

Language Trends Ireland 2025/26

Commissioned research
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In partnership with



Teangacha
Iar-bhunscoile Éireann
Post-Primary
Languages Ireland

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Introduction

British Council Ireland and Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) are pleased to present the findings of the inaugural *Language Trends Ireland* report.

Language Trends Ireland is a survey of Senior Leadership and students in post-primary schools in Ireland,¹ designed in collaboration with an in-country expert panel, to gather information about the current position of Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teaching and learning.

Its aims are:

- i. to assess the impact of policy measures in relation to MFL;

and

- ii. to present an overview of the current context of MFL provision in the Irish school system based both on quantitative evidence and on views expressed by school leaders and students.

The report is part of the wider *Language Trends* series, which began in 2002 with *Language Trends England*; since, there have been annual surveys of primary, secondary and independent schools in England. There has been an annual survey in Wales since 2015, a biennial survey in Northern Ireland since 2019, and an annual survey in Scotland since 2024. All reports can be found on the British Council Language Trends website.²

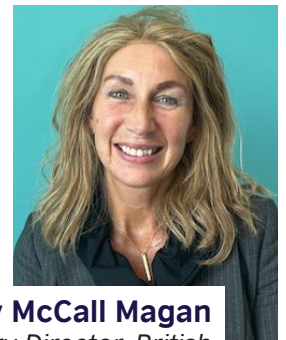
The *Language Trends* series shows general shifts in data and seeks to provide a springboard for teachers, school leaders, academics, inspectors, policy makers, students and the public to consider aspects of language teaching, learning and provision more deeply.

¹ When we refer to Ireland, we are referring to the 26 counties that comprise the Republic of Ireland.

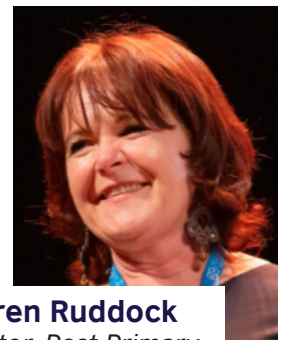
² [Language Trends research series | British Council](#)

British Council Ireland and Post Primary Languages Ireland contracted a team of researchers at Queen's University Belfast to conduct *Language Trends Ireland 2026*. The research team has previously worked on similar outputs for the British Council across the jurisdictions of the United Kingdom (UK) and includes members with experience of teaching languages in primary and secondary classrooms in the UK and abroad.

On behalf of British Council Ireland, PPLI and Queen's University Belfast, we would like to thank teachers and students for participating in our research, without whom this report would not have been possible.



Kerry McCall Magan
Country Director, British
Council Ireland



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Headline Findings from 2025/26

- French has the highest participation in MFL in Ireland but 41 per cent of responding schools say numbers have decreased at Senior Cycle over the past three years
- As in the UK, Spanish is showing considerable growth across all levels of schooling
- Decisions made by Higher Education Institutions to remove a foreign language matriculation requirement for admission to undergraduate degrees is having a negative impact on the number of students taking a foreign language for Leaving Certificate
- Over 75 per cent of first year students enjoy learning a language, and 25 per cent state that they find their MFL classes fun
- Students believe the ability to speak another language when visiting other countries to be the greatest benefit of language learning, and many want the opportunity to speak more in class
- Eighty per cent of fifth year students see the value of language learning
- The most successful language learning enrichment activities include school exchanges and cultural events, including those organised by PPLI



Policy Context and Background

Ireland's National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is the statutory body which oversees the curriculum for all learners from early years to the end of post-primary education with the aim of making Ireland's education system a leader in Western Europe (NCCA, 2024). Working with a variety of education stakeholders and the Minister for Education and Youth, the NCCA aims to ensure that 'that all young people can experience and benefit from enjoyable, engaging, relevant, and appropriately challenging experiences to support learning, living in, contributing to, caring for, and working in a changing world' (NCCA, 2024).

The education system is split into four cycles: Early Childhood and Pre-School Education (ages birth-6), Primary (ages 5-12), Junior (ages 12-15) and Senior (ages 15-18), which ends with the Leaving Certificate. At all levels, in English Medium Schools (EMS), Irish Medium Schools (IMS), and Gaeltacht schools,¹ Irish is a requirement from Junior Infants (age 5) until Sixth Year (age 18), with English a mandatory subject for study until the end of Junior Cycle (age 15 or 16). Building on the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026*, published in December 2017, seeks to 'enable learners to communicate effectively and improve their standards of competence in languages' (Department of Education and Skills, 2017).

The goals of the policy are

- i. **to improve language proficiency;**
- ii. **to diversify and increase the uptake of languages;**
- iii. **to increase the awareness of the importance of language learning; and**
- iv. **to enhance employer engagement in the development and use of trade languages (Department of Education and Skills, 2017).**

In order to achieve these goals, *Languages Connect* sets out a number of targeted outcomes for realisation by 2026, which include increasing the uptake of languages in Junior and Senior Cycles, inclusion of new language options, expanding the variety of foreign languages offered in schools and growing the number of students taking a foreign language as part of their degree. Further, the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) is adopted as the standard, with the aim of increasing the number of learners designated as 'Independent Users'.

In 2023, an interim report and further plan for implementation up to 2026 highlighted a number of great successes, while also identifying some of the remaining challenges to achieving the original targets set out in 2017, especially in promoting MFL from an early age, increasing the diversity of languages offered, and developing a plan for greater inclusion of MFL in higher and further education.

¹ The Gaeltacht is a term which describes regions of Ireland in which Irish is the primary spoken language. Whilst Irish Medium Schools provide immersion in mainly English-speaking areas, Gaeltacht schools operate within Irish-speaking communities where the language is used daily.

Primary education is divided into four stages, with Stages 1 (Junior and Senior Infants, ages 4-6) and 2 (1st and 2nd class, ages 7-8) focussing on English and Irish, with a third language included in the redeveloped curriculum. For those in EMS, English is considered the first language (L1) with Irish constituting the second language (L2). In IMS and Gaeltacht schools, the curriculum is delivered in Irish as L1, and English is offered as L2. The L2 is allotted significant and increasing time per week throughout the primary years. Until 2025, there was no formal inclusion of MFL in the primary curriculum; however, a major redevelopment of the primary curriculum was introduced in 2025, and, in the most recent specification, a MFL should be included in Stages 3 (3rd and 4th class, ages 9-10) and 4 (5th and 6th class, ages 11-13) as a third language (L3), with one hour per week allotted to the teaching of the L3. Introducing L3 in Stages 3 and 4 includes 'building awareness of languages and cultures', 'developing communicative relationships' 'understanding the content and structure of language' and 'exploring and using language' with the goal of supporting children 'to communicate at a very basic to basic level', aligning with pre-A1 to A1 on the CEFR (NCCA, 2025a). The Primary Language Curriculum also encourages pupils to use their home languages in the classroom to increase intercultural awareness and foster plurilingualism. Ahead of the introduction of MFL at Primary level in 2025, PPLI has been running the successful 'Say Yes to Languages' module as a taster in the context of preparing the ground for the integration of an additional language. 'Say Yes to Languages' was introduced in 2021, and, since then, 316,000 primary school pupils have taken part. In the school year 2025/26, over 1,300 schools are taking part in Phase 2 of the module, aimed at Stage 4 pupils

(PPLI/Languages Connect, 2025a). PPLI is also responsible for developing resources and facilitating the language upskilling of primary teachers, to build their language competencies. Overall, PPLI's goal in the context of Primary Education is to support the enactment of the redeveloped Primary Curriculum by enhancing teachers' confidence and competence in MFL and preparing the ground for curriculum enactment by introducing a plurilingual approach to language learning via 'Say Yes to Languages'. The goal of the primary languages programme is also to increase uptake of MFL when pupils move from the Primary Cycle into Junior Cycle.

The Junior Cycle, a three-year course (First to Third Year) starting at age 12/13, aims to enable students to 'communicate with increasing independence, confidence and creativity' (NCCA, 2025b). Currently, the curriculum offers students the possibility of studying French, German, Italian or Spanish as a full course, aligned with levels A1 to A2 of the CEFR. Taking a MFL is not mandatory in Junior Cycle, although most schools do mandate, or at least very strongly encourage, learning at least one MFL during the Cycle. Some schools offer MFL as an option in Junior Cycle. This is partly linked to the 2022 revision of the Junior Cycle which reduced the number of subjects examined to ten. This increased the relative weight of mandatory subjects and limited the overall subject choices. As a result, fewer students take a language other than Irish or English. In 2016, 87 per cent of students took a language exam at the end of Junior Cycle, by 2025, this had dropped to just under 79 per cent (Department of Education, 2025c; State Examinations Commission, 2025).

However, Junior Cycle also gives students the opportunity to pick short courses, including, currently, Chinese Language and Culture (developed by the NCCA), and Polish, Russian, Japanese and Lithuanian (developed by PPLI). A revised specification for Junior Cycle MFL will be introduced from September 2026.

Transition Year (TY) is an optional one-year programme between Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate. TY is part of a three-year Senior Cycle, but it is separate to the Leaving Certificate programme, which lasts two years. It is designed around the development and learning of students moving from Junior Cycle into Senior Cycle, to prepare them for their future lives as local, national and global citizens. It offers opportunities for personal, social and academic development and experience of adult and working life. All post-primary schools have the option of offering the TY programme to their students, and in 2023, 80.3 per cent of third year students chose to do the TY (Department of Education and Youth, 2025b).

#ThinkLanguages is a TY initiative developed by PPLI comprising a series of local and national events delivered annually over a designated week in November, with the aim of celebrating and promoting language learning in alignment with the stated educational outcomes of the TY programme. In 2025, the initiative engaged over 240 schools and approximately 21,000 students nationwide. #ThinkLanguages functions both as a support for teachers and as a mechanism to encourage students' uptake of languages at Senior Cycle level (Languages Connect, 2025b).

Following TY, students enter the two-year Leaving Certificate (Fifth and Sixth Year); while there is no formal requirement to study a MFL in any of the three Leaving Certificate pathways (Established (LCE), Vocational (LCVP)

or Applied (LCA)), there are significant opportunities for the study of modern foreign languages, including: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish. For students whose L1 is non-curricular language (including, Romanian, Croatian and other EU languages, or Ukrainian), there is the option to take a Leaving Certificate exam in their home language. By the end of a Leaving Certificate qualification in a MFL, students are expected to achieve a standard broadly aligning with A2/B1 of the CEFR for most curricular languages. Chinese and Japanese are offered ab initio and so align to Pre A1/A1 of the CEFR, and the assessment for non-curricular languages is based on the First Foreign Language final written paper of the European Baccalaureate.

There are twelve publicly funded Higher Education Institutes in Ireland. Students studying for the LCE and the LCVP receive Central Applications Office (CAO) points, which are used for admission to Higher Education. The LCA is excluded from the standard CAO points system. Whilst not mandated at school level, there is a requirement of a MFL for matriculation in many of the Arts and Humanities courses in the National University of Ireland institutions (University of Galway, Maynooth University, University College Dublin, University College Cork), as well as for specific programmes in other higher education institutions. *Languages Connect* identified that in 2012, around four per cent of Higher Education students were taking a language as a core or accredited component of their degree. The Strategy aimed to increase this figure to 20 per cent by 2026, citing that 70 per cent of school leavers had some form of MFL qualification (Department of Education and Skills, 2017).

Research Outline

British Council Ireland and PPLI commissioned a research team from the Centre for Language Education Research in Queen's University Belfast to conduct the research for the inaugural *Language Trends Ireland* report. Ethical approval was secured from the Research Ethics Committee in the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. All participants in the surveys gave their voluntary and informed consent to take part. The project followed the British Education Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, which provide support to researchers to enable them to conduct research to the highest ethical standards.

Consistent with the research methodology used throughout the wider *Language Trends* series, schools were surveyed using questionnaires. An advisory panel provided expertise in relation to alignment of the research with the context in Ireland and offered feedback on early drafts of the surveys. This panel included representatives from relevant national agencies, school management, teachers, and government.

Three bespoke questionnaires were then finalised for distribution in English and Irish:

- i. **survey for Senior Leadership in Post-Primary Schools,**
- ii. **survey for First Year Post-Primary Students,**
- iii. **survey for Fifth Year Post-Primary Students.**

The survey (using questionnaires and hosted on the survey platform Questback) was conducted from December 2025 to February 2026. Using a database of publicly available email addresses for the attention of school principals, British Council Ireland and PPLI invited schools to participate via email and telephone. Links to participate were also distributed via British Council and PPLI social media channels (LinkedIn, Facebook, X, and Instagram).

After data sets had been cleaned and duplicates removed, we received responses from a total of 143 schools. Additional contextual data was provided by the Department of Education and Youth.

	Number of responses in English	Number of responses in Irish	Total number of responses
Senior Leadership in Post-Primary Schools	129	5	134
First Year Post-Primary Students	1,196	113	1,309
Fifth Year Post-Primary Students	808	80	888

Table 1: Survey response rates

Table 1 presents the overall responses. Respondents had the choice to respond either in English or Irish, and the number of responses in each language is given in the table above.

Univariate and some multivariate analyses were performed on the quantitative data to identify overall trends; qualitative comments were analysed by means of thematic analysis using deductive coding (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Profile of responding schools

According to the Department of Education and Youth’s preliminary statistics for the academic year 2025/26, there are 722 post-primary schools in Ireland (Department of Education and Youth, 2025c).¹ Between the three surveys, we received responses from 143 schools, or 20 per cent of Ireland’s post-primary schools. When considering the breakdown of responses by county and province, we can see that 66 per cent of our responses come from Leinster, Ireland’s eastern province; looking at the national statistics, 51 per cent of schools are in Leinster. The difference between the survey responses and national statistics may have an impact on results. Figure 1 and Table 2 demonstrate the spread of responses from across the country.

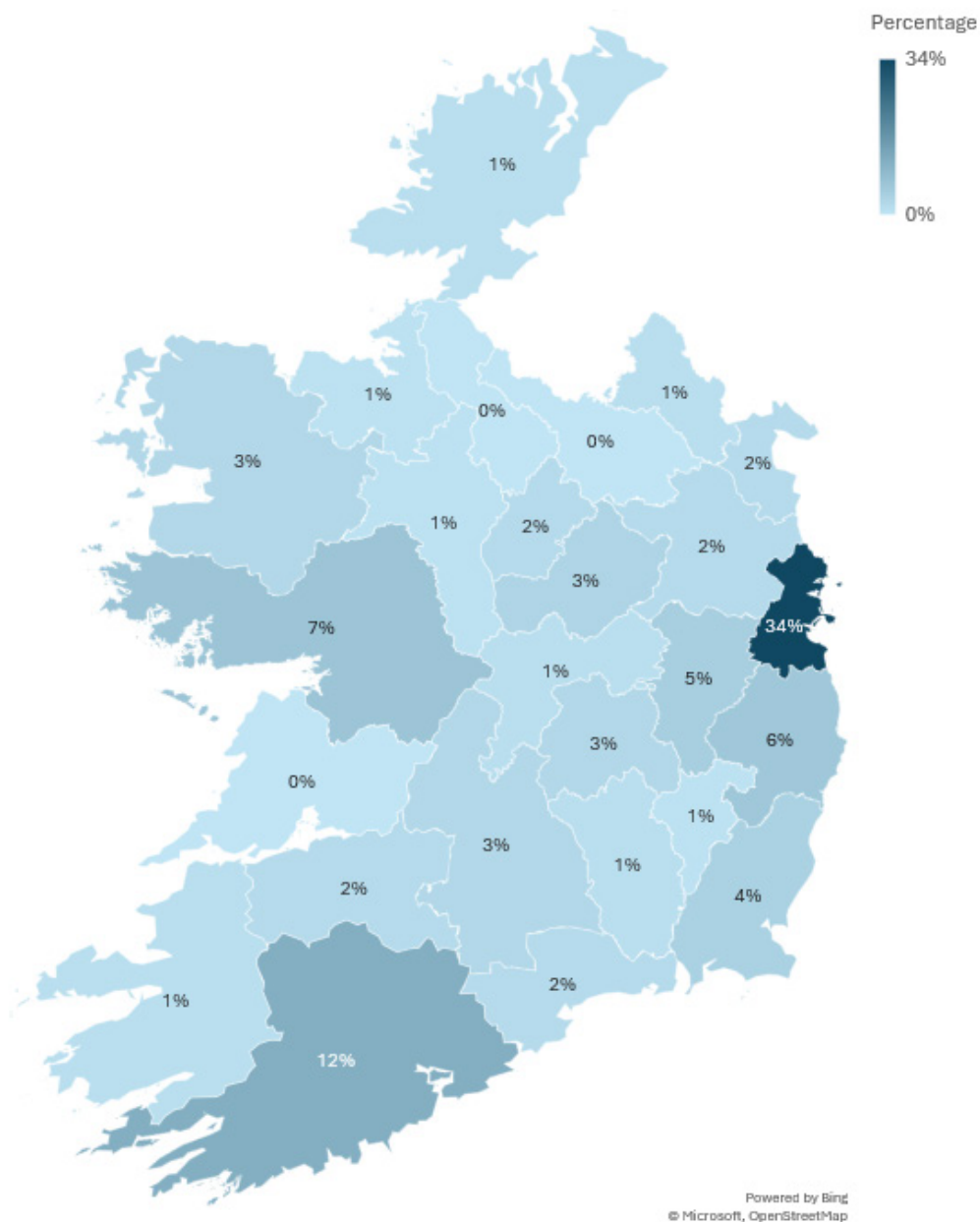


Figure 1: Responding schools by county

¹ The preliminary statistics may be viewed at: [Secondary Education | Education Statistics](#)

Province: Counties	Number of responding schools	Percentage of responding schools (n=143)	National total	Percentage of national total (n=722)
Connacht: Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo	16	11%	116	16%
Leinster: Carlow, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath, Offaly, Wexford, Westmeath, Wicklow	94	66%	370	51%
Munster: Clare, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford	29	20%	186	26%
Ulster: Cavan, Donegal, Monaghan	4	3%	50	7%

Table 2: Number of responding schools by province

According to the Department of Education and Youth, 45 per cent of English as an Additional Language students are found in Leinster; given that 66 per cent of responding schools are found in Leinster, it is likely that there will be significant proportions of students for whom English or Irish are not their first language included in the survey results.

Post-primary schools in Ireland come under 4 categories: Secondary, ETB schools, Community and Comprehensive. As illustrated in Table 3, the spread of schools responding to our survey by post-primary type corresponds largely with the spread of schools nationally.

Post-Primary School Type	Number of responding schools	Percentage of responding schools (n=143)	National total	Percentage of national total (n=722)
Secondary	83	58.0%	379	52.5%
ETB schools	45	31.5%	246	34.1%
Community	13	9.1%	83	11.5%
Comprehensive	2	1.4%	14	1.9%

Table 3: Schools by post-primary type

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is a programme designed to tackle educational inequality by identifying schools with a high percentage of students facing socio-economic barriers to education. Through additional resources and support, and additional staff such as the home-school liaison coordinator, DEIS seeks to ensure that ‘every child and young person can dream without limits, is empowered to grow, is inspired to learn and is supported to succeed’ (Department of Education and Youth, 2025a).² Of the 143 schools responding to the survey, 40 participate in the DEIS programme, or 28 per cent of respondents. This is proportionately slightly below the national statistics, where 32 per cent of post-primary schools participate in the DEIS programme and so DEIS schools are underrepresented in this survey.

School Gender	Number of responding schools	Percentage (n=143)	National Total	National percentage (n=722)
Mixed	96	67%	519	72%
Boys	14	10%	90	12%
Girls	33	23%	113	16%

Table 4: Schools by gender

Table 4 shows the gender of the responding schools, in which boys’ schools are slightly underrepresented, but girls’ schools are significantly overrepresented compared to the national statistics, which may have an impact on outcomes, given that language uptake is higher in girls’ schools than boys’ schools (PPLI, 2017).

Three per cent of responding schools were situated in the Gaeltacht, and nine per cent are Irish Medium Schools.

² The full DEIS strategy may be viewed at: [DEIS Strategy to 2035](#)

Public Examination Figures

Leaving Certificate

Figure 2 and Table 5 show the total number of Leaving Certificate entries, at all levels, for the traditionally taught curricular languages of French, German, Spanish and Italian from 2015 to 2025. Italian entries have remained stable, with a slight increase over the ten-year period. German entries grew to a peak in 2020, before declining to a level just below that of 2015. Spanish has seen strong growth in participation during the last decade, with entries increasing to overtake German in 2022, and having doubled by 2025. French remains the language with highest participation at Leaving Certificate level, but we can see a marked decline from the peak in 2015, with a slight increase in entries in 2025.

Year	French	German	Spanish	Italian
2015	26,798	7,272	5,793	436
2016	25,757	7,615	6,579	512
2017	25,383	7,937	7,086	497
2018	23,710	8,503	7,027	462
2019	23,361	8,544	7,711	473
2020	22,880	8,701	8,355	408
2021	22,069	8,603	8,586	456
2022	21,150	8,126	9,540	541
2023	19,831	7,858	10,094	473
2024	17,950	7,033	10,308	519
2025	18,140	6,862	11,663	569

Table 5: Leaving Certificate entries for French, German, Spanish and Italian, 2015-2025

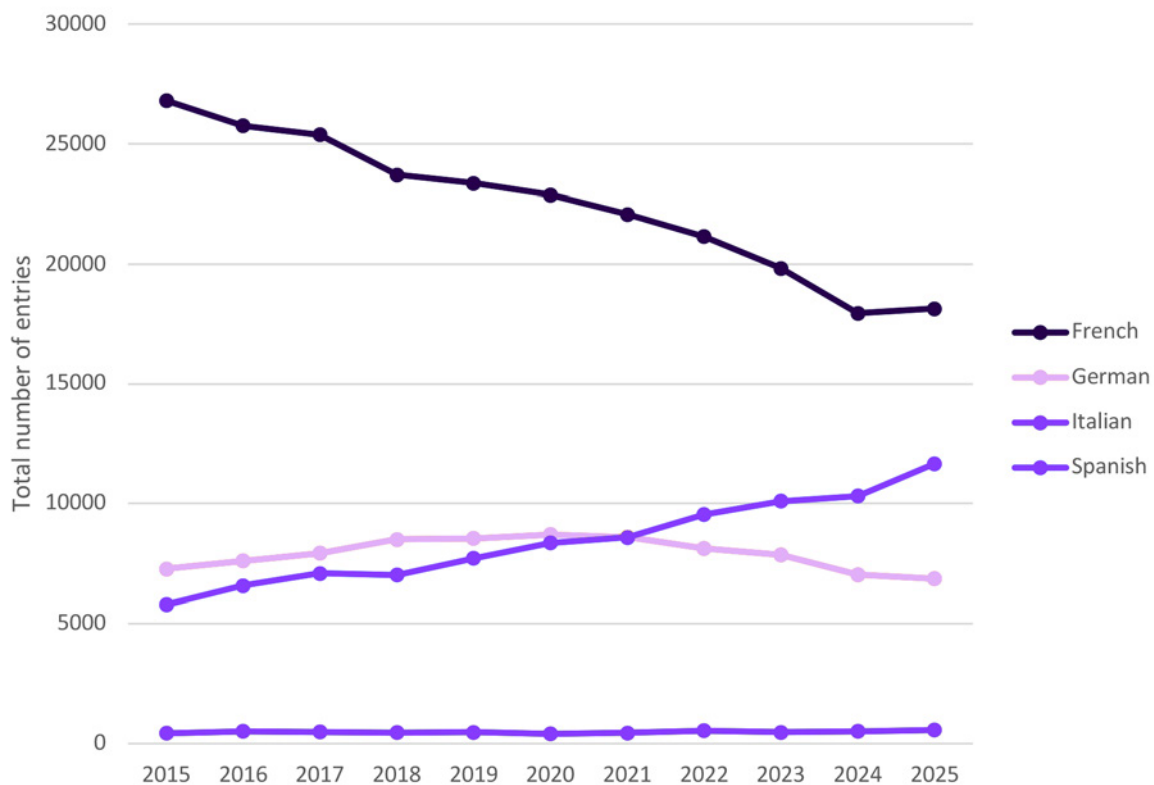


Figure 2: Junior Cycle entries for French, German, Spanish and Italian, 2015-2025

Year	Arabic	Japanese	Lithuanian	Chinese (Mandarin)	Polish	Portuguese	Russian
2014	127	298					309
2015	122	296					285
2016	110	326					333
2017	118	296	213		693	84	310
2018	148	296	156		687	84	367
2019	192	274	177		780	116	470
2020	179	267	96		508	63	395
2021	188	298	144		684	109	474
2022	200	271	186	280	818	131	419
2023	251	312	210	335	956	187	521
2024	290	337	265	337	1,050	276	855
2025	338	263	333	429	1,385	281	1,062

Table 6: Leaving Certificate entries for other curricular MFL, 2015-2025

Table 6 shows the total number of Leaving Certificate entries, across all levels, in other curricular languages. Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese were examined as non-curricular languages from 2017, and, along with Chinese (Mandarin), were introduced into the curriculum in 2020, with the first state exams in 2022. Almost all these curricular languages (except Japanese) have seen an increase in entries in the period 2015-2025; Polish has continued to increase steadily, while Russian has seen significant increase since 2024.

Students presenting for the Leaving Certificate may also take an exam in one additional non-curricular EU language if (i) they speak the language as a L1; (ii) have followed a programme of study leading to the Leaving Certificate; and (iii) are also taking Leaving Certificate English.³ Entries in non-curricular languages have risen steadily since 2017, then rose steeply in 2025, and a student may choose to sit a Leaving Certificate qualification in Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Dutch, Hungarian, Latvian, Modern Greek, Romanian, Slovakian, or Ukrainian.

Ukrainian is an exception amongst the non-curricular languages, as it is the only one that does not come from an EU member state. Figure 3 illustrates increase in entries for all non-curricular languages.

Ukrainian was introduced in 2025 and with 549 entries makes up 39% of entries for non-curricular languages that year. The second largest language is Romanian at 30%. Table 7 shows the spread of entries in non-curricular languages in 2025.

³ Further information on criteria may be found on the State Examinations Commission website: [Examination Information - State Examination Commission](#).

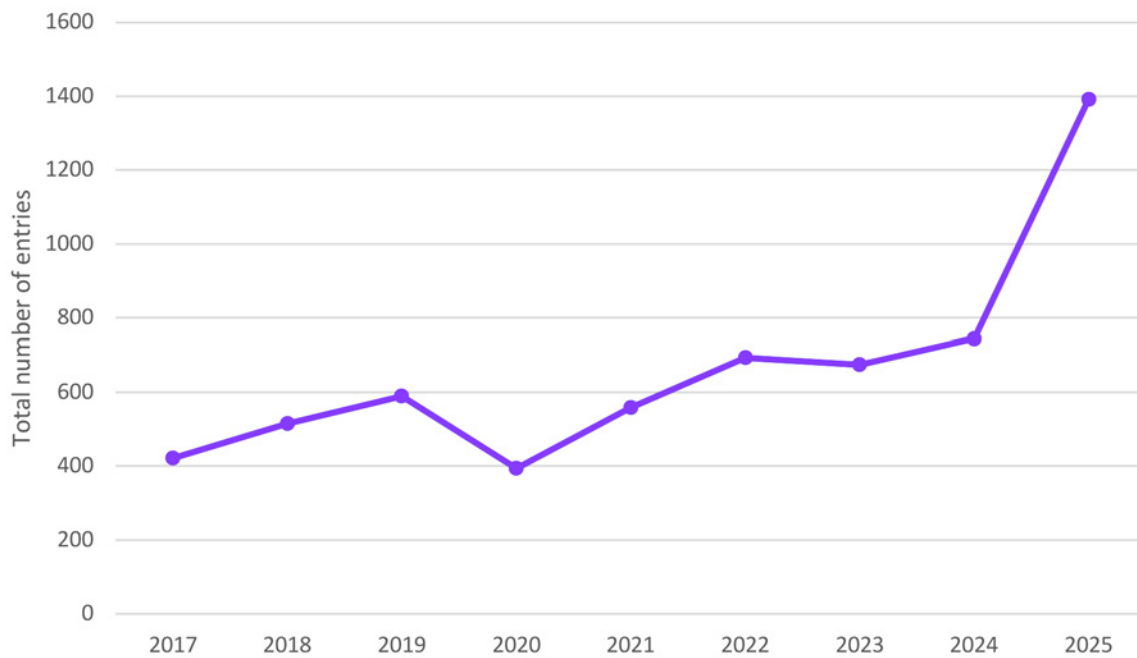


Figure 3: Total Leaving Certificate entries for non-curricular languages, 2017-2025

Language	Number of entries in 2025	Percentage of entries (n=1,392)
Ukrainian	549	39%
Romanian	417	30%
Croatian	118	8%
Latvian	95	7%
Hungarian	61	4%
Bulgarian	37	3%
Dutch	26	2%
Slovakian	29	2%
Swedish	29	2%
Czech	18	1%
Modern Greek	13	1%

Table 7: Leaving Certificate entries for non-curricular languages in 2025

Junior Cycle

Figure 4 and Table 8 show the number of entries, at all levels, for state examinations in French, German, Spanish and Italian in Junior Cycle. As in the Leaving Certificate, French is the most common language in Junior Cycle but has experienced a steady decline in entries since 2015. Italian and German entries remain steady, while Spanish has seen a significant increase through the period, overtaking German to become the second most common language from 2019. If current trends continue, Spanish is expected to overtake French by 2033; this has already happened at GCSE level in Northern Ireland (Duff and Collen, 2025). No data is available for 2020 or 2021, as Junior Cycle state examinations did not occur in these years due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Department of Education, 2020).

Year	French	German	Spanish	Italian
2015	32,044	11,423	8,459	434
2016	31,609	11,833	9,044	459
2017	31,584	12,030	10,231	433
2018	31,066	12,466	10,561	320
2019	31,070	12,013	12,099	511
2022	29,267	10,740	15,761	459
2023	28,873	11,209	17,160	497
2024	29,264	10,603	18,426	535
2025	27,354	10,436	19,369	589

Table 8: Junior Cycle entries for French, German, Spanish and Italian, 2015-2025

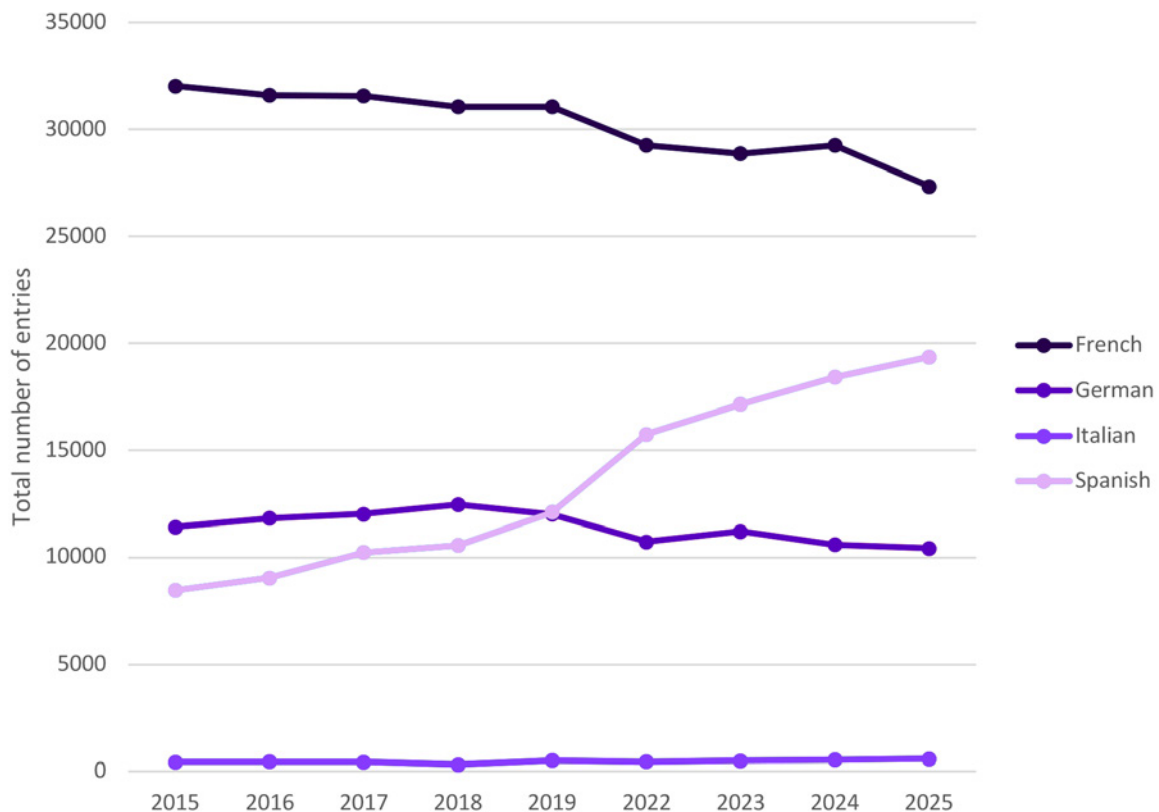


Figure 4: Junior Cycle entries for French, German, Spanish and Italian, 2015-2025

Findings



Think Global
Work Opportunities
#ThinkLanguages

Think Boosting
Life Skills
#ThinkLanguages

Findings from Post-Primary School Leaders

After cleaning the data and removing duplicates, we received Senior Leadership Team (SLT) responses from 134 different schools, out of the total of 143 responding schools. Respondents were primarily Principals and Deputy Principals; we also received some responses from MFL coordinators. Of these schools, only 28 per cent reported that their students would complete the student surveys.

Overview

Language Trends Ireland asked SLT what data they collect from students about prior MFL learning from incoming students. Twenty per cent of schools responded that they did collect data; six per cent that they recorded this information informally; and 57 per cent said they did not collect any data on prior language learning. Sixteen per cent record data on languages spoken in the home rather than prior MFL learning.

Respondents mentioned 76 different home languages, shown in Figure 6, with the most common being Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Spanish and Portuguese.



Figure 5: Home languages reported by SLT

French is the most common MFL that students are learning as part of the normal school day, followed by Spanish and German. Table 9 shows the percentages of respondents for whom **all** students in each year group study the language. It is more common for all students to take a MFL in Junior Cycle (First to Third year) than it is for all students to study a MFL for the Leaving Certificate (Fifth to Sixth year).

Language	First year all students	Second year all students	Third year all students	Fourth year all students	Fifth year all students	Sixth year all students
French	31.3%	26.9%	25.4%	29.1%	17.2%	17.9%
Spanish	21.6%	17.2%	16.4%	20.9%	10.4%	10.4%
German	18.7%	14.2%	13.4%	14.9%	9.0%	10.4%
Italian	2.2%	1.5%	1.5%	5.2%	0.7%	0.7%
Polish	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Chinese (Mandarin)	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	11.2%	0.7%	0.7%
Russian	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.5%
Other	2.2%	1.5%	1.5%	3.0%	1.5%	1.5%
Japanese	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%	0.7%
Arabic	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Lithuanian	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Portuguese	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 9: Percentage of schools responding that all students in each year study the language

However, as Table 10 demonstrates, this trend is reversed when looking at the responses for **some** students studying the language. French remains the language with the highest level of participation as part of a normal school day, but across all languages, the percentage of schools reporting that some students study the language increases significantly between Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate, following the Transition Year (Fourth year).

Language	First year some students	Second year some students	Third year some students	Fourth year some students	Fifth year some students	Sixth year some students
French	60.4%	66.4%	68.7%	62.7%	77.6%	74.6%
Spanish	42.5%	43.3%	45.5%	44.0%	49.3%	47.0%
German	37.3%	42.5%	44.0%	43.3%	45.5%	49.3%
Italian	3.7%	4.5%	5.2%	6.0%	6.0%	6.0%
Polish	5.2%	5.2%	5.2%	7.5%	6.0%	7.5%
Chinese (Mandarin)	2.2%	2.2%	2.2%	6.0%	3.7%	3.7%
Russian	2.2%	2.2%	1.5%	3.0%	3.7%	4.5%
Other	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	1.5%	0.7%	3.0%
Japanese	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.7%	2.2%	3.7%
Arabic	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
Lithuanian	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	1.5%
Portuguese	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 10: Percentage of schools responding that some students in each year study the language

In both Tables 9 and 10 it is interesting to note the spike in the Fourth Year in responses for languages that are not as widely taught, such as Polish, Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese and Portuguese; this is due to the wider variety of options available to students in Transition Year. Other languages mentioned by respondents include Irish Sign Language, Korean, Lithuanian, Romanian and Ukrainian.

The survey asked if any students were currently learning any MFL as an additional subject in either Junior or Senior Cycle. Table 11 and Figure 6 shows that Polish is the language with the highest level of participation in out-of-school classes, with students in 35 per cent of responding schools studying Polish in Senior Cycle. The second most common language for enrichment is Russian, with 22 per cent of schools reporting students studying Russian in Senior Cycle. These figures may be due to the profile of the responding students. Figure 7 demonstrates that languages studied out-of-school are much more common during Senior Cycle than during Junior Cycle.

Language	Junior Cycle	Senior Cycle
Arabic	3.0%	8.2%
Chinese (Mandarin)	3.0%	17.9%
French	3.7%	5.2%
German	3.0%	4.5%
I don't know	27.6%	17.9%
Italian	4.5%	15.7%
Japanese	0.7%	6.7%
Lithuanian	3.7%	16.4%
Other	3.7%	5.2%
Polish	11.2%	35.1%
Portuguese	5.2%	14.2%
Russian	6.0%	22.4%
Sign Language	3.0%	7.5%
Spanish	6.0%	13.4%

Table 11: Percentage of responding schools with students studying an additional language

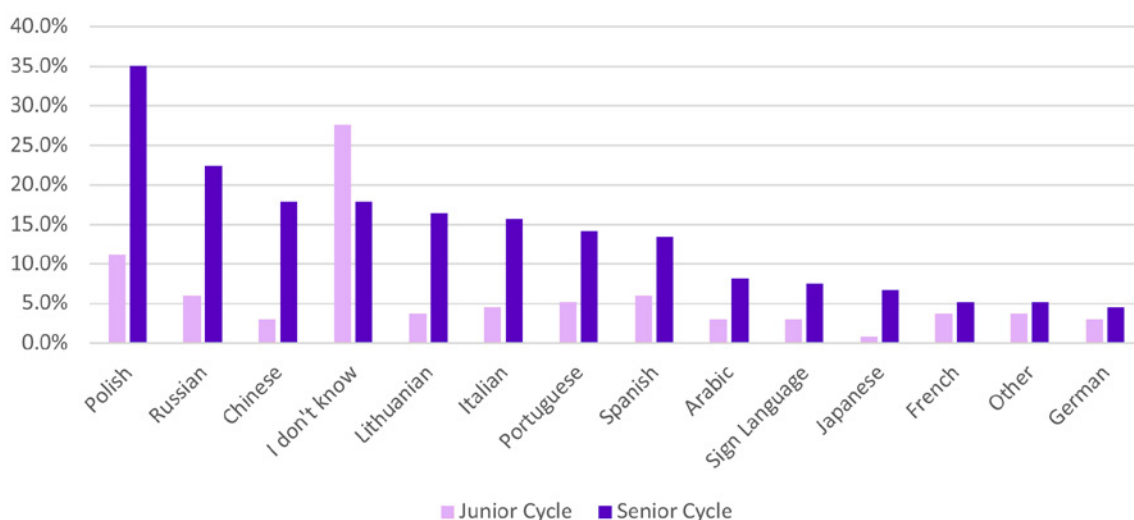


Figure 6: Percentage of responding schools with students studying an additional language

Junior Cycle Languages

Language Trends Ireland asked school leadership about their approach to MFL take-up in Junior Cycle. More than half of responding schools reported that all Junior Cycle students must take a MFL, with another 37 per cent strongly recommending all students take a language. Five schools noted that students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN), or exemptions from Irish, would be exempt from learning MFL.

MFLs in Junior Cycle are offered in a single languages block in 37 per cent of responding schools, with 14 per cent offering languages in more than one block. Around 30 per cent of schools define their options based on the preferences of students.

Some schools offer a choice of languages after offering an initial taster programme at the start of the first year. The most common offering amongst responding schools was a choice between two languages (often French and Spanish), although a small number of schools offer a choice between three or even four languages, with short courses in languages such as Chinese. Other factors that shape the organisation of languages in Junior Cycle include school management, timetabling and student preferences.

Approach to MFL take-up in Junior Cycle	Percentage
All students must take a MFL	58%
The school strongly recommends that all students take a MFL	37%
Students indicate their MFL choices in order of preference	30%
All MFL are offered each year	27%
All students are facilitated to study their MFL of choice	25%
MFL classes do not run if there are not enough students	8%
Some students may be advised by school leadership not to study a MFL	7%
The school strongly recommends that the most academically able study a MFL	6%
Other (please specify)	6%
Timetabling constraints mean that not all students are able to study a MFL	4%
Lower than average attaining students are discouraged from studying a MFL	1%

Table 12: Approach to MFL take-up in Junior Cycle

The survey asked what percentage of the current third year cohort are learning a MFL within Junior Cycle. 125 schools responded, of these responding schools, almost four out of five schools reported that 80 per cent or more of their third year students are learning a MFL.

The survey then asked school leadership about the number of students studying more than one MFL in Junior Cycle. Between 63 and 68 per cent of schools report that there are no students studying more than one language in first, second or third year, as illustrated in Figure 7. Only five per cent of schools state that all their first year students are studying more than one language.

Percentage of current third year cohort learning a MFL for Junior Cycle	Percentage of responding schools (n=125)
15%	1.6%
20%	0.8%
25%	2.4%
30%	1.6%
35%	1.6%
40%	2.4%
50%	1.6%
55%	1.6%
60%	1.6%
65%	0.8%
70%	2.4%
75%	2.4%
80%	6.4%
85%	9.6%
90%	18.4%
95%	23.2%
100%	21.6%

Table 13: Current third year cohort learning a MFL

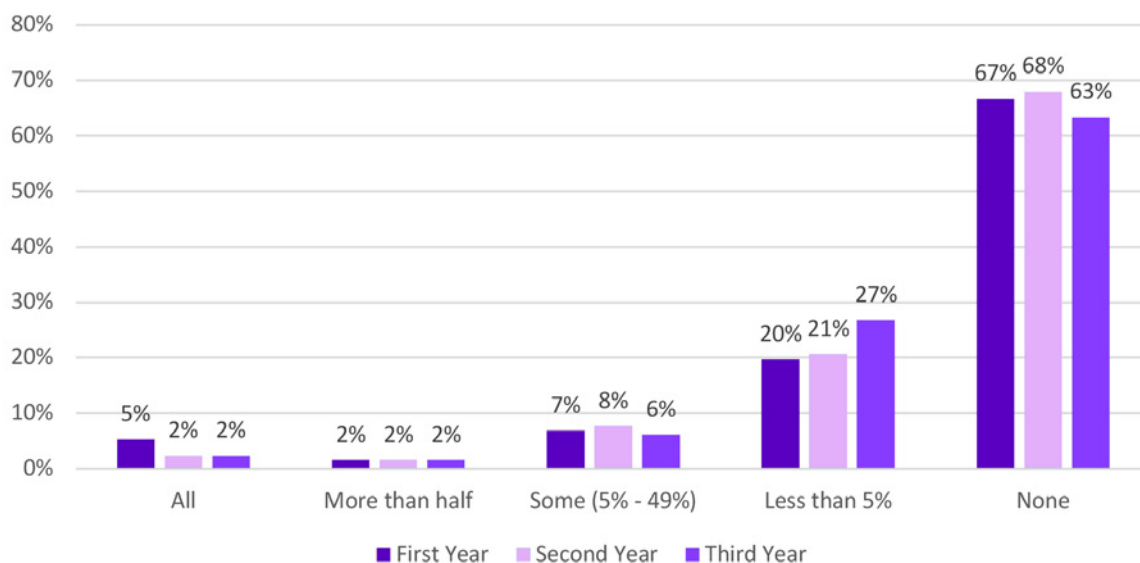


Figure 7: Percentages of students studying more than one MFL in the Junior Cycle

When asked about changes in the last three years to the proportion of students studying a MFL in Junior Cycle, 56 per cent of all responding schools noted that it is still mandatory for all students in their schools to study a MFL in Junior Cycle; with just over 20 per cent of schools responding that the numbers are similar to before. Only 11 per cent reported fewer students taking a language in Junior Cycle.

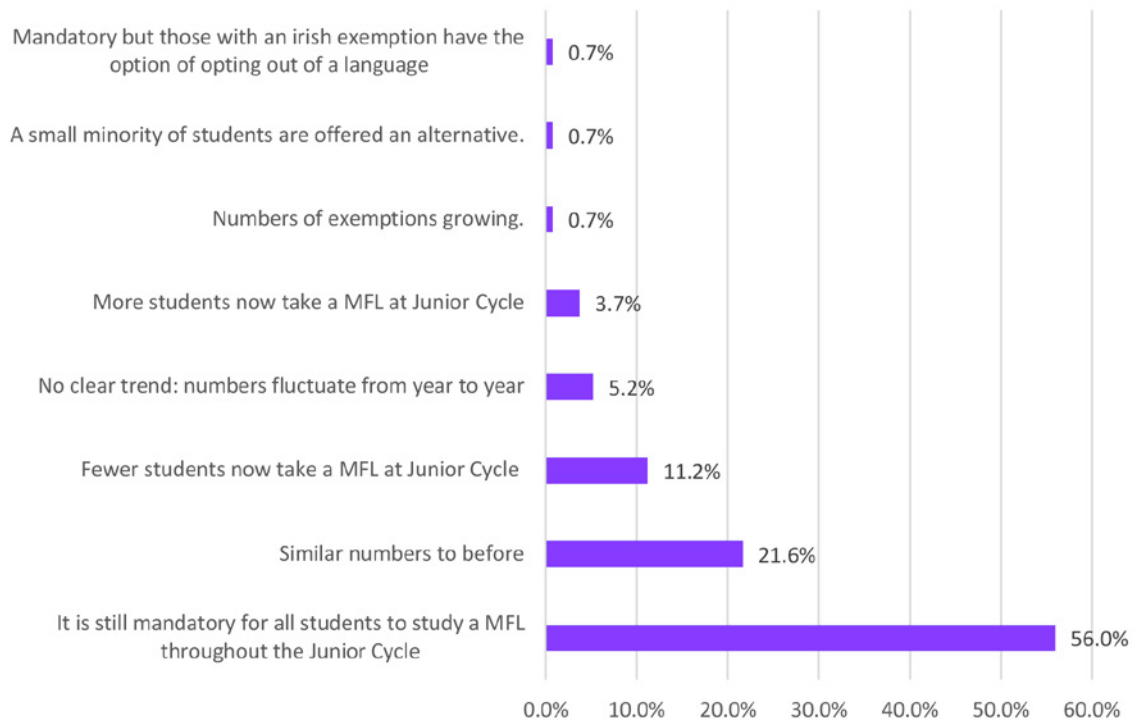


Figure 8: Changes over the last three years in the proportion of students learning a language in Junior Cycle

Senior Cycle Languages

In Senior Cycle, MFL provision is widespread, with 97 per cent of respondents noting that it is delivered wholly in their school. Only three of the 134 schools said there was no provision for MFL in Senior Cycle, and one school reported that it shares delivery with a neighbouring school. Moreover, language uptake in Senior Cycle is very high, with over 80 per cent of schools recording that they have more than 20 students studying one or more languages in Fourth year, with circa 70 per cent recording the same in Fifth and Sixth years. This contrasts sharply with post-16 provision in the UK, where the numbers of students choosing languages at this level are low and where classes, if they run, tend to be small. Table 14 and Figure 9 show clearly the high participation in languages in Senior Cycle in Ireland.

Number of students	4th year (n=129)	5th year (n=131)	6th year (n=131)
None	5.4%	6.1%	6.1%
5 or fewer	9.3%	12.2%	11.5%
6-10	3.9%	5.3%	3.8%
11-15	0.0%	2.3%	3.1%
15-20	0.8%	3.1%	6.1%
More than 20	80.6%	71.0%	69.5%

Table 14: How many Senior Cycle students in your school currently study one or more MFL?

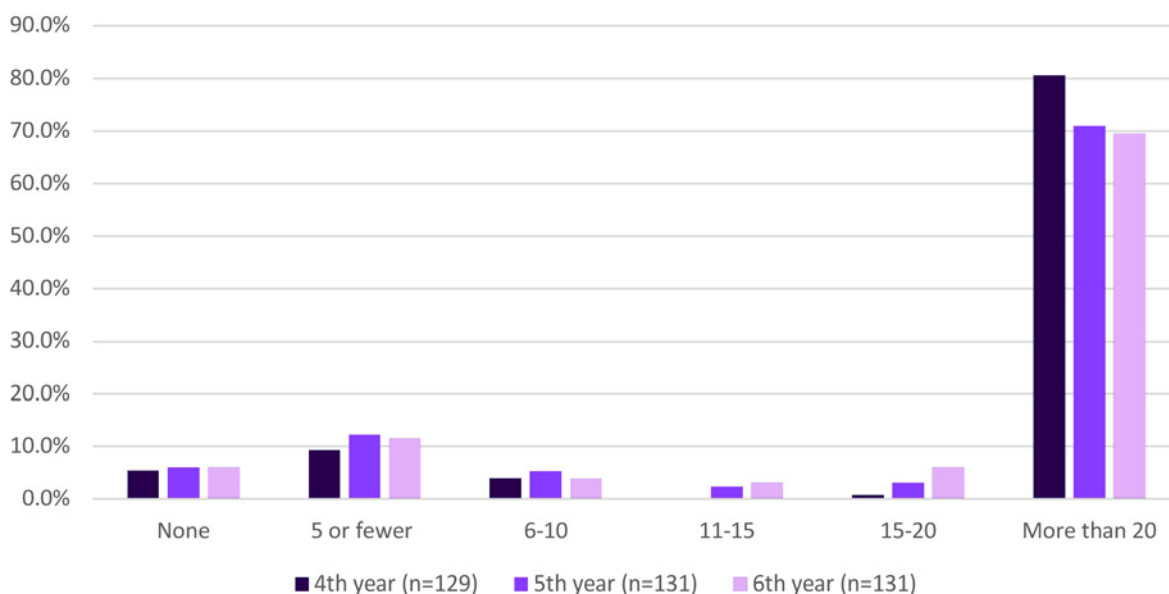


Figure 9: Percentage of responding schools with Senior Cycle Students studying one or more MFL

Where only a few students wish to study a MFL in Senior Cycle, over half the responding schools (n=128) stated either that this was not a problem (27 per cent), or that the classes would run regardless of the numbers (26 per cent). In 19 per cent of schools, classes would not run, while in 16 per cent of schools, an alternative solution would be found, whether on a reduced timetable (8.6 per cent) or through shared arrangements with another school (3.1 per cent), or bilevel classes (4.7 per cent). For schools where there is a minimum number of students required to run a language course in Senior Cycle, this minimum is most often between six and ten students.

As in Junior Cycle, French is the most frequently taught language at Senior Cycle, with only three schools noting that they did not teach French. However, 41 per cent of responding schools stated that, over the last three years, uptake in French had decreased, and almost 25 per cent of schools recorded that take-up of German had decreased. Conversely, 35 per cent of responding schools noted an increase in student numbers taking Spanish to Leaving Certificate. Chinese is the most common language to be introduced as a new subject in Transition Year, with 17 per cent of responding schools introducing it in the last three years. Over 60 per cent of respondents report that Arabic, Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese and Russian are not offered in their schools.

	Introduced as a new Leaving Cert subject	Introduced as a new TY subject	Take-up has increased	Take-up stable	Take-up has decreased	Subject no longer taught	Not taught in my school
Arabic	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%	68.7%
Chinese (Mandarin)	1.5%	17.2%	2.2%	1.5%	0.7%	1.5%	53.0%
French	0.0%	0.0%	3.7%	41.0%	41.0%	0.0%	2.2%
German	0.0%	1.5%	6.0%	23.9%	24.6%	2.2%	24.6%
Italian	0.7%	3.0%	3.0%	3.7%	0.7%	2.2%	64.2%
Japanese	0.7%	2.2%	1.5%	1.5%	0.0%	1.5%	64.2%
Lithuanian	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	69.4%
Polish	0.0%	3.0%	3.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	62.7%
Portuguese	0.0%	2.2%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	67.2%
Russian	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.5%	0.7%	0.7%	66.4%
Spanish	3.7%	6.0%	35.1%	19.4%	1.5%	0.0%	23.1%

Table 15: Thinking about the last three years, what changes have there been, if any, in take-up and provision for MFL at Senior Cycle level in your school?

When asked to comment on the reasons behind the evolving trends in specific language uptake, the primary reason cited by nearly 20 per cent of respondents was the perceived ease of Spanish compared to other languages. Other reasons include student interest in and demand for certain languages to the detriment of others, and changes to staffing or difficulty in recruitment of teachers. Several school leaders also highlighted the shift in higher education, where it is now less often a requirement for matriculation.

“Demand for German is now very low. Demand for Spanish has increased noticeably, as it is believed to be an “easier” language than French or German. Larger numbers of students with additional learning needs are choosing Spanish, as it is perceived as being more accessible.”

“Changes in Senior Cycle MFL provision are influenced by student demand, staffing and timetable constraints, curriculum developments, school support and promotion, and wider societal or community factors, ensuring courses reflect both practical considerations and students’ interests.”

“Students only choose it if it is required for matriculation purposes. Some students strategically studying the subject at Ordinary level outside of school for matriculation purposes and choosing a subject to study in school whereby they will get 5 classes of tuition per week. Students struggle with the gap between studying the subject at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle, and while they may choose to study the subject at the start of 5th year they very quickly move out of the subject if they find it difficult.”

International Dimension

Language Trends Ireland asked school leaders what opportunities are available to develop the international dimension of their schools. Figure 10 illustrates the variety of ways that schools engage with international organisations and partner schools. Almost half of the responding schools had engaged with the cultural institutes, such as Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Alliance Française, Instituto Cervantes, Istituti italiani di cultura; 35 per cent have an international partner school, and 29 per cent are involved in Erasmus+.

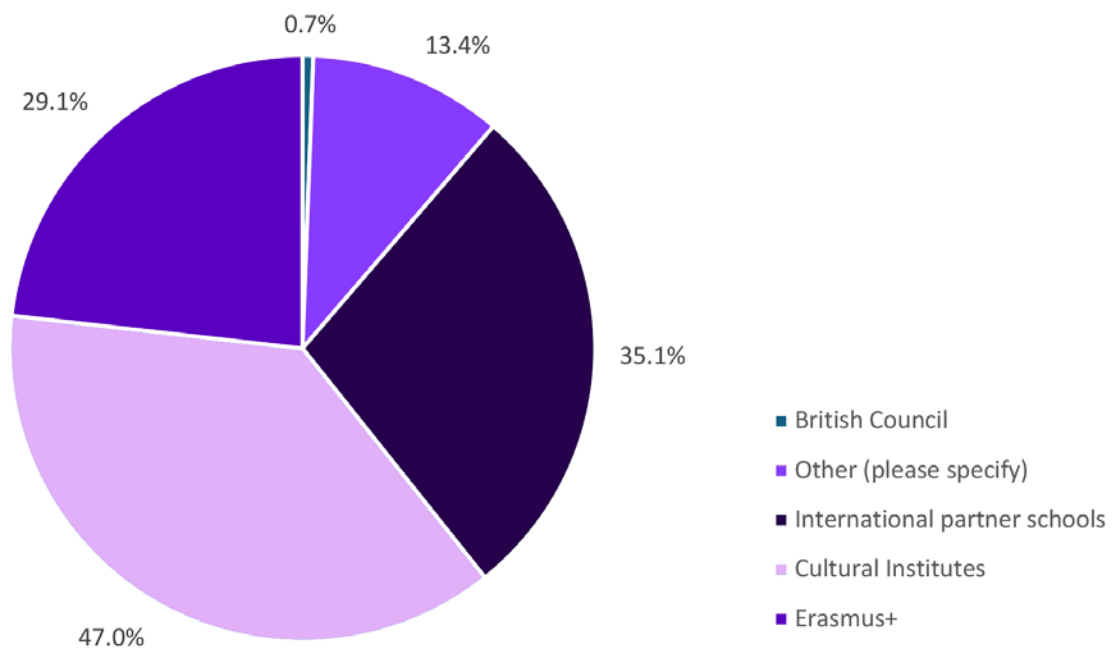


Figure 10: What opportunities are there for students and/or teachers in your school to gain international experience?

Other activities include pen pals, school trips, exchanges, and incoming Language Assistants. Thirty-five per cent of respondents revealed that their school has exchanges with international schools, with many schools hosting international students; another 31 per cent stated that they take their students on international trips to the countries where the studied language is spoken. Eleven per cent of respondents remarked on the importance of time abroad during Transition Year. Nine per cent of schools stated that they had no international dimension.

Almost 90 per cent of schools reported that their SLT values and supports international mobility, with only seven per cent stating that there is no support from school leadership. However, responses were realistic about the challenges posed by international schemes. Schools participating in the DEIS programme noted that there were barriers to all their students being able to fully participate in the international dimension of school life.

“School leadership strongly values and supports international mobility. They actively encourage and facilitate travel abroad for both teachers and students, providing guidance, resources, and logistical support to make participation as smooth as possible. Leadership recognises the educational and cultural benefits of international experiences, promotes collaboration with schools in other countries, and fosters a school culture that values global awareness, language learning, and intercultural understanding.”

“Staff have been told about the possibility of Erasmus schemes for teachers and management are vocally in favour of international mobility. However, in reality, teachers are time-poor and have very little capacity to embark on these things. Also, from the Irish side, the bureaucracy associated with ventures such as Erasmus render them prohibitive for many teachers.”

“All opportunities are, within reason, embraced. Ours is a DEIS school, with a significant proportion of our students coming from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes. We are at all times anxious to be involved in programmes where participation is not decided by a student’s means. This can be difficult, but inclusion is one of our core principles.”

Challenges

The survey asked school leaders to rank challenges to providing high quality MFL learning experiences for students in their school. Table 16 shows the spread of respondents choosing each challenge.

Challenges to providing high quality MFL learning experiences for students	Main	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
Students do not see the relevance of learning a MFL for their future career	20.9%	18.7%	11.9%	10.4%	3.7%
Lack of opportunities for students to practise their MFL outside the classroom	21.6%	22.4%	6.0%	8.2%	5.2%
Learning a MFL is not a priority for parents	7.5%	15.7%	16.4%	6.7%	5.2%
Global English (i.e. the importance of English as a world language)	19.4%	11.9%	8.2%	5.2%	6.0%
Insufficient curriculum time for MFL	11.2%	3.0%	6.0%	3.7%	6.0%
Lack of Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) opportunities for MFL teachers	3.7%	3.7%	6.7%	3.0%	4.5%
The way external MFL exams are marked and graded	2.2%	1.5%	2.2%	4.5%	5.2%
The nature and content of external MFL exams	0.7%	3.7%	1.5%	3.0%	3.7%
Timetabling means that not all students are able to take a MFL	0.7%	2.2%	2.2%	3.7%	1.5%
Learning a MFL is not promoted at whole-school level as a careers option	0.7%	0.7%	2.2%	2.2%	3.7%
Lack of access to MFL teaching materials (e.g. textbooks)	0.7%	2.2%	0.7%	1.5%	0.7%
Learning a MFL is not a priority for school leadership	3.7%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.7%

Table 16: Challenges to providing high quality MFL learning; percentage giving each challenge a rank

As illustrated in Figure 11, the largest overall challenges, from all rankings, are that students do not see the relevance of language learning and that there is a perception by SLT of a lack of opportunities for students to practise or use their language outside the classroom. A second strand is the perception of languages more broadly: the third and fourth most common challenges concern the attitude of parents towards language learning, and the position of English as a ‘Global Language’, both factors impeding student desire to learn languages.

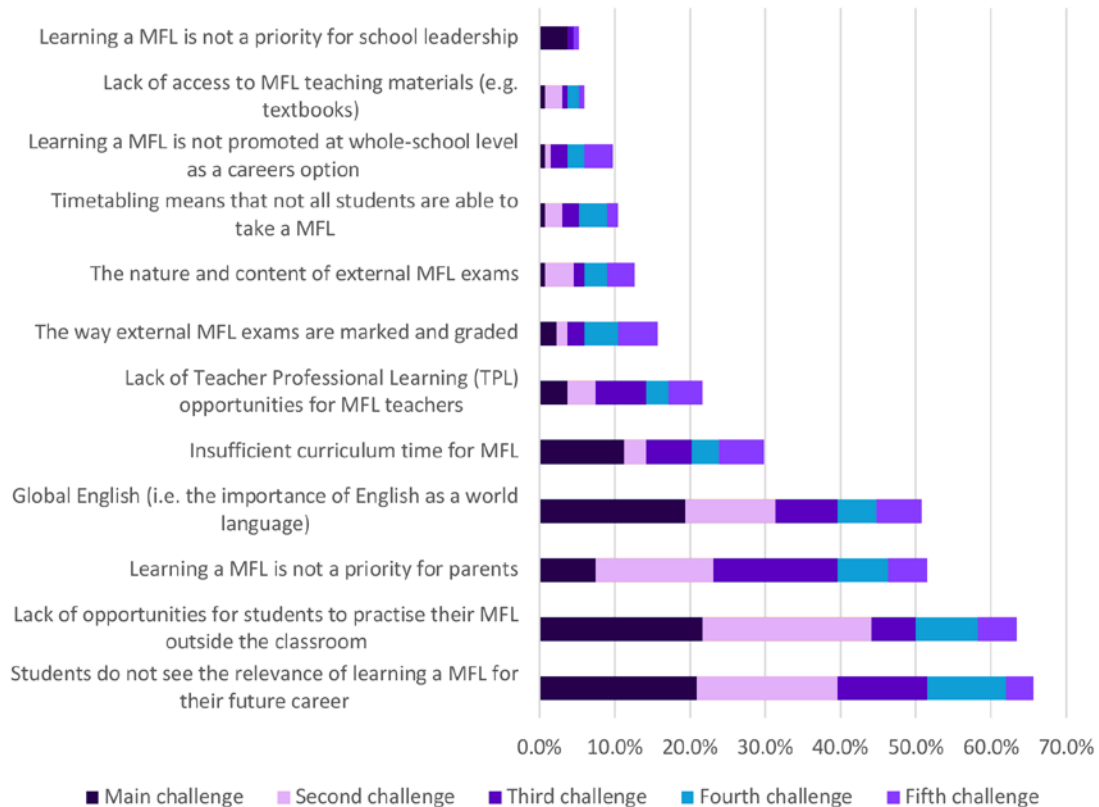


Figure 11: Challenges to providing high quality MFL learning experiences, as perceived by SLT

Considering how best to counter these challenges, SLT respondents focussed on teaching and teachers, especially the need for more qualified teachers or for professional development opportunities for existing teaching staff (mentioned in 20 per cent of responses to this question):

“Ex quota teacher allocation to ensure that class sizes are halved in MFL lessons so that students have a more targeted education in MFL. Teachers would be hired from abroad as very few exist in a formal qualified recognition here in Ireland.”

“CPD to ensure teachers are confident in making their MFL classroom relevant and fun for students.”

“Recruitment is a major challenge - there is a shortage of suitably qualified teachers.”

Indeed, as is clear in Figure 12, teacher recruitment is a significant problem. Fifty-five per cent of responding schools answered yes to the question of teacher recruitment. Three schools responded that finding suitable substitute teachers is a significant problem.

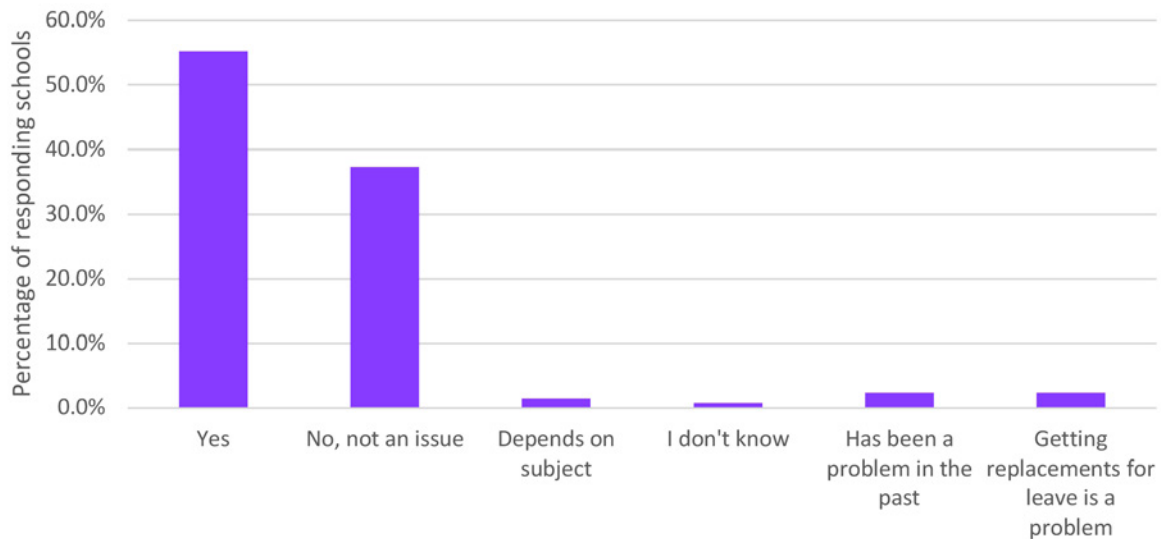


Figure 12: Is recruitment of a qualified MFL teacher a problem?

A second strand of solutions to the major challenges posed in language teaching was to increase awareness of the value and benefits of language learning:

“National focus on the importance of MFL in an EU context and in a global world the opportunities that exist for Anglophones who have 1 or 2 MFLs and a particular level.”

“Schools embracing the importance of languages both inside and outside the classroom.”

“STEM gets all the government funding and priorities at the moment. Perhaps a refocus on MFL at government state level.”

The third common suggestion was to increase the time allocated to MFL learning:

“The curriculum time weighting towards non-curricular subjects is severely impacting attainment in exam subjects. It is becoming increasingly harder to cover course content in reduced time.”

“There needs to be more time available on the timetable to teach MFL. For this to happen, there needs to be a reduction in the curriculum elsewhere. Introducing Wellbeing hours at Junior Cycle has eroded time for other subjects, including MFL. We have 3 x 40-minute classes a week in 1st year, little progress can be made in the teaching and learning experience with such limited teaching and learning time.”

As part of emphasising the relevance and importance of languages, *Language Trends Ireland* asked what careers advice and guidance was available to students. In the context of a whole-school approach to Guidance, respondents indicated that relevant information is predominantly delivered by the school's Guidance Counsellor(s) (59 per cent of responding schools), while in 16 per cent of schools, it is the MFL teachers who provide careers advice. 14 per cent of schools run careers-based events which provide advice on languages, including careers fairs, information from PPLI, and languages in Transition Year. However, some schools identify the pressures faced by Guidance departments, and the need for improvement in this area.

"Guidance team are actively encouraging MFL. Students are not permitted to drop a language without consultation with parents, guidance and approval from Principal."

"This is two pronged: practical information and cultural/ experiential. Many career events take place both inside the school and during visits to universities and at centralised events. We promote languages during #ThinkLanguages (PPLI) and highlight the importance of home languages in February when we survey our community. We also mark Seachtain na Gaeilge in March to reinforce their importance. There are signs and lessons which refer to career opportunities and benefits associated with these events."

"Careers advice, in general, is an area for improvement in our school. There is an enormous demand on our hard-working Guidance Department for counselling/ relationship building and resilience work, which may come at the expense of career guidance. As a means to offset this, careers has been added to the timetable this year for all year groups."

School leaders were asked what funding has been made available for the teaching of MFL this year. Table 17 shows the variety of sources from which funding comes. Most commonly, schools noted that funding came from their own school budget (44 per cent). However, 37 per cent of schools reported having received no additional funding from any sources, potentially demonstrating the need for further support of MFL at all levels.

Source of funding	Percentage of responding schools
Local resources (including annual departmental budget and fulfilment of additional requests)	44.3%
No funding available	36.8%
Erasmus +	10.4%
PPLI	5.7%
Department of Education and Youth	2.8%
Funding for a Language Assistant	1.9%
Leargas	1.9%

Table 17: Sources of funding for the academic year 2025-26

What's working well

The responses to *Language Trends Ireland* overwhelmingly demonstrate that MFL teachers are working hard to provide high quality education. More than 60 per cent of respondents noted that the quality, dedication and enthusiasm of their teaching staff, who are working collaboratively, all contribute to creating effective MFL teaching and learning environments in their schools:

“Great teachers, very passionate about their subjects. We have a very academic school, and students will only choose the subject if they know they can do very well in it. Teachers make a great effort to promote their subject.”

“We have an exceptionally strong group of teachers who work closely together right across the four main languages and continually support each other.”

“As a compulsory subject in Junior Cycle there is a very strong MFL department across four languages in the school. Languages are taught passionately and students are fully engaged in the learning process. 92% of students in 6th year are studying an MFL for the Leaving Cert which is a key indicator for the popularity of the subjects.”

Other elements of language teaching which are commonly mentioned as working well include students engaging well with languages (11 per cent), Language Assistants and an emphasis on spoken language skills (10 per cent) as well as broader school culture that celebrates diversity:

“Every student who wants to study French or Spanish has the opportunity to do so. We surveyed the students and we followed their desire to have Spanish instead of German.”

“There is a strong emphasis on communication skills, particularly speaking and listening, alongside preparation for state examinations. Students are encouraged to develop confidence, cultural awareness, and an understanding of the relevance of languages beyond the classroom.”

“MFL education is working well in our school due to a strong whole-school commitment to language learning, effective teaching practices, and positive student engagement [...] School leadership actively values and promotes languages, contributing to positive uptake, strong learner motivation, and a language-rich school culture that supports high-quality MFL learning experiences.”

Room for improvement

While most schools record teachers as what is working best in MFL provision, when asked what can be done either in their school and/or at an Ireland level (system level) to improve MFL learning, around 25 per cent of school leaders highlighted the need for more teachers, and for more professional development opportunities for existing staff. Twenty per cent of respondents mentioned the need for greater funding, and 14 per cent emphasised the need to rehabilitate the timetable to allow more teaching time for languages and redress the balance of subjects within the curriculum, where languages often lose out to other subjects.

“Ensure that at Third Level, those who intend to train as teachers are proficient in their target language and receive appropriate and rigorous pre-service training to include pedagogy; classroom management; catering for additional needs.”

“To improve MFL learning at both school and national level, curriculum time for MFL could be increased at Junior and Senior Cycle, and more Teacher Professional Learning opportunities and ongoing support should be provided.”

“At system level, improvements could include increased targeted funding for MFL, greater curriculum time and flexibility, stronger national messaging on the value of languages, improved continuity from primary to post-primary education, and assessment approaches that prioritise communicative competence and inclusion. Together, these measures would support high-quality, sustainable MFL provision.”

Some of these issues seem to be particularly amplified in schools participating in the DEIS programme, with one respondent suggesting:

“Extra funding for mobility projects. Make the paperwork less complex and onerous - Teachers already have far too much to do and cannot face the lengthy applications! Funding for a Language Lab/headphone and software resources for school. DEIS schools need more funding and support as MFL are not seen as important. DEIS schools will prioritize STEM/apprenticeships and MFL does not feature.”

“A strategy aimed particularly at DEIS schools to place weight and value on our school cohort pursuing an MFL, specifically in terms of future employment. Opportunities to visit those countries are limited to the very touristy areas where English is commonly spoken. Students often fail to see the relevance of studying a foreign language.”

Around 20 per cent of respondents commented on the need for reform of the curriculum and exam system, proposing that the oral component of language learning should be prioritised:

“The oral component must be prioritised and rewarded accordingly. Students need to thrive when speaking a language and be rewarded for that.”

“Look at the curriculum, make it accessible, give more weight to the oral and aural component so that students can actually engage in conversation when they go abroad.”

“The common level exam at Junior Cycle is not working for students at both the lower and higher end of the spectrum [...] the student who would have done well in the old ordinary level paper is at a disadvantage in the common level and can easily become disheartened and similarly the better equipped student is not as challenged as they would be at the higher level.”

A final common strand is the importance of supporting international opportunities to highlight the relevance of language learning, and subsequently underline the value of learning languages:

“Promoting language-learning as a skill set (not simply knowledge) and the appreciation of other cultures would help change this fixed mindset. MFL learning should be a celebration of language, music, food, geography etc. but it is currently very difficult to do this in a 40-minute class, 4 times a week.”

“Greater emphasis on the value of MFL for employment, mobility, and progression would strengthen motivation and uptake. In particular, clearer links between language learning and careers within EU institutions, including the European Commission and the European Parliament, would help students understand the real and tangible opportunities available through multilingualism.”

Findings from Post-Primary Year 1

The first year post-primary survey received 1,309 responses from 37 different schools. Of the respondents, 65 per cent were female and 33 per cent were male, with the remainder reporting as 'other' or 'prefer not to say'. When asked if primary languages should be mandatory, 85 per cent of students responded that primary school pupils should have the opportunity to learn MFL if they want, while only 14.3 per cent agreed that primary school pupils should have to learn MFL. Over half of the responding students did not learn a MFL while at primary school. For those who had learned a language, Spanish was the most learnt language, followed by French. Figure 13 shows the spread of primary languages. Sixteen other languages were reported, including Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Polish, Japanese, Malayalam, Russian, Hindi and Irish Sign Language.

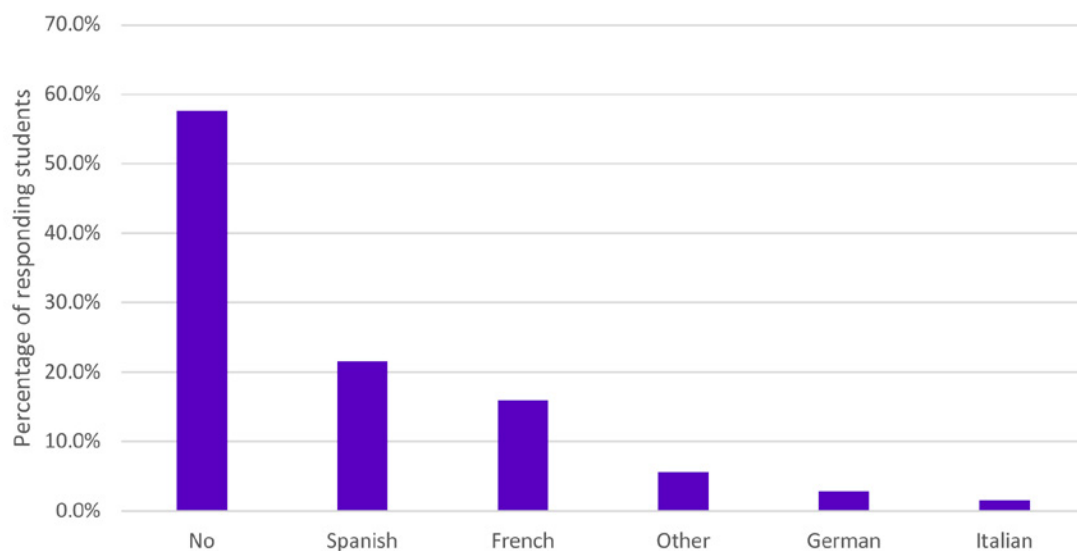


Figure 13: Primary languages

School day languages

When asked which MFL are currently learned as part of the normal school day in First Year, Spanish was the most common language, with almost half of respondents (49 per cent), followed by French (32 per cent), and then German (14 per cent). Other languages include Hindi, Romanian, Tamil and Urdu.

Languages in 1st Year	Percentage
Spanish	49.3%
French	31.5%
German	13.6%
Other	5.1%
None	5.3%
Chinese (Mandarin)	3.4%
Italian	1.8%
Arabic	0.7%
Polish	0.5%
Russian	0.5%
Japanese	0.3%
Portuguese	0.2%
Lithuanian	0.1%

Table 18: Which Modern Foreign Languages do you currently learn as part of the normal school day in first year?

Students were then asked which language they would choose if they could pick a new MFL; 16 per cent picked Spanish, almost 15 per cent Italian, and ten per cent mentioned other languages such as Korean, Russian and Lithuanian.

Language	Percentage
Spanish	17.3%
I don't know	16.3%
Italian	14.5%
French	11.5%
German	6.1%
Chinese (Mandarin)	5.2%
Polish	5.2%
Portuguese	5.0%
Arabic	4.0%
Japanese	3.7%
Other languages (<2% respondents per language)	10.0%

Table 19: If you could start to learn a new Modern Foreign Language, which one would it be? (First year perspective)

Eighty-six different languages are spoken at home, with the most common after English and Irish being Polish, Spanish and Romanian; the full variety is illustrated in Figure 14.



Figure 14: Home languages spoken by first year students

International Trips

Ninety-six per cent of first year students have been on trips outside of Ireland; the vast majority of these (95 per cent) had travelled abroad with family, 12.5 per cent had been abroad with friends, and only two per cent had travelled abroad as part of a school trip. Table 20 shows the variety of destinations visited by students; the most frequently cited destinations were Spain, Great Britain and France. Other destinations include Portugal (18 per cent) and the Netherlands (six per cent).

Destination	Percentage
Spain	69.3%
Other	56.1%
Great Britain	54.2%
France	48.1%
Italy	32.5%
America	21.6%
Germany	15.4%
Greece/Greek Islands	12.0%
Turkey	11.8%
Poland	8.9%
Morocco	5.3%
China	2.7%
Japan	1.1%

Table 20: Destinations visited by responding first year students

Careers and languages

When asked if they thought it was likely that they would use MFL in their job when they left school, 61 per cent of first year students thought it was unlikely. Only around 20 per cent of students had received advice on jobs that they can do with MFL, while over half (55.2 per cent) had received no advice at all on future careers with languages. The most common perceptions of jobs that include languages are teaching (38.7 per cent) and translation and interpreting (20.9 per cent), with some students identifying work and travel abroad as potential career paths including languages.

Jobs including languages	Percentage
Teacher	38.7%
Translation and Interpretation	20.9%
Linguists	11.3%
Aviation	9.0%
Working abroad	6.8%
Tour guide	5.2%
Don't know	3.6%
Business	2.4%
Doctor	2.1%
Tourist	1.5%

Table 21: What jobs can do you do in the future if you study Modern Foreign Languages?

Whilst students do not necessarily see themselves using languages in their future careers, over 80 per cent of students reported that being able to speak different MFL is more useful than not, as shown in Figure 15. However, most students feel that they don't speak the MFL they are learning very well – although very few report being unable to speak the language – demonstrating the need for more opportunities to practice oral skills.

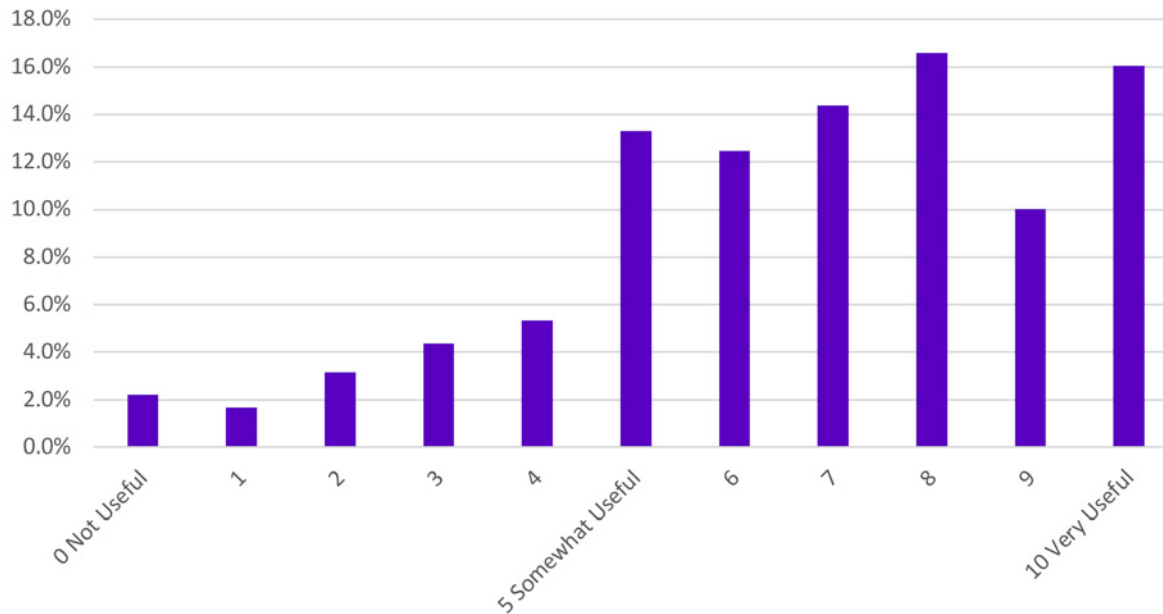


Figure 15: How useful is being able to speak different Modern Foreign Languages? (First year perspective)

Nonetheless, students are overwhelmingly positive about the experience of learning languages. Over 75 per cent of responding first year students enjoy studying languages (either like or love):

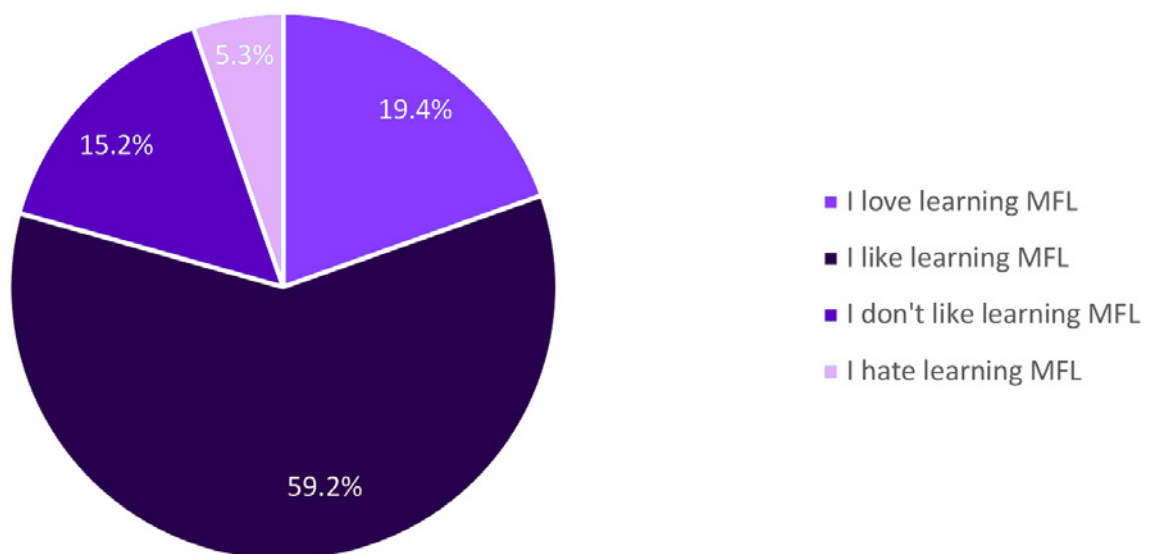


Figure 16: Do you enjoy learning Modern Foreign Languages? (First year perspective)

First year students were asked to choose three statements that describe their feelings about MFL learning at school. As seen in Table 22 and Figure 17, the foremost responses are positive, with 'I like speaking the language', 'MFL classes are fun' and 'I feel that I am learning a lot of new language' being the most cited feelings. Over 50 per cent of students report that they like speaking the language, emphasising the importance of the oral component, and over 25 per cent stated that their main feeling was that MFL classes are fun. These results also show that Digital Technology is not frequently used in the early stage of post-primary MFL classes.

Statements	Main feeling	Second feeling	Third feeling
I like speaking the language	19.1%	16.5%	16.3%
MFL classes are fun	25.4%	11.6%	8.2%
I feel that I am learning a lot of new language	12.5%	12.8%	11.0%
MFL learning is hard	7.9%	10.4%	10.9%
There are too many words to learn	7.0%	10.2%	9.2%
MFL classes are boring	9.9%	5.4%	4.3%
The amount of words I have to learn is about right	3.0%	4.1%	7.0%
We rarely use Digital Technology in MFL classes	2.0%	5.7%	4.8%
MFL learning is easy	3.3%	3.6%	5.3%
I don't feel that I am learning a lot of new language	2.4%	3.7%	2.8%
I don't like speaking the language	2.4%	2.5%	3.2%
We often use Digital Technology in MFL classes	0.6%	3.7%	2.8%

Table 22: Which of these statements describe your feelings about Modern Foreign Language learning at school?

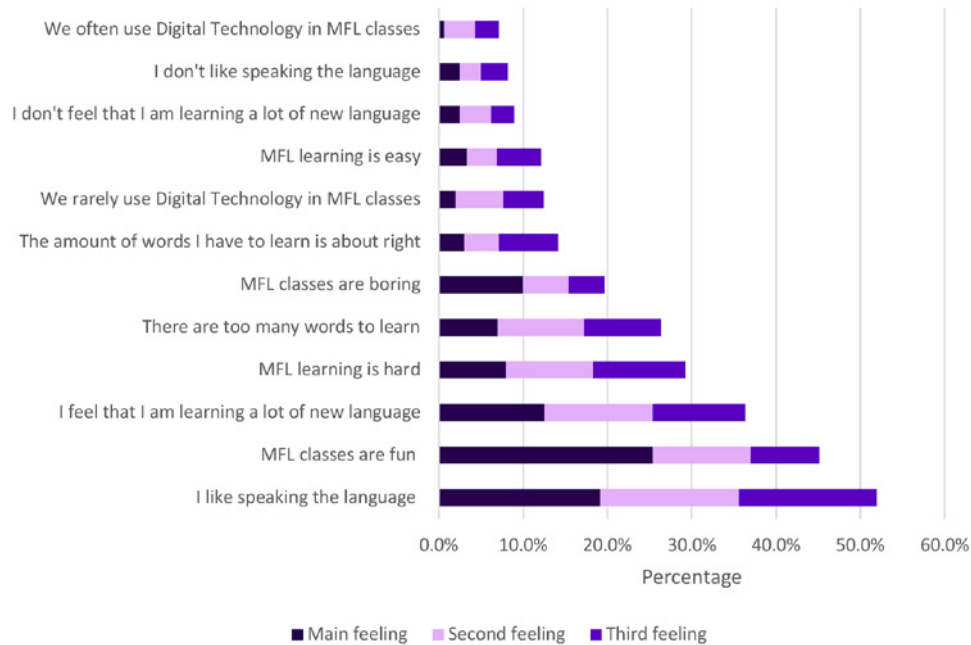


Figure 17: Which of these statements describe your feelings about Modern Foreign Language learning at school?

Almost 60 per cent of surveyed students reported that Modern Foreign Languages are mandatory in Junior Cycle, while only 34.7 per cent reported that they were mandatory in Senior Cycle.

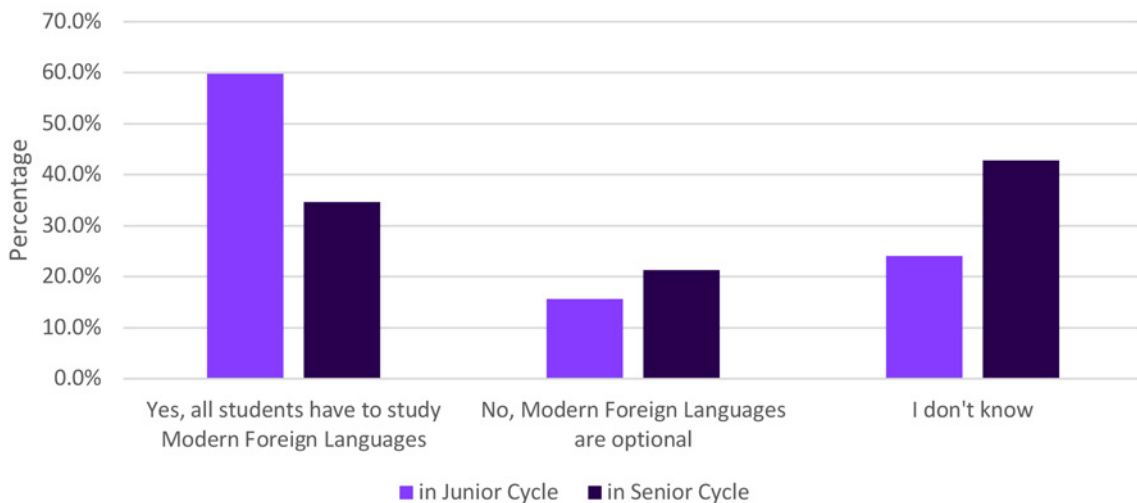


Figure 18: In your school, do all students have to study a Modern Foreign Language? (First year perspective)

In first year, 40 per cent of students reported that they plan to study a MFL for the Leaving Certificate. The most common response to this question was ‘maybe’ with 46.2 per cent of students unsure whether they will continue learning a MFL in Senior Cycle. Among the students who responded “no” (n=155), just under half reported reasons related to perceived ability to cope with the demands of a MFL, including subject difficulty (49 responses), low self-efficacy (17), or both (5). A smaller proportion (5.2 per cent) referred to additional learning needs or wellbeing-related barriers, while around eight per cent reported concerns relating to workload.

Over 25 per cent cited a perceived lack of value, most commonly in relation to career relevance or future plans in Ireland, while around twelve per cent reported a strategic prioritisation of other subjects perceived to be more useful or likely to yield higher grades. Around 20 per cent expressed a lack of interest or enjoyment in language learning, and only a very small proportion (1.9 per cent) referred to the teaching and learning experience, suggesting that decisions not to continue a language were largely associated with perceived difficulty, perceived value, and strategic subject choice, with affective factors playing a comparatively smaller role.

“I’d like to focus on learning Irish [...] because I think it’s important to learn your native language and I don’t think I’ll ever go down to the shop and have to talk Spanish.”

“I feel like I’ll have enough on my plate with Irish as I already struggle with it and I’d much rather contribute my studies to things like maths and science because I know I’ll use them a lot more.”

“It’s hard, and I think I could get higher scores in other subjects.”

However, when asked about motivations for learning a MFL, a somewhat different pattern emerged, with over 25 per cent of respondents (n=139) citing aspects of the learning experience such as a good teacher (7), engaging lessons (10), and the use of games or technology (5). Suggestions for improvement included making learning easier by slowing the pace and placing greater emphasis on speaking. Almost 33 per cent of responses reflected future-oriented or

conditional motivations, most commonly linked to travelling or living abroad (24) or potential employment or education requirements (9). Smaller proportions mentioned changes to the curriculum (7.2 per cent) or assessment (4.3 per cent), such as increased choice of languages or reduced emphasis on grading. Intrinsic motivations, such as enjoyment or satisfaction from improvement, were mentioned relatively infrequently (five per cent), as was cultural exposure through films or school trips (3.6 per cent). Notably, around 33 per cent of respondents did not identify any motivating factors, with 26 students stating that nothing would motivate them.

“If it was optional, or if we had more of a choice on which MFL we wanted to learn, as I can only pick between Spanish and French in my school.”

“Maybe if it wasn’t main curriculum and taken so seriously.”

“If there was less learning of grammar to learn and it was more about speaking the language.”

When asked about interest in the culture of the MFL that they learn in school, most respondents (940/1,211) reported that they were interested, compared to 271 who indicated otherwise. Of the 940, almost half said they either enjoyed some aspect of culture (17.8 per cent) or wanted to learn more about it (31.4 per cent), with students commonly expressing interest in areas such as food, traditions, celebrations, sport, and specific places, alongside comparisons with their home culture. Almost thirteen per cent of respondents highlighted interaction with others as

a motivation for developing cultural knowledge, while just over ten per cent referred to developing language skills. Fifteen per cent identified a practical motivation with travel (80 respondents) by far the most common, followed by study (8), career (7), and relocation (7). Smaller proportions mentioned extrinsic influences (3.9 per cent) such as family, friends, and teachers and the novelty of encountering something different from their own culture (4.7 per cent). Overall, responses suggest that interest in MFL culture is driven primarily by a combination of enjoyment and curiosity, with practical and social motivations playing a secondary role.

“Some of them [cultures] have interesting stories and also interesting roots for some words.”

“If I ever visit/ live in the country I will know the traditions and expectations of that country.”

“Because if I [...] go to the country I will not stand out and fit in”

“Because it helps you connect with other people and gain understanding of people around the world.”

“Yes, because the culture of a country is just as important as the language. It is important to learn about the culture of the language because it can be influential to how a person plans on using the language later in life.”

Among the 271 respondents who indicated they were not interested in culture, around 25 per cent expressed a lack of enjoyment, most commonly describing it as boring (30 respondents), not enjoyable (12), or stating a preference to focus on the language (11). Smaller proportions cited a lack of interest in the language itself (8.9 per cent), a perceived lack of value (11.8 per cent), difficulty or low self-efficacy (9.6 per cent), and competing priorities (4.8 per cent).

As with MFL more generally, very few students (1.1 per cent) mentioned a negative learning experience. A substantial proportion (27.7 per cent) gave minimal elaboration.

A similar pattern of interest and disengagement emerged when considering historical content, with most respondents (703/1,153) indicating interest in the history of their MFL, and 450 lack thereof. This difference may reflect the fact that history was often perceived as a distinct subject in its own right, with some respondents explicitly stating that they disliked history (47) or felt it should be kept separate from language learning (10). In addition, compared to culture, history was less frequently associated with practical application (2.8 per cent) or relevance to language learning (3.6 per cent).

“No. I don’t mind learning another language but history is already mandatory and I don’t really need to know where the words I’m learning come from.”

Despite this, positive responses showed broadly similar patterns to those for culture, with over half of respondents expressing either interest in specific aspects of history (33.9 per cent) or enjoying historical content (21.5 per cent), including military, political, and colonial history. A notable feature of

the data was the relatively high level of interest in historical linguistics (41 respondents). Among negative responses, patterns were also broadly similar to those for culture. Almost 40 per cent reported a lack of enjoyment, most commonly describing history as boring (73 responses) or expressing a preference for language over history (25). A further 39.3 per cent gave minimal or no elaboration, while smaller proportions cited a perceived lack of value (11.6 per cent), competing priorities (four per cent), difficulty or low self-efficacy (four per cent), and, again rarely, learning or teaching issues (0.9 per cent).

Thirty-three respondents reported that they had not (yet) learned much or any history.

“It’s nice to learn what’s behind the language and the history of tradition/culture behind it [...] Chinese characters make sense because they represent things.”

“I find it very interesting to hear and understand how other countries develop their perspectives and why.”

Benefits and improvements

When asked about the greatest benefit of learning languages, the most popular response was the ability to speak the language when visiting another country:

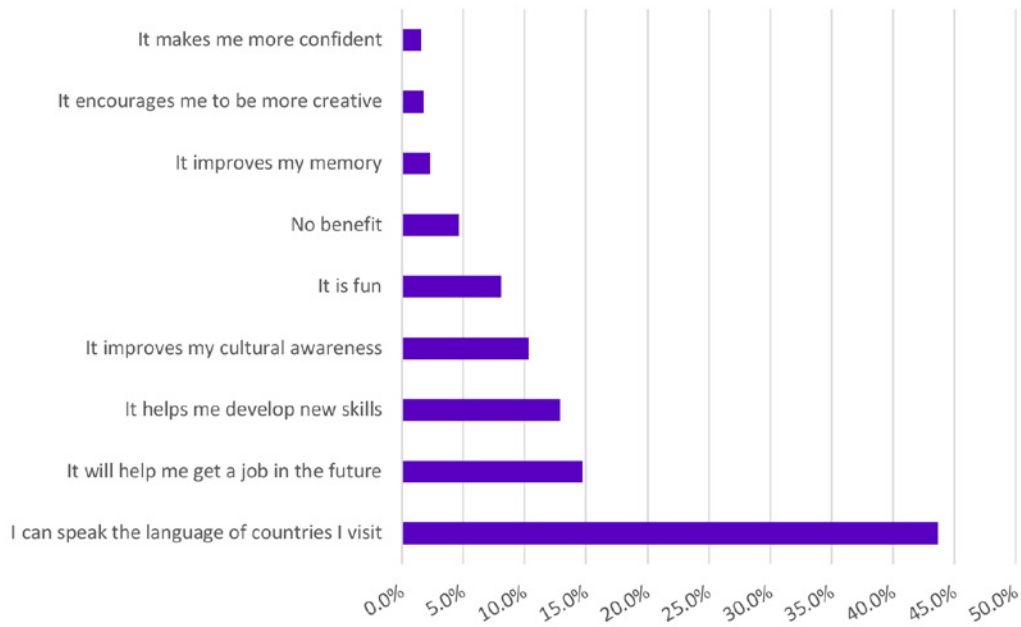


Figure 19: What do you think is the greatest benefit of learning Modern Foreign Languages in school? (First year perspective)

In an open text answer, first year students gave their suggestions for how MFL learning in schools could be improved; the most frequent responses cited how the languages are taught (with over 33 per cent of respondents mentioning this). Two hundred and seventy-five respondents suggested the inclusion of more games, quizzes or interactive activities in the classroom, with a further 85 specifying they wanted more opportunities to speak in class. Around 10 per cent of first year students noted a desire for more choice in language learning in Junior Cycle: both allowing languages to become optional, and for there to be greater variety in the languages offered.

Findings from Post-Primary Year 5

A total of 888 fifth year students from 35 schools chose to respond to the survey. Almost all (n=800) were learning a language as part of the Leaving Certificate, significantly above the national average of around 70 per cent. Sixty-six per cent of respondents were female, almost 33 per cent were male and the balance was recorded as other or preferred not to say. Half of the respondents told us that the study of at least one MFL is mandatory in their school during Senior Cycle.

Eighty per cent of respondents did not learn a language in primary school. Seventy-five per cent of respondents think that primary school pupils should have the opportunity to learn a language should they wish whilst 25 per cent think that languages should be mandatory in primary schools. Of those students who did learn a language in primary school the most commonly learnt language was Spanish closely followed by French. This contrasts with the three nations of Great Britain, where French is consistently the most popular language in the primary phase. Language learning in primary schools is not mandatory in Northern Ireland.

School day languages

We asked students which language they learn as part of the school day. As in the UK, the 'big three' are Spanish, French and German. Whilst French is the MFL with the highest participation nationally in Ireland, respondents to our data set were more likely to be learning Spanish:

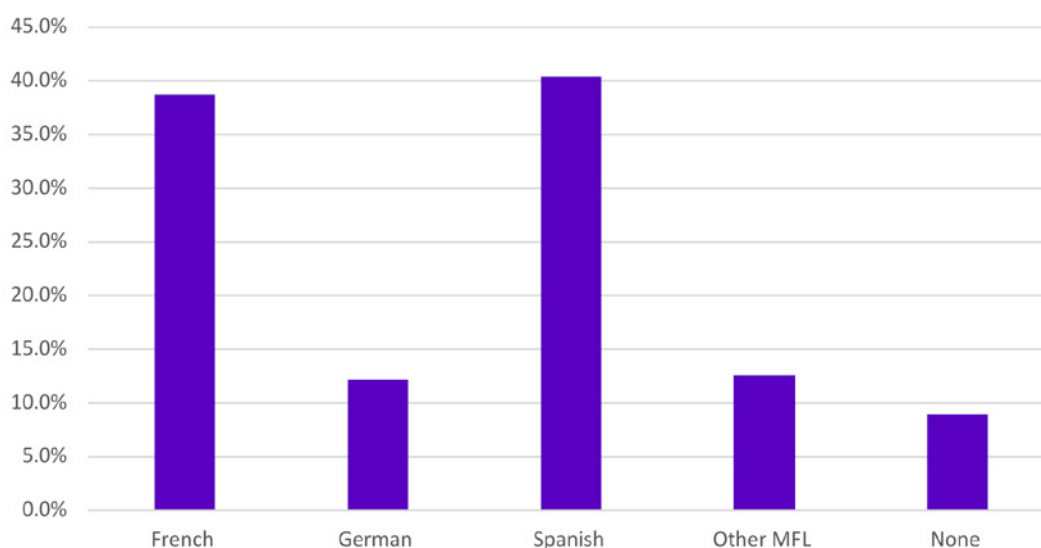


Figure 20: Languages taught as part of the school day in responding students' schools

Other MFL included, in order of size, Mandarin (2.9 per cent), Japanese (1.9 per cent), Italian (1.5 per cent) and a handful of Arabic, Polish, Portuguese and Russian.

Students were asked which new language they would choose if given the opportunity.

Language	Percentage
Spanish	21.4%
Italian	20.9%
I don't know	15.3%
French	8.2%
Chinese (Mandarin)	6.8%
Arabic	6.0%
German	5.9%
Portuguese	4.6%
Polish	2.3%
Japanese	1.6%
Korean	1.1%
Russian	1.1%

Table 23: If you could start to learn a new Modern Foreign Language, which one would it be? (Fifth year perspective)

There is a particularly notable level of interest in Italian, reflecting findings from *Language Trends Northern Ireland* in 2023. Despite interest in the language from students in Northern Ireland, Italian has been discontinued in a significant majority of schools, and as a curricular subject in all schools. It is interesting that in Ireland, there is a continued and growing appetite for Italian.

Our responding students had a multilingual repertoire with sixty-three different languages spoken at home. The word cloud below (Figure 21) shows most of these languages, with Polish, Romanian, Arabic and Russian being the most popular after English and Irish:



Figure 21: Home languages spoken by responding fifth year students.

“Labhraím Béarla le mo chlann sa bhaile ach labhraím Gaeilge agus Béarla le mo sheantuismitheoirí.” / “I speak English with my family at home but I speak Irish and English with my grandparents.”

“I’m an Italian exchange student in Ireland. I speak English with my host family.”

“I used to speak Polish a lot at home, but now my mother, my siblings and I more commonly speak English and embrace the Irish culture around us. We now speak English at home even if sometimes we have to explain what something in English means to my mother in Polish.”

International Trips

Almost all students have been on a trip outside of Ireland with parents and guardians and half have been on a school trip. The top outbound destination is Spain, closely followed by Great Britain and France. Over half of our students have also been to Italy, reflecting the deep ties between the two countries and the desire cited by students to learn Italian.

Destination	Percentage
Spain	79.5%
Great Britain	68.5%
France	62.3%
Other	51.2%
Italy	50.6%
America	29.4%
Germany	23.3%
Greece/Greek Islands	14.8%
Poland	10.2%
Turkey	10.2%
Morocco	4.8%
China	4.2%
Japan	1.8%

Table 24: Destinations visited by responding fifth year students

There were 114 countries cited in the ‘other’ column, showing a wide travel appetite for our young people. Despite this great experience, just five per cent of respondents are sure that languages will play a part in their working lives; the need for evidence-based career guidance in relation to the importance of MFL is more important than ever.

Careers and languages

We asked students if their school provides career guidance in relation to languages and the majority replied no:

No Comment	7.0%
No	51.6%
Yes	28.8%
Don't know	5.5%
A little	6.8%
Depends	0.1%
Not yet	0.2%

Table 25: Students’ responses in answer to question as to whether their school provides careers’ guidance in relation to languages.

We also asked students what jobs they could do in the future with languages. Sixty-six per cent said teaching or translation; just ten per cent mentioned international business, law or diplomacy and less than five per cent cited travel and tourism.

Despite this lack of careers awareness, four out of every five students see the value of language learning.

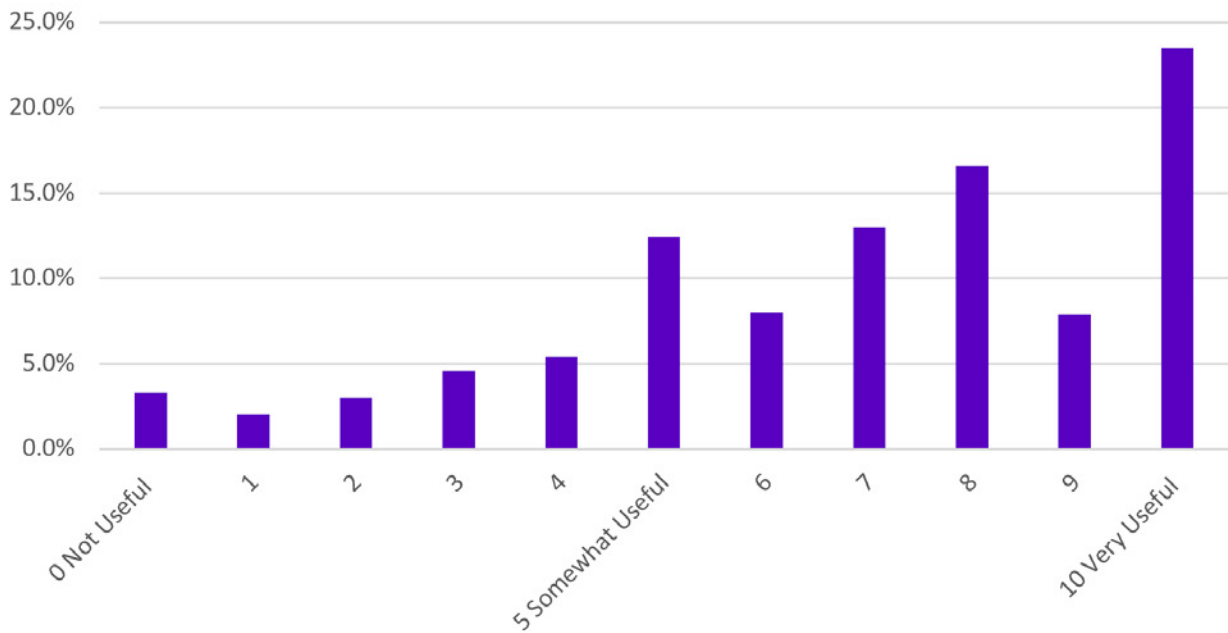


Figure 22: How useful is being able to speak different MFL? (Fifth year perspective)

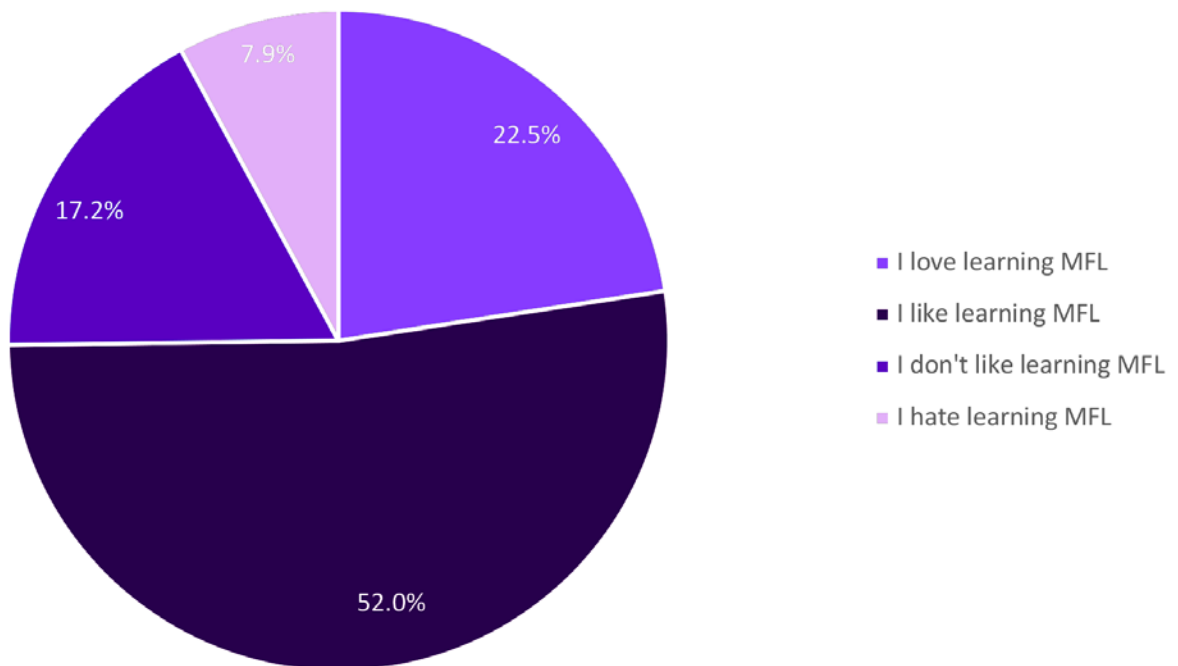


Figure 23: Students’ enjoyment of language learning (Fifth year perspective)

Students are also positively disposed to language learning. Almost three in every four young people enjoy the subject. We gave students a list of six positive and six negative feelings about language learning. The three most popular feelings were: (i) students like speaking the language; (ii) MFL learning is hard; and (iii), there are too many words to learn. Of those students in our data set who are not studying a MFL for the Leaving Certificate (n=75), almost half said it was due to perceived difficulty. To address similar concerns in England, recent policy changes have shifted the focus of language learning from topics to language using high frequency and defined vocabulary.

Seventy-five per cent of students are interested in the culture of the MFL they learn in school, but just under half are interested in the history of the countries.

“We have learnt nothing of France’s history during our classes.”

“[I] don’t think there is a need to know the history if you’re just learning the language to speak it”

Through free text, we asked students to tell us about cultural enrichment opportunities in their school. Table 26 shows exchanges and trips to be healthy, together with good engagement from the #ThinkLanguages events run by PPLI.

Type of enrichment	Number of responses following thematic coding
Exchanges (outgoing)	294
Trips	150
Culture Day(s)/Week	65
International students (incoming)	56
Pen pals	53
None	62
#ThinkLanguages	47
Don’t know	32
Language Day(s)/Week	37
Language assistants	24
Erasmus	17

Table 26: Types of enrichment

Benefits and improvements

When asked what the greatest benefit is of learning a new language, it is clear that the spoken element came out first and foremost:

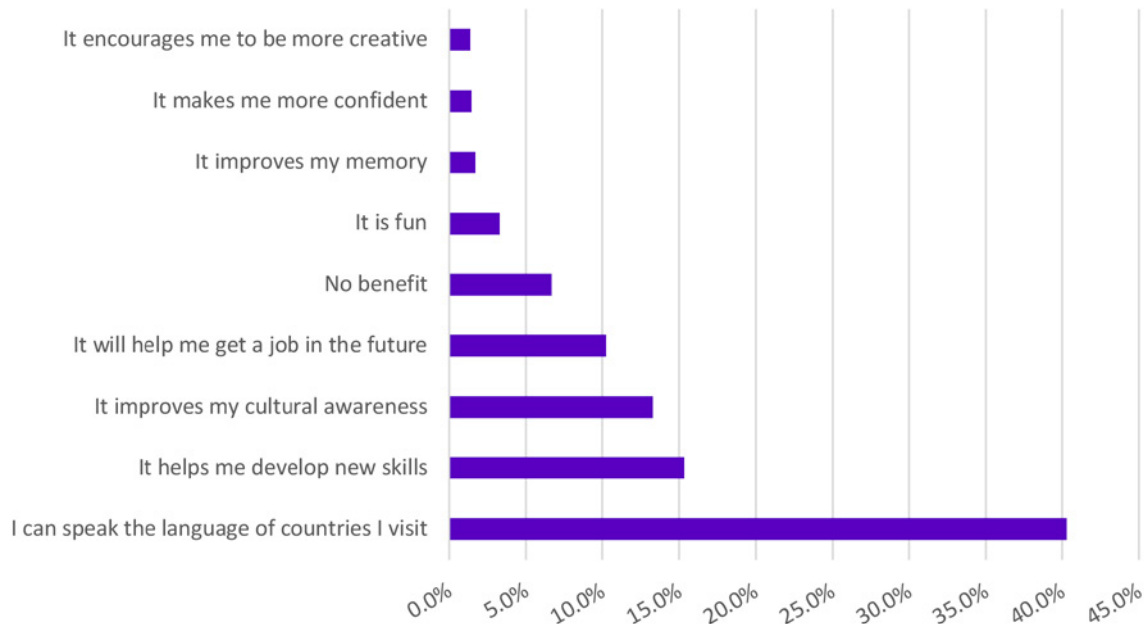


Figure 24: What do you think is the greatest benefit of learning MFL in school? (Fifth year perspective)

We asked students to give an open text answer to what could be done to improve language learning in Senior Cycle. Data were coded using thematic analysis and the main resulting keywords were a renewed focus on spoken language, activities, more support and outbound mobility:

Keywords	Number of responses
Spoken language (oral and aural skills, in class and in country)	137
Activities (more interactive, more fun, language events, creativity)	109
Teaching and learning, support	79
Trips and Exchanges; Erasmus	68
Don't know	56
Greater choice of languages	41
Introduce languages at Primary level	32
Make MFL learning optional	22
Include more culture and history in studies (including music, film etc)	26
Difficulty (subject is perceived as too difficult, or the jump from Junior Certificate to Senior Certificate is too big)	21

Table 27: How students think languages could be improved in Senior Cycle

Conclusion

School leaders across Ireland clearly value the teaching and learning of languages in their schools; while they are realistic about the challenges posed by a lack of qualified teachers and professional development opportunities, and the barriers of finance, they have nonetheless demonstrated their commitment to supporting all manner of initiatives, both inside and outside the classroom, to continue to enthuse students about languages. French remains the most taught language in Irish schools, but trends show that Spanish continues to grow, along with interest in other European and global languages, showcasing an increase in diversity.

Students in both first and fifth year of their post-primary education have recorded a remarkable satisfaction with language learning, with 75 per cent of both age groups stating that they enjoy language classes. The increase in interest in Spanish is most evident from a student perspective. However, despite their enjoyment of language learning, and the fact that most students think being able to speak a different language a useful skill, relatively few students consider languages to be an important element of their future careers. Most students believe that careers with languages are limited to teaching, translation and interpreting. Work remains to be done to broaden students' horizons on integrating language into future careers.

Throughout this report, the importance of the international dimension of school life in shaping students' attitudes towards different languages and cultures is evident. Students thrive in language learning environments where they can put their languages into practice, and the restrictions imposed by the curriculum and timetable can be detrimental in this regard. However, opportunities during Transition Year to engage with languages in new and different ways – whether through new languages, opportunities to go abroad or to welcome international students into Irish schools, or programmes like PPLI's #ThinkLanguages – contribute to the success of languages in Irish schools.

Despite the challenges outlined in the responses, language learning in post-primary schools in Ireland is in a very healthy position. Uptake of languages throughout school is significantly higher than across the United Kingdom, and the inclusion of home and heritage languages within the curriculum and as Leaving Certificate options demonstrates the commitment of Ireland to the promotion of language learning and to a more inclusive education system. With further funding, development of resources, and addressing the difficulties around teacher recruitment, language learning in Ireland will continue to go from strength to strength.

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