3 in a number of Welsh schools. The British Council’s report also recognises that the Welsh Bacallaureate is responsible for reducing the number of optional subjects available to pupils (British Council, 2019: 20). Therefore, although the government, with the *Global Futures* strategy, is promoting the study of foreign languages on the one hand, it may be argued that opportunities to continue to study a foreign language are taken away from the pupils, on the other, as the timetable constraints brought about by the Welsh Bacc are partly responsible for less time on the timetable. It is interesting to note that parents also recognise this problem in the Estyn report (2016):

A few parents raised concerns about the limited number of options available to learners in key stage 4 due to the number of compulsory subjects, with a very few stating that they felt their child would have selected a modern foreign language if they had more choices. (Estyn (2016: 35)

Such comments are very familiar to foreign language teachers. Although a linguistic element was originally included in the Welsh Bacc, which would have led to an improvement in the linguistic skills of our pupils in a foreign language, this element was omitted in 2015 (Welsh Bacallaureate, 2016).

It is interesting here to compare the activities of the Welsh Government with the efforts in England to increase the numbers studying MFL at GCSE level. While the Welsh Bacc is responsible for reducing the number of option boxes available which, in turn, limits the numbers able to study MFL here in Wales, the EBacc in England, on the contrary, offers a practical approach to trying to encourage pupils to choose MFL. Pupils receive the EBacc if they choose English language and literature, mathematics, sciences, history or geography and a language (either modern or classical) for their GCSEs. The English Government’s target is for 75 per cent of pupils in England to study EBacc subjects by 2022. (By 2019, those choosing French and Spanish had increased by 4 per cent and 8 per cent respectively; Wright, 2020.)

The importance of the option boxes in influencing the future of young people is emphasised in the article with the succinct heading ‘Option blocks

that block options' (Abrahams, 2018). Although that article is intended to show how option boxes restrict some pupils' choices and therefore their admission to Russell Group universities, the conclusions are relevant to our discussion here. Abrahams' study looked at the differences in the options available to pupils in three secondary schools in an English town, namely a state school in a deprived area, an affluent state school and a private school. It argued that those in a private school had better opportunities than pupils at the school in a deprived area because there were no restrictions on pupils' choices at the private school while the restrictions of the option boxes represented a barrier to the future of pupils in the disadvantaged school. A survey was held with 800 year 7, 9 and 11 pupils from the three schools and 6–8 pupils from each of those years from each school took part in semi-structured interviews. In her conclusion, Abrahams states: 'I argue that we must understand young people and their package of GCSE and A levels in context of the *opportunities* they were given from which to make such choices' (Abrahams, 2018: 1157).

Following this, it can be argued that explaining the decline in the numbers continuing to study MFL in Wales at Key Stage 4 as a result of pupils' lack of interest, or enthusiasm, in languages is not sufficient. The decline must be explained in terms of the choices offered to our pupils. Arguably, positive attitudes towards languages will have been fostered from having introduced an international language in Year 5 but, unless the option box system is changed, it will remain difficult for all those pupils who wish to study a language as a GCSE subject to do so.

The perception that MFLs are difficult

The other important element responsible for the decline in numbers is the fact that MFLs are perceived as difficult subjects, particularly following the introduction of the new GCSE specification in 2016. This is emphasised in the British Council's report: 'The nature and content of external exams emerged as the most widespread challenge for 73% of schools, followed by insufficient curriculum time and the timetabling of options in Key Stage 4' (2019: 28).

Taylor & Marsden's study (2014): 913) reinforces the importance of pupils' perception of the subject's difficulty or ease in their decision whether or not to choose it: 'Whether the class was perceived to be easy or hard significantly predicted language uptake in our study.'

Tinsley's report (2019) on linguistic trends in England states that a number of schools said that the inclusion of external examinations was 'the major

barrier to increasing numbers’ (2019: 18). It is worth elaborating here why a GCSE in a modern language seems difficult for pupils. There are 18 sub-themes to be learned within three broad themes, namely:

1. Identity and culture	2. Wales and the world	3. Current and future study and employment
Youth culture Self and relationships Technology and social media	Home and Locality Local areas of interest Travel and transport	Current study School/college life School/college studies
Lifestyle Health and fitness Entertainment and leisure	The Wider World Local and regional features and characteristics of France and French-speaking countries Holidays and tourism	Enterprise, Employability and Future Plans Skills and personal qualities Post-16 study Career plans Employment
Customs and Traditions Food and drink Festivals and celebrations	Global Sustainability Environment Social issues	

Source: WJEC 2016: 6.

Pupils are expected to be familiar with the 47 pages (2016: 19–66) of vocabulary contained in the specification. In addition, four pages detail the grammar requirements for the foundation tier only (2016: 67–71). One example can be given here of all the different tenses of the verb that the learner is expected to be able to recognise (R below) and/or produce them:

present, past,
future,
imperfect,
conditional,
pluperfect,
passive voice: future, imperfect and perfect tenses (R), perfect infinitive,
present participle, including use after *en*, subjunctive mood: present, in commonly used expressions (R).

Bearing in mind that there are 18 sub-themes, the grammar to be learned and the need to practise the four skills for four examinations (oral, listening, reading and writing), it is inevitable that pupils perceive the subject as challenging. Remember also that no part of the GCSE examination can be taken in Year 10, as is possible in a number of subjects, and that there is no longer an element of coursework in the examination, although this remains the case in some other subjects.

Indeed, as a result of teachers' concerns that fewer pupils were choosing MFL as a GCSE subject due to the belief that it was difficult to achieve the highest grades in these subjects, Ofqual (the regulatory board of qualifications and examinations in England) decided to undertake a review to establish whether it was more difficult to achieve good grades in GCSE French, German and Spanish compared to other subjects and concluded that: 'On the balance of the evidence we have gathered, we have judged that there is a sufficiently strong case to make an adjustment to grading standards in French and German, but not Spanish' (Ofqual, 2019).

They also heard evidence that the subject content may be a factor in why MFLs are perceived as difficult. They also determined that French and German, across a range of statistical measures, were seemingly consistently more difficult than other GCSE subjects and that both subjects had experienced a significant reduction in their uptake at GCSE and A Level.

The way forward?

Some recommendations can now be proposed on how to ensure that the necessary preparations are in place to effectively deliver the international language element of the 2022 curriculum. This can lead to increased numbers studying MFL at GCSE, in line with the *Global Futures* strategy, and ensuring that the next generation is 'Bilingual plus 1'.

Firstly, therefore, how do we ensure that teachers have the necessary linguistic skills to teach a foreign language in the primary sector?

- One solution would be to ensure that Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses offer a module on teaching a foreign language. This was recommended by Holmes & Myles (2019: 12), who noted that this should be a mandatory element of the PGCE course.

These sessions could provide opportunities for students to refresh their language skills (if they already have a MFL as a GCSE subject) as well as

demonstrate modern language teaching strategies, bearing in mind, as Finch, Theakston & Serratrice (2018) said, that this pedagogy is ‘unique’.

- Professional development courses could be delivered to those teachers already in post to help them become confident in teaching a foreign language.

It is important that teachers are aware of research that offers evidence on how learners learn a language in order to use the most effective methods. Chambers (2019) noted that pupils want to be taught by teachers who are qualified in the MFL and have received appropriate training. It is worth quoting the finding of the British Council’s report (2019: 16) here: ‘86% of responding schools said that language training for staff was required.’

- The work of foreign language students from universities visiting schools as part of the Modern Languages Mentoring project (Gorrara & Jenkins, 2020) could be expanded to address the lack of teacher expertise.

Transitional arrangements are the second crucial factor in ensuring the success of the *Global Futures* strategy and have proven to be a challenge to delivery in England.

- There is a need to ensure that the international language introduced in the primary is not forgotten in secondary school.

This can happen if another international language is introduced in secondary. It would be beneficial for all schools in a secondary school catchment to study the same foreign language in order to see real progression in the language. Studying a foreign language for five years, rather than three as is the current case, before choosing GCSE subjects would arguably mean that pupils found the subject a little easier. Remember that some secondary schools ask pupils to make their GCSE choices in Year 8, which means that they have only been studying the foreign language for just over a year as things stand. Improving this element of transition would ensure that some of the lessons of the past to see progression from primary to secondary are realised, as Chambers (2019: 20) notes.

The consequences of not learning from past experience has the potential to be damaging (Hunt et al. 2008). Findings on the Primary French initiative in the 1960s (Burstall et al. 1974) and now more recent research (e.g. Bolster 2009; Hunt

et al. 2008; McLachlan 2009) on PMFL teaching in schools, report the same serious challenges relating to organisation, staffing, teaching methods and, very importantly, transition. These issues, which question the extent to which policy-makers are aware of, or take seriously, the experiences from the past, need to be addressed with the diligence and urgency they deserve, otherwise the latest iteration of PMFL is likely to be the same ‘damp squib’ as its predecessor.

It should be noted here that the new curriculum offers opportunities for schools to choose which international languages to offer. Throughout this article, however, particular mention has been made of French, Spanish and German, as these are currently the most commonly taught languages in primary and secondary schools in England, Wales and Scotland (Tinsley, 2019; British Council, 2019; Scottish Government, 2020) and because our aim here is to deal with the take-up of these subjects at GCSE level.

Conclusion

It is hoped that, through the ongoing actions of *Global Futures* (Welsh Government, 2015), the continuation of schemes such as the Student Mentoring project (Blake & Gorrara, 2019; Gorrara & Jenkins, 2020), as well as introducing an international language in the primary sector, it will be possible to increase the numbers choosing a MFL as a GCSE subject. It is anticipated, however, that the option boxes system will continue to be a barrier to some pupils choosing a MFL as a GCSE subject. The innovative changes coming into force in 2022 provide valuable opportunities to enable the delivery of the aspirations of *Global Futures*, and we can conclude with a quote from the document:

There is a pressing need to encourage many more of our young people to study one or more modern foreign language subjects as part of their education at school in Years 10 and 11, and beyond. We need to ensure that all young people from all backgrounds understand the benefits of, and have the opportunity to receive, a formal qualification in a modern foreign language subject. (Welsh Government, 2015: 3)

Notes

- 1 ‘Why is UK language teaching in crisis?’, *The Guardian*, 11 September 2013; ‘Foreign language learning “declining rapidly” in Wales’, *BBC Wales*, 2 June 2015;

‘Fall in number of students taking up foreign languages prompts Brexit concerns’, *Independent*, 5 August 2017; ‘Language learning: German and French drop by half in UK schools’, *BBC Wales*, 27 February 2019.

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