

Institution: Cardiff University		
Unit of Assessment: Modern Languages and Linguistics (26)		
Title of case study: Increased uptake of modern languages in secondary schools through mentoring in Wales and England		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Claire Gorrara	Professor	01/08/1994 - present
Sally Blake	Head of Training, Doctoral Academy	17/01/2005 - present
Lucy Jenkins	National Coordinator	21/08/2017 - present
Neil Mosley	Learning Technologist	24/04/2017 - 30/06/2020
Tallulah Machin	Project Coordinator	30/01/2018 - 31/03/2021
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/11/2015 - 31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The number of students studying a modern language at GCSE in Wales has fallen by 64% since 2002; in England, uptake has fallen by 48% over a similar period. Collaborative research led by Gorrara showed that mentoring programmes change learners' attitudes to languages. Cardiff's research-led mentoring programmes supported policy and practice for increasing languages uptake across Wales and England, with partner schools reporting on average a doubling in the number of pupils choosing GCSE languages. This work was extended to support bilingual pathways from primary to secondary education in partner schools in Spain, and to tackle gender inequalities and uptake in Physics A Level education in Wales.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Cardiff research has shown how mentoring (face-to-face and blended) can influence attitudes towards language learning in schools and motivate pupils to choose a language at GCSE [3.1]. Wales' devolved education context has provided a 'living laboratory' to explore the impact of mentoring as an educational intervention to support language diversity in schools.</p>		
2.1 Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Student Mentoring Project		
<p>Since 2015, Gorrara has been the Academic Lead of the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Student Mentoring Project, funded by the Welsh Government's <i>Global Futures</i> strategy (£895,983) [G3.1]. She has undertaken research in parallel which increases understanding of why learners are deterred from learning languages and the difference a discovery mode of learning languages can make [3.2].</p>		
<p>The mentoring project, led by Cardiff University, addresses the challenges facing modern languages, including pupil demotivation; perceptions of difficulty; and undervaluing of the subject within the curriculum. It created partnerships between four Welsh universities and their local secondary schools to improve the uptake of languages at GCSE. Undergraduate and postgraduate students, mainly linguists, are trained to deliver a six-week programme to Year 8 and 9 pupils before they make subject choices. It is distinct from other initiatives to promote uptake of MFL in Wales in offering targeted and sustained support at this key decision point.</p>		
<p>Cardiff's work [3.1] on the programme's effectiveness led to the development of an e-mentoring programme (<i>Digi-Languages</i>) to support languages in 18 Welsh secondary schools in 2018. This also informed design of a remote learning Year 13 Continuity of Learning project (May-July 2020) which is supporting Year 13 linguists under COVID-19 lockdown.</p>		

The Cardiff team also carried out a research-led evaluation of *Digi-Languages* [3.3] and, based on the programme's successful outcomes, recommended the expansion of e-mentoring to other regions of the UK and abroad.

2.2 Understanding the effectiveness of mentoring

From the first two cycles of the MFL mentoring programme in 2015-17, Cardiff's research established that [3.1]:

- systemic factors (i.e., school timetabling) are less influential on learner choices than attitudes towards languages absorbed at home and externally;
- 'short burst' intervention can be highly effective;
- mentoring, by highlighting the value of languages for personal and professional development, can influence attitudes to language learning;
- use of near-peer mentors (university students), who communicate with an immediacy and relatability which older adults may lack, is a unique feature of the programme and key to its success as an educational intervention;
- mentored pupils in Wales were twice as likely as non-mentored pupils to choose a GCSE language, particularly in schools in disadvantaged areas.

Policy-related research [G3.2] evidenced that this uplift in numbers can be attributed to the creative, curiosity-driven approach to language learning developed by the project. Younger mentored learners were less likely to adopt a functionalist approach to languages and more likely to see languages as part of a valued set of life-long intercultural skills [3.3].

These findings informed the design and effectiveness of a hybrid face-to-face and e-mentoring experience, *Language Horizons*, in Sheffield and the West Midlands. Data from the Welsh and English projects fed back into research on the development of Wales' new curriculum and the value of multilingual participatory methodologies to stimulate and retain younger language learners [3.4]. It has also supported extension of the project to Spain [G3.1].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Blake, S. and Gorrara, C., 'Evaluating student mentoring as an intervention to support modern foreign language learning in schools in Wales', 2019, *Wales Journal of Education* (21/1): 24-45, <https://doi.org/10.16922/wje.21.1.3>

[3.2] Gorrara, C., 'Speaking from Wales: building a modern languages community in an era of Brexit', 2018, In: Kelly, M. ed. *Languages after Brexit: How the UK Speaks to the World*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 149-158, (10.1007/978-3-319-65169-9_13)

[3.3] Gorrara, C., Jenkins, L., Mosley, N., 'Modern Languages and Mentoring: Supporting Digital Learning Across Language Communities', 2019, in Wales' *Languages, Society and Policy*, http://www.meits.org/files/policy_papers/uploads/gorrara_jenkins_mosley.pdf

[3.4] Gorrara, C., Jenkins, L., Jepson, E., and Machin, T.: 'Multilingual perspectives: preparing for language learning in the new curriculum for Wales', 2020, *The Curriculum Journal*, special issue, 'Re-educating the nation: the development of the new curriculum in Wales' (April 2020), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/curj.11> Commended in *The Curriculum Journal Editor's Choice Award 2020*

Selected grants:

[G3.1] Welsh Government, 'Modern Foreign Language (MFL) Mentoring Initiative', total of £895,983 received in annual grants 2015-2021, including (March 2020-April 2021) £230,000

[G3.2] Gorrara, C. and Jenkins, L., 'Evaluating the effectiveness of e-mentoring and a digital languages platform for FLL in Wales', funded by the Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies (MEITS) Open World Research Initiative (£2,900) and 'Language Learning Opens Doors to Other Worlds: Memory Acts through Digital Technologies', funded by Language Acts and World Making Open World Research Initiative (£1,500), AHRC, 2017-2018

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Cardiff research has influenced policy and practice across Wales and England, bolstering the uptake of languages, as well as supporting bilingual education in regions in Spain and increasing the number of female Physics GCSE students moving on to A Level.

4.1 Policy and Practice in Wales

a. MFL Mentoring Project in schools

Over 10,000 pupils at 115 secondary schools engaged with the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Mentoring Project during its first five years in Wales [5.1]. Independent evaluation confirmed that the increase in MFL uptake at GCSE was 57% of those mentored in 27 schools during 2015-16, and 50% of those mentored in 43 schools during 2016-17. These uptake rates are over double the national average for these years, where just over 20% of students chose MFL for GCSE across Wales [5.2].

The project expanded substantially to work with 87 schools in 2018-19, achieving an average uptake of 45% of mentees choosing a language at GCSE. In 2019-20, the project worked with 95 schools, almost half of all secondary schools in Wales (data on subsequent GCSE uptake not available due to COVID-19 restrictions in the period).

The programme has been heralded as a pioneering model of partnership working by the Welsh Government Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams. Commending Gorrara when the programme was awarded the Chartered Institute of Linguists' Threlford Cup (2017) for inspiring modern languages in schools, she noted: *"I've been pleased to note the success of the MFL student Mentoring Project and its positive impact on school pupils and undergraduate students. I am keen to see the development of such partnership approaches in other disciplines"* [5.3]. The Welsh Government's confidence in the project is also seen in its 2020-2022 update of *Global Futures*. This confirms its continued funding of the project to provide direct support to secondary schools despite resource constraints due to COVID-19 [5.4].

b. Digi-Languages e-mentoring

The *Digi-Languages* e-mentoring platform has seen 29 schools taking part, extending project reach to geographically rural areas of Wales. Of the 18 schools involved in the 2018 pilot phase, 16 saw increased uptake of MFL in comparison to the previous year. 43% of pupils went on to opt for an MFL GCSE and 58% said it had changed the way they think about languages in relation to their futures. Pupil feedback includes [5.2]:

- *"I didn't enjoy languages but now I do"*
- *"I have been persuaded to take Spanish as a GCSE, but I wasn't even considering it before"*
- *"I didn't think languages were very important, but I realised how many jobs that need you to be able to speak a foreign language."*

c. Wider impacts

The project's impacts are far wider than GCSE uptake. For example, a report tracking the cumulative impact on schools involved in the scheme for three years or more found that it raised the profile of MFL in schools [5.2]. Anna Vivian Jones, who was Regional Coordinator for Modern Languages for the Mid and West Wales education consortium, confirmed that *"on the ground, it has helped sustain departments over repeat cycles of mentoring and boosted morale among teachers"* [5.5]. She highlighted how the project also supported equity of access to languages by giving pupils in highly deprived areas *"an opportunity to engage with other cultures and languages that would not otherwise have been accessible to children"* [5.5].

In her current role leading on the delivery of national strategy for languages, literacy and communication for Wales' new curriculum, Jones said the project *"has supported schools to develop strategies in line with the new curriculum"* and that Gorrara's research *"has been on the table when we have been writing the new curriculum and [...] made a difference to my thinking and what was consequently adopted"* [5.5].

d. Support for learners during the COVID-19 crisis

In response to the COVID-19 restrictions, Cardiff staff working on the MFL Mentoring Project created a programme of interactive remote learning (April - July 2020) for Year 12 and 13 modern languages students. The team ran 80 sessions, supported by trained mentors, to ensure that 441 students from 35 schools in Wales and 25 outside Wales maintained their confidence and skills by giving them vital opportunities to practice their languages. Respondents to a student survey indicated that 98% found the sessions useful or very useful for language learning and 89% found participation improved their confidence in their language skills [5.6]. Feedback from students included: *“I am so thankful for these sessions to make it easier for me since school support has vastly dropped”* and *“it’s motivated me to do more independent language learning while I’m off school”* [5.6]. In March 2020, Welsh Government confirmed £230,000 funding to run a fully digital iteration of MFL Mentoring in 2020-21 in response to the impacts of COVID-19 on education provision [G3.2].

4.2 Policy and Practice in England

Gorrara’s research on the benefits of e-mentoring has shaped the languages work of the Department for Education (DfE). The Cardiff team was awarded a competitive grant (2017; £94,000) to deliver *Language Horizons*, a hybrid face-to-face and digital mentoring programme in Sheffield to ten schools and 196 pupils with the aim of improving uptake at GCSE. External evaluation (2019) demonstrated the decisive impact of the project:

- 62% said it has definitely changed the way they think about languages in relation to their future lives;
- 59% stated they would take a GCSE in MFL (English national average was 46%) [5.7a].

The project also supported broader languages take-up and awareness in the pilot schools, which increased overall by 43% on the previous year. The greatest impact was in schools with the lowest take-up rates at the start of the project [5.7a]. A teacher from one of the schools noted that *“many [pupils] have already said after the mentoring process they are sure they would like to choose Spanish when it comes to the options. Even those that are still having a few doubts e.g. difficulty of exams, are now leaning more towards languages as an option than prior to the mentoring”* [5.7b].

The DfE subsequently provided funding (£431,973) to the Cardiff team to roll out the project to an additional 40 schools and 1,000 pupils in South Yorkshire and the West Midlands in 2019-21. Although evaluation of this phase in 2020 was impacted by COVID-19 school closures, an interim external evaluation pupil survey indicated:

- in one school, 43% of mentees reported intentions to take an MFL GCSE compared with just 4% of the non-participatory group;
- an increase of 21% amongst the mentee group who were considering a career using languages, compared with just 3% increase amongst non-selected pupils [5.7b].

Data from teacher interviews found:

- 95% of teachers said the project’s approach was useful or very useful in combating the decline of MFL in England;
- 71% felt mentoring had been effective at improving their pupils’ intentions to take MFL at GCSE;
- 65% felt the project was effective or very effective in improving their pupils’ confidence;
- 81% of teachers said the project has been effective or very effective in improving their pupils’ aspirations to go to university, above all pupils from more deprived areas [5.7b].

4.3 Practice in Spain

The *Digi-Languages/Languages Horizons* model has also been run in the Castilla y Leon region of Spain, where the regional government wished to tackle the risk of pupils abandoning bilingual programmes due to lack of interest in languages. In 2018, Gorrara and Jenkins

trained four Cardiff undergraduate mentors to adapt the model's multilingual ethos to a Spanish context. This partnership focused on work-based practice with 48 pupils (age 10-11) in a primary school, with the aim of increasing the choice of bilingual education as pupils transitioned to secondary school. Following the intervention, the school reported a 9% increase in pupils choosing a bilingual education pathway [5.8]. [Text redacted], senior policy advisor in the region, stated that the project's success in *"motivating pupils to progress and improve their skills...is due to the inspiring methodology and engagement practices which have allowed pupils to connect more fully to the value of learning languages"* [5.8].

4.4 Extending the methodology to tackle gender inequalities in Physics education

The mentoring methodology has been adapted to deliver successes in other areas beyond languages. Amanda Wilkinson, Director of Universities Wales, stated that the project led to *"targeted working with Welsh Government to develop further school-university partnerships, supporting learner attainment"* and provides *"a model of co-working across the school and HE sectors"* [5.9].

The MFL mentoring model has been adapted to Physics as part of a Welsh Government objective to increase the number of female students progressing from GCSE to A Level. In Wales, around 20% of Physics A-Level entrants are female. Gorrara was an expert advisor and consultant for the project. Vivian Jones, commenting on the wider impact of Cardiff's MFL mentoring, confirmed that the Physics project *"would not have happened without the MFL Mentoring Project"* [5.5]. Three cycles of this new Physics mentoring approach have now taken place and, for the latter two cycles (2019-20), external evaluators [5.10] found a 38% increase in female mentees expressing positive attitudes towards taking Physics A Level. This rose from 5% pre-intervention to 43% post-intervention.

The mentoring methodology also increased the intention of entering STEM-related careers with 60% of mentees reporting they are likely to choose a science career, compared with 38% of non-participating pupils from the same schools. In September 2020, the project secured an additional two years of funding from the five Welsh University partners to continue the programme, with the aim of making use of pan-Wales digital platforms, such as that developed by MFL Mentoring, to reach more pupils than the prior approach.

The extension of the MFL mentoring methodology to other subjects and other countries demonstrates how this model of school intervention can lead to striking changes in student attitudes and subject uptake. This is reflective of the wider success the project has achieved in boosting motivation and the uptake for language learning across Wales and England.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] Global Futures 2015-2020: summary report

[5.2] MFL student mentoring external evaluations: **a.** *Longitudinal review of MFL student mentoring project, Alcantara Communications, December 2019* and **b.** *Educational consultants: OnData Research 5-year review of MFL Mentoring, January 2020.*

[5.3] Welsh Government: Remit Letter 2017-18, Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams AM

[5.4] Welsh Government strategy: Global Futures: A plan to improve and promote modern foreign languages in Wales 2020 to 2022

[5.5] Testimonial letter: Anna Vivian Jones, formerly Leader of Learning and Regional Coordinator for Modern Languages in the ERW consortium

[5.6] 'Final report: Post-16 Languages Recovery Project', MFL Student Mentoring Project report, October 2020

[5.7] Language Horizons external evaluations: **a.** *Language Horizons Final Year evaluation, Alcantara Communications, July 2019:* **b.** *Language Horizons, Year 2, OnData Research, April 2020*

[5.8] Testimonial letter and report: [text redacted] Education Directorate Castilla y Leon

[5.9] Testimonial letter: Amanda Wilkinson, Director, Universities Wales, May 2018

[5.10] Physics Mentoring Project: Evaluation Report, OnData Research, June 2020