



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## **Response to the Estyn thematic review on modern foreign languages**

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

**OGL**

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**Report title:****Modern Foreign Languages****Report Details:**

This report is published in response to a request in the annual remit to Estyn from the Welsh Government for 2014-15. The report focuses on the quality of teaching and learning in modern foreign languages, and developments and issues in modern foreign language teaching in Wales since the last Estyn report, which was published in 2009.

Context: The findings and recommendations in this report draw on visits to 20 English medium and Welsh medium secondary schools, which were selected randomly. Inspectors also visited and gathered evidence from lead representatives for modern foreign languages in the regional consortia.

**Main findings****Key Stage 3**

- In the lessons observed in key stage 3, most pupils achieve good skills in their oral work and in their reading and writing in the assessed language. Many show a good understanding of the grammar of the assessed language. This is a significant improvement when compared with Estyn's findings about learners' understanding of grammar in 2009.
- However, too many learners make repeated mistakes with intonation and pronunciation, particularly when reading aloud, or they prepare conversations in written form before practising them as spoken conversations. This detracts from their ability to speak the language fluently.
- The percentage of learners achieving the expected level (level 5) or above in modern foreign languages has improved over the last seven years, but it is still too low (84%),
- It is the second-lowest level of performance in the National Curriculum subjects. Boys generally perform worse than girls in modern foreign languages.

**Key stage 4**

- In the lessons observed in key stage 4, learners generally have a good understanding of the language skills they require for examinations. Most learners make effective use of technology to support their language learning.

- However, too many learners, even the more able, do not speak the language fluently enough. Often this results from learners preparing for spoken examination by writing out and learning by heart written paragraphs on the prescribed topics.
- Examination outcomes for those who take modern foreign language GCSEs are Good. The proportion of GCSE entries into modern foreign languages achieving grades A\*-C was 77% in 2015. This was better than in most other National Curriculum subjects. However, of those learners who achieved the expected level in modern foreign languages at key stage 3, only 28.2% went on to enter at least one modern foreign language GCSE. At GCSE, boys continue to perform less well than girls in modern foreign languages.

### **A level**

- A level results are good in modern foreign languages and compare well with those in other subjects. In 2015, the proportion of A level entries in modern foreign languages gaining grades A\*-C was 82%. The trend of high performance at A level has persisted over time.
- However, the decline in entries at A level is greater than at GCSE. The number of boys taking an A level in modern foreign languages is a much smaller proportion than the number of girls, and the proportion has stayed at a similar level over time. In 2015, only 204 of the 700 entries in modern foreign language at A level were boys (29%). Since 2009 this proportion has shown small fluctuations, but has generally stayed at just under a third.

### **Teaching**

- The quality of teaching in many modern foreign language classrooms is adequate. In a few cases it is good and in a very few cases it is excellent.
- Most teachers in the lessons observed are subject specialists with appropriate qualifications to teach modern foreign languages. They speak the languages they teach with a good degree of fluency and accuracy. A few teachers do not have a firm enough grasp of the most effective way to teach a modern foreign language. In most of these cases it is usually because they are teaching the modern foreign language as a second subject.
- Increasingly, teachers are using developments in digital technology in lessons to good effect. In a few cases, teachers are using technology well to support homework tasks.
- The extent to which teachers teach through the assessed language has declined.

- Too often teachers use English to explain simple classroom instructions.
- In many less effective lessons, teachers allow teaching grammar to dominate at the expense of learners developing the key modern foreign language skills of speaking and listening.
- In too many classrooms, teachers require pupils to prepare conversations in written form before practising the spoken language. This hinders pupils from developing a good level of fluency in the assessed language.
- Most teachers mark and assess learners' work effectively on a regular basis. However, the effective use of assessment for learning techniques has declined since Estyn's last report in 2009.

### **Provision, leadership and management**

- Most heads of department and modern foreign language teams share a vision of the modern foreign language provision they wish to offer. However, increasingly, many do not support this through a written policy that sets out a shared vision for modern foreign languages teaching and learning within the school. This leads to varied practice within the department.
- On average, learners experience three hours of modern foreign language learning across a two-week timetable. However, this is less time than the two hours per week recommended in Estyn's last modern foreign language report.
- Nearly all departments have a well-planned modern foreign language curriculum that links well to National Curriculum level descriptors for the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). However, only in a very few departments do teachers plan in effective ways to prepare learners to use the assessed language in everyday transactions in the classroom.
- In nearly all departments, there were a good range of resources to support modern foreign language learning. Many modern foreign language teachers run effective extra-curricular activities for helping to encourage young people to take a modern foreign language to examination level.
- The examinations that learners take in modern foreign languages are mainly at GCSE or A level. A few schools use other examinations to accommodate learners who may have stronger skills in speaking, listening and reading, but with less emphasis on writing. At present, there is no GCSE that links language learning and business skills. Many teachers regard this as a significant gap, especially in attracting pupils of a wider range of ability to study a modern foreign language in

key stage 4.

- Most headteachers and senior leaders are supportive of learners having the opportunity to learn at least one modern foreign language to examination level. However, nearly all report that this is challenging, due to the dominance of the core subjects at key stage 4.
- 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.

### **Recruitment of modern foreign language teachers**

- Headteachers with modern foreign language departments with few or no learners in key stage 4 and post-16, and headteachers in the west of Wales, report that it is often difficult to recruit teachers for modern foreign language departments.
- Quite often, the linguists applying for posts in schools with little provision for modern foreign languages are only able to offer one modern foreign language. This reduces flexibility on the timetable and in the number of options available to learners.
- In 2014-2015, initial teacher training centres recruited at most half of the quota for modern foreign language trainees allocated to them by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

**Estyn's recommendations** are directed at Headteachers, senior leaders and teachers of modern foreign languages. The recommendations target the quality of teaching and learning of modern foreign languages and the uptake of languages at examination level.

Responses to the recommendations are outlined below.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Teachers of modern foreign languages should:**

R1 Improve the quality of teaching in modern foreign languages by ensuring that they:

- increase the use of the assessed language as the language of instruction across key stage 3, key stage 4 and post-16
- help learners to gain a secure grasp of the rules of pronunciation of the language they are learning
- help learners to use an extensive range of strategies to prepare

confidently for oral examinations, so that learners develop oral fluency at levels in line with their abilities

- make sure that learners of all abilities are fully challenged and engage in creative language activities that develop their mastery of the language
- keep an appropriate balance between the teaching of grammar and the four language skills, particularly speaking and listening
- assess learners' work using meaningful assessment for learning strategies

R2 Attend and engage with regional network groups and regional training to develop high-order skills in modern foreign language teaching and learning

**Headteachers and senior leaders should:**

R3 Improve learners' uptake of at least one modern foreign language at examination level through reviewing their curriculum planning and timetabling arrangements.

R4 Make sure that their modern foreign language teachers are able to take advantage of the 'Global Futures' continuing professional development offered

within and across regions to improve the quality of learning and teaching of modern foreign languages.

**WG response:**

In October 2015 Welsh Government published 'Global Futures – A plan to improve and promote modern foreign languages in Wales 2015-2020'. The plan, which aims to encourage learners to extend their knowledge of other cultures by becoming bilingual plus 1, that is, studying English, Welsh and at least one modern foreign language (MFL) from primary to examination level. The plan has three main objectives:

- To improve the teaching of MFL;
- To improve the MFL learning opportunities for pupils; and
- To raise the profile and improve the understanding of the benefits of learning a MFL, particularly at GCSE.

The five year plan was developed with and draws on the knowledge of key partners, including colleagues from language institutes, regional consortia, universities and schools, in the field of languages. These partners form the Global Futures Steering Group, which meets quarterly to share effective best practice and to deliver the objectives in the Global Futures plan.

Under the plan, we have established school 'centres of excellence' in each of the Regional Education Consortia. The 'centres of excellence' are providing school-to-school support to partner secondary schools and their feeder primary schools, in the form of professional development for teachers to improve and enhance the delivery of learning experiences for learners who are studying a modern foreign language. This includes, but is not limited to, delivering training days, developing resources and materials and sharing effective practice.

The Welsh Government will publicise Estyn's report on Modern Foreign Languages through Dysg and the Global Futures Steering Group and will include the recommendations as part of its workplan for this forthcoming year. We will also ask regional consortia to take account of the recommendations as part of their ongoing work of Global Futures.

#### **Publication Details**

The report will be published on or after **11<sup>th</sup> July 2016** and may be accessed on Estyn's website [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)