Transitions into Higher Education Report

School of Modern Languages (MLANG)

Commissioned by the School of Modern Languages

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Executive Summary

Purpose

This report shows the findings of a data collection and analysis project undertaken by the School of Modern Languages, Cardiff University (July 2023-July 2024). The report was commissioned in order to better understand how to support students in their transition into Higher Education. University data on applications, retention, and progression were analysed to identify trends in student demographics. These data were supplemented by questionnaires to students, academic staff, and to staff in schools and 6th form colleges. The findings of this report will shape the provision of student-facing support organised by the School of Modern Languages spanning the period of Transition to Higher Education.

Research Questions

What is the demographic make up of the School? Which groups are more vulnerable to withdrawing from studies, or taking an interruption of studies?

To what extent to students feel prepared for the differences between school/college and Higher Education? How is that preparation perceived by students/academic staff/school and college teachers? How can the School better prepare students for academic studies before they arrive? How can the School better prepare students for academic studies before they arrive?

What are the key areas of concern for students on commencing University? How can the School support students in these areas? How can the School better equip teaching and professional services staff to support students in key areas?

Key Findings

- Internal transfers account for the majority of Yr 1 and Yr 2 transfers.
- Students with an A-level matching their degree course are more likely to progress.
- Students who perform well in A-levels or equivalent are more likely to progress.
- Students at Cardiff who did not achieve the entry requirements are less likely to progress.
- Students who arrive through additional softening levels of entry requirements are less likely to progress than students who met the initial entry requirement.
- Students who arrive through clearing are more vulnerable.
- Approximately one third of students arrive through clearing.
- The majority of students are school-leavers and under 21.
- The majority of students are domiciled in England.
- Progression rates are lowest in students domiciled in Wales.
- Students from POLAR4 quintiles 4 and 5 are more likely to progress.
- The student population lacks ethnic diversity.
- Mature students are a minority in the student body and less likely to progress than under-21s.
- Most students are female.
- Male students are less likely to progress.
- Students with declared disability are less likely to progress.
- Students with contextual flags are less likely to progress.
- Students with a parent/parents who have a degree are more likely to progress.
- Students who are carers are less likely to progress.

Questionnaire data analysis has identified four areas in which perceptions of learning in Higher Education differ amongst the groups surveyed.

— Perceptions of preparedness for university life and learning
— Perceptions of aptitude in the transition to university life and learning
— Perceptions of engagement in the transition to university life and learning
— Perceptions of support during the transition to university life and learning

These data have been used to create an Action Plan containing recommendations to be implemented over the coming academic year.

Key Recommendations

— To organise a student workshop to identify views on what support is needed for the transition to Higher Education.
— To organise an event bringing together schools, universities, students, and support organisations to collaboratively discuss transitions to Higher Education, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.
— To increase visibility of Academic Study Support resources through Assessment Briefs.
— To move student training sessions into timetabled slots during teaching weeks.
— To develop a training session on Independent Study for implementation in 2025/26.
— To develop a question set for Academic Tutors of Year 1 students to support learners in transition to Higher Education.
— To work in collaboration with Careers Advisors from Student Futures to promote support sessions, careers fairs, and awareness of careers using languages.
— To support students in organising their own study groups and peer networks.
— To promote the opportunities available for students to come together in language cafes and other extra-curricular activities.
— To create a student-facing resource: 'Guide to Graduation'.
— To create a resource that signposts and guides students towards the various support services available in the University.
— To hold student-led events that raise awareness of mental health support.
— To tailor student mentor engagement and role towards MLANG specifics.
— To offer more training and support for Year 1 tutors to better support their tutees.
— To work with schools and 6th form colleges on support for transition to Higher Education.

Conclusions

The recommendations will be implemented over the coming academic year and monitored by the Project Team. Feedback will be sought from all stakeholders (students, staff, and schools) throughout the implementation process. Any additional suggestions or recommendations raised during the feedback process can be followed up in future versions of the Action Plan. Section 4 Outcomes and Recommendations has been compiled after successful piloting of aspects of the Action Plan and provides suggestions for enhancing transition to Higher Education.

Introduction

Transition is long known to be a critical moment in the academic journey (O'Donnell et al., 2016). The extent to which students develop a sense of belonging within the first weeks of university is crucial to progression and completion of studies (Meehan & Howells, 2018; Tate & Swords, 2013). Studies into the attitudes and experiences of first year students demonstrate that the first year of study is fundamental in establishing attitudes to study (Hussey & Smith, 2010). Given the continued decline in students applying for language degree programmes, understanding the moment of transition to Higher Education from a collaborative perspective with schools is of the utmost importance (Critchley et al., 2021).

Decreasing recruitment cannot be addressed by researching student views alone; collaboration with schools is fundamental to understanding students in transition from an academic perspective (Gallagher-Brett & Canning, 2011; Harnisch et al., 2011; Williams & Roberts, 2023). The Transitions Project at Cardiff University has worked with schools, students, university staff, Widening Participation, and third sector organisations. The core of our strategy for supporting students through transition, their studies, and beyond into graduate employment is one of inclusivity.

Understanding transition not just from an academic perspective, but also seeking to understand the challenges students may face in terms of access to education, personal characteristics, mental health, and neurodiversity must be undertaken through cross-sector collaboration. The economic situation, the ongoing impact of Covid-19, changes in social interactions, the surge in technology use, and the increasing stress of tuition fees are changing how students perceive university education, and changing the kind of support HEIs need to offer (Muradás-Taylor, 2023; Pollard & Bamford, 2022).

This report, commissioned by the School of Modern Languages at Cardiff University investigates progression rates of language students at Cardiff University and proposes strategies to support students in transition, through to graduation, and beyond.

Context

In June 2023 the School of Modern Languages, Cardiff University commissioned two scholarship projects to inform practice in the School on areas of strategic importance.

The aim of the Transitions into Higher Education project was to design a development plan on how to support undergraduate students across the School to transition to university learning and teaching.

The project investigates the different entry pathways to undergraduate studies in the School in terms of engagement, progression, and retention through analysis of student data from 2018 to 2023. The project further supports statistical data with questionnaire data. The findings from data analysis are then used to identify the implications of the data and to suggest action points for the School.

Rationale

The School of Modern Languages underwent recent reaccreditation. As part of the rollout of the new degree programme, the School seeks to implement a support network for students. In order to offer appropriate, targeted, and meaningful support. To this end, analysis of student data,

comparisons to national data, and questionnaires to students, staff, and schools were undertaken. The support plan will be implemented as a pilot for the academic year 2024/25 with further events planned to gauge student engagement, staff feedback, and to collaborate further with schools and colleges.

Overview

This report has four sections.

Section 1, authored by Theresa Federici, with support from MLANG students Anna Kiddier and Sophie Waite in the discussion and implications sections, locates MLANG students within University, Wales, and UK trends for language degree uptake, and progression. Student involvement in the discussions enables the data to be understood from a student as well as a university perspective, thus creating a richer understanding of the implications of the data on student needs.

Section 2 presents the methodology and results of questionnaires devised and circulated by the project team. In this section data from three questionnaires is analysed and discussed, implications of the findings are presented and mapped to the statistical information in Section 1. Marion Heuchert oversaw the administration and analysis of the questionnaire to MLANG students, Nadia Nebot oversaw the administration and analysis of the questionnaire to schools and 6th form colleges, Samia Zitouni oversaw the administration and analysis of the questionnaire to MLANG staff. Data analysis, discussions, and implications of findings were conducted by Anna Kiddier and Sophie Waite.

Section 3 draws together the implications of findings from the 4 data sources, identifying common themes and areas. These areas are brought into 4 key headings linked to perceptions of transition to Higher Education. This section was compiled by Marion Heuchert, Theresa Federici, Anna Kiddier, and Sophie Waite.

The report concludes in Section 4 with an overview of the completed outcomes of the project and a suggested action plan that can be implemented in order to provide targeted support in a time-critical way to students.

Section 1: MLANG, Cardiff University, Wales, and UK Data Review

MLANG Statistical Data

Introduction

To best support our students in their academic journey, MLANG commissioned an AHSS data report. The report analyses progression data (withdrawal, transfer, repeat, and absence (Interruption of Studies) rates) for Year 1 and Year 2 students spanning 2018 to 2023.

Rates of withdrawal, transfer, year repeat, and absence were mapped against student data including contextual markers.

Data were gathered on the following criteria:

Academic Information

- Students who have an A-level matching the language of their course
- Outcomes by tariff point range
- Outcomes by IDRC Code
- Outcomes by grade profile
- Outcomes by course type: Single honours, Joint honours, Internal Joint Honours

Demographic Information

- Outcomes by Fee Status
- Outcomes by domicile
- Outcomes by polar4 quintile

Personal Information

- Outcomes by ethnicity
- Outcomes by young/mature
- Outcomes by gender
- Outcomes by contextual flag
- Outcomes by disability group name
- Outcomes by parents' degree
- Outcomes by carer description

The purpose of the data is to understand which students have higher rates of withdrawal, transfer, repeating, and absence in order to implement changes to support these groups.

These data are analysed below and discussed individually and thematically. The analysis was then shared with two students working on funded internship placements with the project to further inform the discussion through lived experience as students in MLANG. Many thanks to Anna Kiddier and Sophie Waite for their contributions to this section.

Access to sample

Data analysed in this section is highly sensitive and complex, analysis was undertaken by AHSS data analysts Tom Washington and Lynsey Rushton using BI, AHSS, and Central University databases to compile the information. The analysis was completed in February 2024. The data was provided as a spreadsheet image.

Sample

Base outcomes comprise the entire MLANG Year 1 and Year 2 student populations for the academic years 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23. Total count of students to which the data refers is 996 students.

Ethical Considerations

Access to raw data was limited to the project team and not shared further due to the sensitive nature of some of the filters used on the data. Data were provided as tables with numerical information only, thus ensuring that no individual should be identifiable from the information present without additional knowledge.

Limitations

Annual Intakes

Language learning in Higher Education continues to decline (https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/19-01-2023/sb265-higher-education-student-statistics/subjects) the data does not assess student numbers per intake, so the decline is not perceivable in the data analysed.

Years Covered

It must be acknowledged that the years covered in this data sample are anomalous. 2018/19 is the only pre-pandemic year considered by the data. 2019/20 is anomalous as mode of delivery changed to online delivery midway through the year. The data does not indicate if there were higher rates of absence (interruption of studies) during 2019/20.

2020/21 and 2021/22 were impacted by Covid (https://www.hesa.ac.uk/insight/19-01-2023/impact-covid-19-2022-student-data) and 2022/23, as the first year of a full return to in-person teaching, was also impacted by the lived experiences of students and the periods of online teaching and assessment over the pandemic.

A further impact on the years covered is the changes to how A level and equivalent exams were awarded, both in terms of format – with some cohorts missing exams entirely – and in terms of marking strategies. In the period 2020-2021 adjusted assessments, lenient grade boundaries, and teacher-awarded marks led to a spike in higher grades, when adjustments were removed in 2022 there was a significant drop in grades.

The continued impact of the pandemic was perceived in the 2023 intake, in which a record number of students secured university places through clearing (https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/highest-number-ever-students-accepted-through-clearing).

Transfer

Data regarding transfer required substantiating via MLANG SIMS to understand whether students were transferring programme internally – moving between Modern Languages/Modern Languages and Translation – or externally with joint honours partner schools.

Transfer destination is not noted in the data, however transfer destinations can be accessed via SIMS reports.

Taking the academic year 2022/23 as an example, SIMS data indicates that of the 83 students who transferred in their second year: 1 transferred to CARBS; 3 to ENCAP; 3 to LAWPL; 1 to SHARE and the remaining 75 transferred internally to different MLANG programmes.

As such, outcomes related to transfer are useful to understand the contextual information of students transferring but do not give the full picture. Internal transfer reasons may be linked to moving from a course with no year abroad to a course with a year abroad or vice versa.

Implementation

The data analysis process was initiated in August 2023 and the report was completed in February 2024. Data was gathered from BI systems held by central university and AHSS. No students were involved or contacted directly.

Methodology

The sample consists of 5 years of 1st year students in MLANG from the new entrant report (997 rows of data) and their various characteristics as found from SIMS. Separate pivot tables are constructed with the full populations of MLANG students who undergo withdrawal, absence, transfer, repeat years or remain registered. The various progression outcomes are placed into a Hierarchy *(fig. 1)* which ensures that each student ends with a single outcome to avoid double counting.

Overall Outcome
Withdraw - YR1
Transfer - YR1/1S
Repeat - YR1
Absent - YR1
Withdraw - YR2
Transfer - YR2
Absent - YR2
Registered

(Fig. 1 Outcome Hierarchy.)

Though there are 5 years of *first year* students our analysis takes place over 6 years to account for the second year progression of the final year of students.

Once the outcome is attached to the students we then perform several analysis by grouping the students into new populations based on the target characteristic, or by binning students for a continuous characteristic such as tariff.

Percentages are calculated for each of the progression outcomes based on the characteristic population and compared the population of students that do not possess this characteristic.

With thanks to Tom Washington for providing this methodology section.

Data Analysis

For the purposes of analysis, data are grouped into Academic, Demographic, and Contextual outcomes.

Academic Information

Student who have an A-level matching the language of their course

Students who have an A-level language matching the language of their course

Overall Outcome	No	Yes
Withdraw - YR1	11%	5%
Transfer - YR1/1S	5%	1%
Repeat - YR1	1%	2%
Absent - YR1	1%	1%
Withdraw - YR2	4%	3%
Transfer - YR2	10%	12%
Absent - YR2	2%	0%
Registered	66%	76%

There is a notable difference in those likely to progress. Students with an A-level matching their degree course are 10% more likely to continue to in their studies. Within Yr 1, there is a withdrawal rate of 11% for those without matching A levels, compared to a 5% withdrawal rate for those with matching A levels.

In Yr 2, outcome rates are comparable across the two variables, with transfer being the highest outcome.

Summary

Students with an A-level matching their degree course are at a significant advantage in terms of progression data in the first year, this difference levels out by the second year.

Transfer rates in Yr 2 are not dependent on previous study and transfers are predominantly internal between BA Modern Languages; BA Modern Languages and Translation; BA Translation.

Outcomes by tariff point range

Outcomes by tariff point range

Overall Outcome	-1	20-39	40-59	60-79	80-99	100-119	120-139	140-159	160-179	180-199	200-219	220-239	240-259	260-279	280-299
Withdraw - YR1	15%	29%	33%	30%	12%	8%	5%	9%	2%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Transfer - YR1/1S	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%	5%	3%	1%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Repeat - YR1	2%	0%	0%	10%	5%	1%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Absent - YR1	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Withdraw - YR2	3%	0%	17%	0%	7%	2%	4%	4%	1%	6%	9%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Transfer - YR2	10%	0%	33%	10%	15%	12%	14%	7%	6%	9%	13%	13%	0%	0%	0%
Absent - YR2	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Registered	67%	71%	17%	50%	55%	71%	70%	77%	82%	79%	78%	88%	100%	100%	100%

Outcomes by entry qualification were extrapolated both by tariff point range and by grade profile. The School of Modern Languages accepts entry qualifications from a range of pathways, therefore to analyse entry by grade profile only would miss students coming through non A-level routes.

Progression data indicates that the higher a student's tariff point, the more likely they are to progress.

From 140 tariff points upwards, there are very high levels of progression. 77% of those with 140-159 tariff points progress; 82% progress in the 160-179 range; 78% in the 180-199 range. Students with tariffs over 200 are highly likely to progress with just 4 transfers and 2 Yr 2 withdrawals in the five-year period. In terms of A-level equivalent, 144 tariff points is AAA at A level, therefore students with A Level grades of A and above are likely to progress.

The areas of concern are the lower tariff points. 50% of students in the 60-79 range progress, 55% of those in the 80-99 range progressed, 71% of those in 100-119, and 70% of those in the 120-139 range. In terms of A Level equivalent, 88 tariff points equates to CCD, and 112 tariff points equates to BBC.

The School of Modern Languages entry requirement is 120 tariff points, and 120-139 is the most populous range of marks in the data, with 262 students gaining 120-139 tariff points. The second most populous group is students with 100-119 tariff points, just below the School's entry requirements. Depending on the year of intake, students in this range may have been offered a place through pre-agreed softening levels or through the clearing system. In total there were 301 students in the period 2018-2023 registered with tariff points below 120, ranging from 60-199.

Summary

Students who perform well in A-levels or equivalent are more likely to progress.

Students at Cardiff who did not achieve the entry requirements, are less likely to progress.

Students who arrive through additional softening levels of entry requirements are less likely to progress than students who met the initial entry requirement.

Students who arrive through clearing are more vulnerable.

Outcomes by grade profile

Outcomes by grade profile

Overall Outcome	***	**A	*AA	AAA	AAB	ABB	BBB	BBC	BCC	CCC	CCD	CDD	N/A
Withdraw - YR1	0%	0%	10%	0%	3%	6%	8%	4%	7%	9%	9%	0%	15%
Transfer - YR1/1S	0%	3%	0%	0%	4%	1%	3%	3%	5%	7%	9%	0%	3%
Repeat - YR1	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	9%	0%	0%	2%
Absent - YR1	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%
Withdraw - YR2	11%	3%	0%	0%	3%	7%	3%	4%	3%	5%	9%	0%	3%
Transfer - YR2	6%	13%	7%	7%	11%	12%	15%	11%	9%	9%	9%	0%	11%
Absent - YR2	0%	3%	2%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Registered	83%	77%	80%	93%	78%	72%	71%	73%	72%	59%	64%	100%	63%

This analysis mirrors the results for outcomes by tariff point.

There is a direct correlation between students who achieved the highest A-level results and retention.

The School of Modern Languages entry requirement is stated on UCAS as ABB-BBB. https://digital.ucas.com/coursedisplay/courses/3be8d0ea-4960-4012-fe10-509e66a66c81?SearchText=#entry-requirements, accessed 12/07/2024)

As with tariff points, it is pertinent to note the numbers of students who met the entry requirements and those whose A-level results were below the entry requirements.

Over the period 419 students entered on BBB or above and 290 students entered on BBC or lower.

Summary

Grade profile mirrors tariff point and suggests students who arrive at Cardiff with lower grades than the initial entry requirements are more vulnerable.

Outcomes by IDRC Code

Outcomes by IDRC Code

Overall Outcome	..UF	....UF	UF	CFUF	CIUF	NOT FOUND
Withdraw - YR1	0%	10%	9%	7%	5%	9%
Transfer - YR1/1S	0%	4%	3%	3%	2%	3%
Repeat - YR1	0%	4%	0%	2%	2%	0%
Absent - YR1	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Withdraw - YR2	100%	6%	3%	3%	2%	5%
Transfer - YR2	0%	14%	8%	11%	8%	9%
Absent - YR2	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%
Registered	0%	59%	77%	73%	82%	72%

IDRC (Initial Decision Response Code) is the coding system that tracks a students' journey from offer to acceptance at Cardiff University. The data shows students who have arrived through clearing, who had received their grades before applying, for whom Cardiff was the first choice and who received a conditional offer, who did not have Cardiff as their first choice but as their second choice.

Codes related to clearing (...UF and ....UF) have significantly lower progression rates than students who applied after receiving their results (UF), those who received and met a conditional offer, including softening (CFUF), and those for whom Cardiff was a second choice (CIUF). The 'not found' statistics are likely to be students who transferred in from other institutions or who were internal transfers.

In terms of student numbers, the largest group is CFUF, those who met conditional offer inc. softening (516), which suggests students coming straight from school/college make up the majority of students (correlated by outcomes by age below). The second largest intake is through clearing (271 students). Students who applied already in possession of their entry qualification is significantly smaller (109), those who did not have Cardiff as a first choice is the smallest group (66), with 87 students in the 'not found' code.

Out of the students who arrived through clearing, Year 1 withdrawal rates were 10%, compared to 7% for those who received a conditional offer, and 5% of those who did not have Cardiff as a first choice.

Further breakdown of the CFUF data would be useful to understand how many of this group were admitted through softening and how many met the entry requirements. This information would map better to the tariff and grade outcomes above and allow us to see more clearly if the progression trends are linked to the entry pathway.

The UF data is of note: students on this code already knew the results of entry qualifications before applying, therefore did not need a conditional offer. These students are not immediate school-leavers, they may have had a gap year or may be mature students (over 21). Within this code, there is a 9% withdrawal rate in Year 1. These data need to be viewed in tandem with the Outcomes by young/mature which is analysed below, and indicate that the majority of students are young (under 21) on entry to university, but that mature students (over 21) are less likely to progress.

Summary

Data indicate Cardiff attracts younger students, straight from school/college.

31% of Cardiff students in the years to which the data relates entered through clearing.

Outcomes by course type: Single honours, Joint honours, Internal Joint Honours

Outcomes by course type: Single honours, Joint honours and Internal Joint Honours

Overall Outcome	▼	Internal joint	External Joint	Single Honours
Withdraw - YR1		7%	7%	10%
Transfer - YR1/1S		2%	2%	5%
Repeat - YR1		1%	3%	1%
Absent - YR1		1%	0%	1%
Withdraw - YR2		4%	3%	4%
Transfer - YR2		9%	8%	16%
Absent - YR2		1%	0%	1%
Registered		75%	76%	61%

These data refer to the courses students have been accepted on. In terms of student numbers across Year 1 and Year 2 students, more students study internal joint honours, next external joint honours, finally single honours.

Single honours students fare worse than joint honours, with overall retention of 61%. This is well below rates for joint honours and well below the base outcomes across the entire student population, which is 71%. Withdrawal rates are higher in this population in Year 1, and transfer rates are substantially higher than other groups in Year 2: 16% transfer from single honours, whereas transfer rates for internal joint are 9% and external joint 8%. Transfer data do not indicate whether single honours students transfer internally or change degree programme.

Discussion

The analysis above indicates that the better a student does at A-level, the more likely they are to progress past the first year at the university. It also indicates that those who have an A-level in common with their undergraduate programme are more likely to progress. Areas of concern emerge from those who do not reach entry requirements for the university and from those who do not have the A-level in the subject they study.

Those who come into the university with lower tariff points and lower grades are at higher risk of transfer and withdrawal this includes students who come in just below entry requirements and those significantly below entry requirements. Students significantly below entry requirements in terms of tariff points were much less likely to progress and therefore require more support to succeed and progress past their first year.

Students who come in through on their conditional offers are the largest proportion of our student population according to the IDRC Code, further breakdown is required to see how many of these students achieved the entry requirements and how many came in as a result of grade softening as results show that those who receive grades and tariff points below the entry requirements are less likely to progress and require more support.

There is a trend amongst the data that suggests students entering through clearing are less likely to progress and therefore require more support, especially in their first year.

Data also indicates mature students are less likely to progress and may require more support, especially as they are a lower in numbers within our student body.

Single honours students also require much more support than those on joint honours programmes as they have higher levels of progression and of transfers in their second year.

Implications of findings

A significant number of students come to Cardiff via clearing, around one third in the years covered by the data.

Students with grades below the offer requirements are more likely to withdraw, transfer, repeat, or take interruption of studies. These may be students who come through clearing or through grade softening.

Students without an A Level in the language they are studying are less likely to progress.

The academic provision in the School of Modern Languages is aimed at students meeting the qualification requirements of BBB and above. Given the number of students whose A levels and tariff points are below this threshold, the School needs to do more to support students who do not meet this threshold.

Students on a single honours programme also appear to struggle much more than those on joint honours programmes and therefore may require more support, be that through meetings with tutors or opportunities to meet with peers and student representatives or other support systems within MLANG and the University. These students may take more classes that do not fall within their single honours programme which means that they may not connect as well with their peers or with the works as often single honours students take supplementary modules in the first year or two depending on the language they study. This could affect their overall motivation and lead to transfers and withdrawal if they are unmotivated or lack the enthusiasm across all the modules they take and subjects they study.

Demographic Information

Outcomes by Fee Status

Outcomes by Fee Status

Overall Outcome	Home	Overseas
Withdraw - YR1	8%	19%
Transfer - YR1/1S	3%	5%
Repeat - YR1	2%	0%
Absent - YR1	1%	0%
Withdraw - YR2	4%	0%
Transfer - YR2	11%	10%
Absent - YR2	1%	0%
Registered	71%	67%

The data indicate that overseas students are considerably more likely to withdraw within their first year of study. A limitation of this outcome is that the data cover a period of change in terms of access to Higher Education in the UK, with the necessity of student VISAs coming into force in January 2021. Looking at the data as student numbers rather than percentages, it is clear that a

very small number of students are overseas, in the period covered by the data, there was a total of 21 overseas students, compared to 975 home students. Of those 21, 4 withdrew in the first year, one transferred in the first year, and two transferred in Year 2.

Summary

What is noteworthy of these data is the low number of overseas students. The School of Modern Languages does not attract overseas students to undergraduate programmes.

Outcomes by domicile

Outcomes by domicile (Home Students)

Overall Outcome	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	France	Other
Withdraw - YR1	7%	12%	0%	7%	0%	12%
Transfer - YR1/1S	3%	2%	33%	7%	0%	3%
Repeat - YR1	2%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Absent - YR1	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Withdraw - YR2	3%	5%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Transfer - YR2	11%	13%	0%	0%	0%	9%
Absent - YR2	1%	1%	0%	7%	0%	3%
Registered	73%	62%	67%	79%	100%	70%

Analysis of students by fee status in the previous section indicates that the majority of students at the School of Modern Language are 'home' students, i.e. UK residents. This section breaks down the home student data by UK domicile. Other may be students who were eligible for home student status and fees but who currently reside outside the UK.

In terms of numbers, the overwhelming majority of students come from England. In the period analysed 752 students were domiciled in England, only 165 in Wales, 3 in Scotland, and 14 in Northern Ireland. 8 students were domiciled in France and 33 in other countries.

English students fare better than the base outcome of 71%, the small number of students from Northern Ireland have the highest progression rates. Proportionately Welsh students fare the worst, with a progression rate of 62%, significantly below the base outcomes. Note particularly the high rate of withdrawal of Welsh students in Year 1 and again in Year 2 compared to other areas of the UK.

There are two factors of interest to the School of Modern Languages here: why are so few Welsh students studying at Cardiff compared to English students? Why do Welsh students have such lower rates of progression compared to students from other parts of the UK?

Summary

Students domiciled in Wales are less likely to progress than students domiciled in other parts of the UK.

Students domiciled in England outweigh students domiciled in other areas, including Wales.

Outcomes by polar4 quintile

No graph is provided due to sensitive nature of data.

Polar4 quintile data, available from the Office for Students (https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/search-by-postcode/) identifies the progression to Higher Education of young people (age 18-19) based

on their home postcode. Postcodes are divided into quintiles that correspond to different local areas. Quintile 1 represents areas with the lowest progression to Higher Education, and Quintile 5 represents areas with the highest rates of progression.

In terms of student numbers, the data shows the largest intake of students is from Quintile 5 areas. Student intake reduces proportionately to the quintile. The data base outcome for progression is 71%. Students from Quintile 5 homes progression outcome is 78%, students from Quintile 1 homes progression outcome is 61%. Students from lower quintiles are far more likely to withdraw in Year 1 and in Year 2 compared with other quintiles.

		Withdrawal % Yr 1	Withdrawal % Yr 2
Quintile 5	335 students	4	3
Quintile 4	203 students	9	3
Quintile 3	170 students	8	4
Quintile 2	131 students	9	4
Quintile 1	101 students	14	6

Students transfer rate is comparable across quintiles. Students from higher Polar4 Quintiles are more likely to transfer in year 1. Interruption of studies is slightly higher in Quintile 1 students.

Areas with higher numbers of young people attending university is also indicative of other factors, such as socio-economic factors and possibilities within postcode areas.

Summary

Most students come from Polar4 Quintile 5 and 4. Those coming from lower quintiles are more likely to withdraw from university within the first year.

Discussion

The analysis above illustrates that Cardiff University mainly attracts English students and does not attract or retain local Welsh students. Welsh students have a higher rate of withdrawal and a lower rate of progression. Cardiff does not seem to retain and/or attract local students.

What is noteworthy of these data is the low number of overseas students. The School of Modern Languages does not attract overseas students to undergraduate programmes.

In the Polar4 data, we can conclude that there is a higher withdrawal rate in Quintile 1 within the first year of study. Postcodes and POLAR4 data are contextual flags that are used to assess socio-economic conditions. Quintile 5 has the largest intake and therefore the highest progression rate and the lowest withdrawal rate. Students from lower quintiles are far more likely to withdraw in Year 1 and Year 2. Areas with higher numbers of young people attending university is also indicative of other factors, such as socio-economic factors and possibilities within postcode areas.

Implications of findings

The analysis of demographic information suggests:

Students are predominantly from England.

MLANG does not attract overseas students.

Students from more affluent areas are more likely to progress.

Students domiciled in Wales have lower rates of progression than students from elsewhere in the UK.

Further research would be welcomed to investigate any link between contextual flags linked to socio-economic factors including POLAR4 quintile and domicile, particularly with regard to students domiciled in Wales. Many young people in the UK see Higher Education as part of a journey of personal independence involving going *away* to university (Champion, 2022). It is possible that young people domiciled in the Cardiff area who attend Cardiff University also have contextual flags or responsibilities that prevent them going away to university and at the same time increase their vulnerability to withdrawing from studies.

Personal Information

Outcomes by ethnicity

Outcomes by ethnicity

Overall Outcome	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Not Known	Arab	Other
Withdraw - YR1	8%	8%	13%	8%	0%	0%	50%
Transfer - YR1/1S	3%	5%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%
Repeat - YR1	2%	2%	6%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Absent - YR1	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Withdraw - YR2	4%	6%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Transfer - YR2	11%	6%	16%	4%	8%	33%	0%
Absent - YR2	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Registered	71%	72%	65%	71%	92%	67%	50%

The majority of students at the School of Modern Languages declare themselves as 'white'. Not known may indicate a response of 'prefer not to say'.

White   857

Mixed   65

Asian   31

Black   24

Not Known   12

Arab   3

Other   4

In the period of the data, students who indicated Asian ethnicity had higher rates of withdrawal in Year 1.

Summary

The School of Modern Languages is not ethnically diverse, with the majority of the student body declaring their ethnicity as 'white'.

Outcomes by young/mature

Outcomes by young/mature

Overall Outcome	Mature	Young
Withdraw - YR1	19%	7%
Transfer - YR1/1S	1%	3%
Repeat - YR1	1%	2%
Absent - YR1	1%	1%
Withdraw - YR2	3%	4%
Transfer - YR2	9%	11%
Absent - YR2	1%	1%
Registered	64%	72%

Mature for UCAS is over 21. The data does not break down into further age range categories. Numerically, over the period to which the data refer, there were 926 'young' students and 70 'mature' students.

'Mature' students are significantly more likely to withdraw from studies in Year 1, with a 19% withdrawal rate. Rates of progression settle after Year 1, and are comparable to the 'young' population.

Summary

Mature students, who are 21 and above, struggle more in the first year of study and are significantly more likely to withdraw compared to their younger counterparts.

Outcomes by gender

Outcomes by gender

Overall Outcome	Female	Male	Other
Withdraw - YR1	7%	10%	0%
Transfer - YR1/1S	3%	3%	0%
Repeat - YR1	1%	4%	0%
Absent - YR1	1%	1%	0%
Withdraw - YR2	3%	4%	0%
Transfer - YR2	9%	14%	17%
Absent - YR2	1%	1%	0%
Registered	75%	63%	83%

Students who identify as female significantly outnumber other groups. In the period, 662 students identifying as female were registered in years 1 and 2, compared to 328 students who identify as male, and 6 student who identify as other. The information provided by BI indicates preferred gender, statistics on sexuality were not included.

Rate of drop out is higher in male students, transfer rate is also much higher for male students and students identifying as other. This gender gap is known in language study, from GCSE onwards there is a trend for more female language learners than male (Mills, 2020). Student intake is indicative of the UK gap in language learning.

Summary

There is a gender imbalance in the student population, with numbers of female students doubling those of male students. Male students and those identifying as other are less likely to progress than female students.

More needs to be done across the sector to encourage male students towards the uptake and continuation of language learning.

Outcomes by contextual flag

No graph is provided due to sensitive nature of data.

UCAS contextual flags indicate a contextual marker that universities consider when making an offer. Contextual flags include postcode-derived data (POLAR4, the indexes of multiple deprivation, Department of Work and Pensions data on household income), data on school league tables and rates of students receiving free school meals, care-experienced status, refugee status (for Cardiff information on contextual data see: https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applying/contextual-data#:~:text=Contextual%20admissions%20is%20a%20university,focusing%20on%20their%20academic%20achievements).

Data was sought with Yes/No therefore no information was provided on the nature of the contextual flags. Approximately 22% of students at the School of Modern Languages in the period had a contextual flag on their UCAS form.

Withdrawal rates in Year 1 of students with contextual flag is significantly higher than those with no contextual flag. Retention rate of students with contextual flag is 66%, compared to 72% retention of students with no contextual flag.

Summary

Students with contextual flag are vulnerable and more likely to withdraw in Year 1 than students with no contextual flag. Withdrawal rates in Year 2 are marginally higher for those with contextual flag. Support for this student demographic in Year 1 is critical to retention.

Outcomes by disability group name

This data is sensitive and is not reported as a graph.

Data outcomes were: known to be disabled, no known disability, not known/sought, unknown. The value for not known/sought was too small to be statistically significant.

Students who declare no known disability have a 72% progression rate. Students who declare a disability have below average progression rates of 68%. Students whose disability status is unknown (prefer not to say) also have a progression rate of 68%.

In terms of student numbers, over the period 757 students declared no known disability, 205 students declared a disability, and 25 are unknown.

Rates of withdrawal are similar (Yr 1 disability 8%; no disability 7%), as are rates of transfer (Yr 2 disability 10%; no disability 11%). However, it is noteworthy that higher numbers of students with a declared disability of the students took interruption of studies (Yr 1 disability 4 students; no disability 2 students and Yr 2 disability 7 students; no disability 3 students).

Summary

Students known to have a disability experience lower progression than students who declare no disability.

Outcomes by parents' degree

Outcomes by parents degree

Overall Outcome	▾	Yes	No	Unknown
Withdraw - YR1		6%	11%	9%
Transfer - YR1/1S		4%	1%	2%
Repeat - YR1		2%	3%	1%
Absent - YR1		0%	1%	0%
Withdraw - YR2		3%	4%	3%
Transfer - YR2		9%	13%	13%
Absent - YR2		1%	2%	0%
Registered		74%	64%	71%

In this field, yes indicates a parent who has gone to university, no indicates no parent has gone to university, unknown indicates that the applicant does not know or prefers not to say.

In terms of numbers, significantly more students come from families in which at least one parent has a degree (Yes 552; No 228; Unknown 216). In terms of progression, students whose parents have a degree are more likely to progress. First generation students have significantly higher rates of withdrawal in Year 1, higher transfer rates in Year 2, repeat rates in Year 1 and higher rates of interruption of studies.

Summary

Student generally come from families in which at least one parent has attended university. Those from families where a parent has not attended university are 10% less likely to progress in their first choice of programme. They are also 5% more likely to withdraw from university in the first year.

Outcomes by carer description

No graph is provided due to sensitive nature of data.

A very small number of students are carers. Of these students a significant number withdraw from university within the first year. 8% of students who are not a carer withdraw in Year 1, compared to 24% of students who are carers. Carers are also 5% more likely to repeat Year 1 and 5% more likely to take interruption of studies. Given the retention baseline of 71%, those who are carers have a progression rate of 59%. Those who stay passed the first year are more likely to progress through the degree course. Cross data analysis indicates that students who are carers also are more likely to have other contextual flags, tend to be accepted through clearing on lower tariffs, and are more likely to be female by a ratio of 2:1.

Note on data: as mentioned in the Introduction, the data outcomes cover the pandemic but the data do not indicate if carer progression fluctuated during 2019/20 as a result of caring responsibilities.

Summary

Students who are carers are highly vulnerable to withdrawing from university in the first year.

A clear profile emerges here of a very vulnerable student profile: female carer with lower tariff points, other contextual flags.

Additional awareness and support is needed to get through the first year.

Discussion

Across the areas covered by the data on personal characteristics we find that students need more support, especially in the first year, in order to progress. The data shows that MLANG is not a very ethnically diverse school with the majority of students being white. However, although there aren't many Asian students, the data shows that they have a higher withdrawal rate. Mature students (Students over the age of 21) are more likely to withdraw in their first year with a 19% withdrawal rate. These students may find it harder to connect with their peers and fully engage in the student experience and therefore feel more isolated within their experiences at the University. More can be done within MLANG to create connections between students and support students struggling, possibly with more regular meetings with personal tutors as most students do not see their personal tutor often and may not be accessing the support networks within MLANG ,and the University as a whole, available to them.

There is also a large gender imbalance in MLANG with double the number of female students as there are male students and 'other' students who do not identify as male or female.

In terms of contextual flags, 22% of MLANG students identified a contextual flag in their UCAS application. This links to the data on domicile and POLAR4 and these students definitely require more support to progress through first year and stay through to graduation. Students who are carers are often female and have lower tariff points, suggesting they are coming in through clearing and also often have other contextual flags. These students require more support and clearer access to support. First generation students who are the first to come to university in their family are less likely to progress. Students who have identified disabilities are also less likely to progress than those without disabilities.

What we are finding is many students for a variety of reasons are requiring more support and are at risk of withdrawal and transfers. This could be due to Mental Health struggles alongside many other struggles that people may be facing within their lives. The key here is to find more ways to support all students and create better awareness of the support available to students and make it readily accessible so that we can be there for our students before they are at a stage of withdrawing or requesting transfers. This may include regular conversations about support with students, increased meetings with personal tutors, safe spaces for our students and spaces to talk things through with peers (reps) and staff or professionals.

Implications of findings

The analysis of personal information indicates:

The student body is not ethnically diverse.

There is a significant gender imbalance in the student population.

Students who have contextual flags, carer status, disabilities, or who are over 21 are significantly more vulnerable in Year 1 and require addition support.

Summary

A clear picture emerges from the data of students more likely to succeed at Cardiff University and those whose progression is most at risk. This section provides a summarised list of the key findings above.

- Internal transfers account for the majority of Yr 1 and Yr 2 transfers.
- Students with an A-level matching their degree course are more likely to progress.
- Students who perform well in A-levels or equivalent are more likely to progress.
- Students at Cardiff who did not achieve the entry requirements, are less likely to progress.
- Students who arrive through additional softening levels of entry requirements are less likely to progress than students who met the initial entry requirement.
- Students who arrive through clearing are more vulnerable.
- Approximately one third of students arrive through clearing.
- The majority of students are school-leavers and under 21.
- The majority of students are domiciled in England.
- Progression rates are lowest in students domiciled in Wales.
- Students from POLAR4 quintiles 4 and 5 are more likely to progress.
- The student population lacks ethnic diversity.
- Mature students are a minority in the student body and less likely to progress than under-21s.
- Most students are female.
- Male students are less likely to progress.
- Students with declared disability are less likely to progress.
- Students with contextual flags are less likely to progress.
- Students with a parent/parents who have a degree are more likely to progress.
- Students who are carers are less likely to progress.

Comparative Data Analysis

This section analyses the findings above in relation to Cardiff University, Wales, and UK data. The data discussed is taken from HESA statistics, HEFCW reports, and Cardiff University reports. HESA data refers to the 2021/22 data, which is the most recent data set available at time of writing.

Student Characteristics

A recent report into university-wide data undertaken as part of the Y Sgwrs Fawr – The Big Conversation allows for comparison between MLANG data above and data from the University as a whole (Analysis and Insight Team, 2024). The report takes HESA data predominantly from the year 2021/22, except the Widening Participation data that comes from 2022/23. MLANG data spans a longer period, as detailed above.

	University	MLANG
International Students	22%	2%
Students domiciled in Wales	32%	16%
Students from rest of UK	45%	77%
Declared gender	59% female	66% female
Declared ethnic minority background	14%	14%
Declared disability	13%	20%
Parents without a degree	17%	23%

Classified as Widening Participation (contextual flags)	65.9%	22%

The comparative table allows us to see that MLANG is not just significantly below institution-wide statistics for international students, but also for students domiciled in Wales. As discussed above, the discrepancy may be linked to socio-economic capacities of the majority of MLANG students who have come to Cardiff to study in a different area to their domiciled address. The number of universities that offer language degrees continues to diminish, therefore choice of institution offering desired language combination may also influence choice of university and may necessitate choosing a university outside Wales. It is important to see this figure also in the context of progression rates for Wales domiciled students, which is considerably lower than student from other parts of the UK. The HEFCW Investigative Study into Higher Education in Wales (Verhamme, 2024, p. 4) notes that only 1 in 3 young people in Wales chooses to engage with Higher Education and that the higher the levels of contextual flags, the less likelihood there is of a young person applying for a university education. The statistics presented in the HEFCW report mirror the university-wide figures and the figures analysed for MLANG: 'people living in Wales who: have a disability, are carers, come from Roma, Gypsy and Traveller backgrounds, from Bangladeshi and White and Black Caribbean ethnic backgrounds or are young men, have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education'.

The HEFCW report goes on to state that of the 1 in 3 young people living in Wales who do study in Higher Education, 27-31% study outside Wales. As the MLANG report has also noted, there is a pattern indicating privilege as a factor in deciding whether to remain in Wales or move outside Wales for higher education (Verhamme, 2024). HESA 2021/22 data confirms significantly lower levels of intake for Language and Area Studies for young people domiciled in Wales:

	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Other UK	Total UK	EU	Non-EU	Total Non-UK	Total
9 Language and area studies	59,310	3,420	6,925	1,855	175	71,690	4,435	11,675	16,110	**87,79**

Declared gender shows that MLANG follows the same trend as university-wide data, however with a percentage of female students significantly higher than university-wide figures. This trend is visible in HESA data, with 63,445 female students and 23,675 male students in Language and Area Studies in 2021/22.

Data concerning declared ethnicity maps directly to the university-wide percentage, whereas declared disability and first generation students are more numerous in MLANG than the university figures. This reinforces the discussions above and indicates that MLANG would benefit from increased guidance and collaboration with disability services to ensure the needs of all students are met. Wales national data indicates that students with a known disability do not favour particular modes of engagement, however, there is a higher proportion of students with disabilities in distance learning courses than in in-person courses. (Verhamme, 2024). The implications for higher percentages of first generation students can also be seen in support networks, and this will be discussed in the questionnaire data sections. Students in transition to HE may seek help and advice from family members when they are unsure of how to navigate the university environment; students whose parents have a degree may be more knowledgeable on

how universities work and where help might be sought, thus creating a more secure support network, and an increased likelihood of progression.

HESA data from 2021/22 also confirms as national trends the number of people aged 20 and under studying Language and Area Studies as the dominant age range; and the spread of declared ethnicity:

Subject	19 Language and area studies
White	48,840
Black or Black British – Caribbean	560
Black or Black British – African	1,355
Other Black background	120
Asian or Asian British - Indian	1,065
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1,145
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	695
Other Asian background	620
Chinese	260
Mixed	3,655
Other	820
Total	59,145

The Cardiff report states that 65.9% of students coming to Cardiff University are classified as Widening participation. The report does not present sufficient granularity to map directly to the MLANG statistics presented above, however, indicates that 22% of MLANG students have contextual flag markers. This statistic suggests that there may be Schools and programmes across the University with significant experience of working with students coming to Cardiff through Widening Participation. HESA data spanning 2017-2021/22 indicates that Cardiff and MLANG data aligns with national statistics with POLAR4 data showing little movement in the low participation figures over the period. HESA data also indicates parents' profession as an important factor in young people attending university, with much higher numbers of students from higher and lower managerial and professional occupations than other categories. The project aims include creating and maintaining stronger links with Widening Participation, as will be discussed in the Action Plan.

The table below (Analysis and Insight Team, 2024, p. 7) shows University-wide completion data. Overall completion rates are 94.2%, however, the table presents where Cardiff is placed in rankings for completion among the three sets of competitors. The report notes that Cardiff was bottom in the Russell Group for retention in 2019/20.

	Russell Group	Wales	Sector
2014/15	15	1	21
2015/16	18	2	31
2016/17	17	2	28
2017/18	18	3	31
2018/19	18	1	23
2019/20	24	1	34

This information is very relevant to the Transitions project. It shows that the experiences of progression in MLANG is not atypical for Cardiff University and that the University as a whole needs to consider ways to support students to progress through their studies. Initiatives such as the MLANG Transitions Project can be presented in other Schools as an example of good practice and the Action Plan resulting from this project can be shared across the university.

Language Learning

The British Council report into language trends in Wales, notes that A-level entry has now stabilised to pre-pandemic levels, however a decline in language study at GCSE persists. Schools' engagement with national language initiatives such as Routes into Languages and Modern Foreign Language Mentoring is high and language teaching staff in primary and secondary are committed to improving language provision and uptake (Duff, 2023).

Comparison data using HESA statistics (2021/22) are presented by CAH code (Common Aggregation Hierarchy) in which language degree programmes are aggregated within Language and Area Studies, which also comprises degree programmes related to Linguistics, Literature, and languages not taught by Cardiff University. As such the following statistics lack granularity. Language and Area Studies at Cardiff has 28% fewer international students than the Russel Group median and similar percentages of home students as the Russel Group median (Analysis and Insight Team, 2024).

The most recent HESA Statistical Bulletin for 2021-22, however, identifies Language and Area Studies as the only subject with reduced enrolments over two consecutive years, with a 5% decrease in 2021/22 compared with the previous year. This data is explicitly linked by HESA to an ongoing decline in the study of languages (Mantle, 2023).

The comparative data analysis in this section indicates that Cardiff University data trends are aligned with overall UK data, however as a whole the University needs to do more to address issues of transition to Higher Education and retention of students. The next section of the report details the research undertaken by the project into the perspectives of current MLANG students, staff, and schools offering A level languages to identify ways to support students through their studies to graduation and beyond.

Section 2: Understanding Transition in MLANG

Introduction

In order to better understand the views Modern Languages students and how these perceptions of transition to Higher Education map to the perceptions of service provided by school and university teaching staff, a series of questionnaires were designed. Data gathered is intended to provide insight into the statistical data above and support the project in creating and implementing an action plan that is evidence-based, attuned to the needs of students, staff, and schools, and that hopes to produce tangible benefits to all students.

Questionnaire Design

Questionnaires were designed containing both qualitative and quantitative question types to build a strong profile of views on key issues which could be analysed thematically alongside the quantitative open-ended replies.

Methodology

The three questionnaires were designed collaboratively with a mirroring approach so that questions across the three populations surveyed could be thematically analysed together.

The broad themes covered in the three questionnaires are:

- Perceptions of preparedness for university life and learning
- Perceptions of aptitude in the transition to university life and learning
- Perceptions of engagement in the transition to university life and learning
- Perceptions of support during the transition to university life and learning

Administration of the questionnaires was undertaken by a member of the project team who was responsible for contacting the target population. Data analyses, discussion, and implications of findings were undertaken by Cardiff University Summer Placement Scheme Interns employed between June and September to collaborate on the project and to co-create the action plan.

Information on the methodology of each questionnaire, specific ethical considerations for the target population, and any limitations are discussed in the individual reports below collaboratively written by the student interns under the supervision of the project team member overseeing each questionnaire.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was sought for the administration of the three questionnaires and for a student workshop, which will take place in Semester 1 2024. The application, **Supporting Students in Transition into Higher Education**, was submitted to the School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) by Theresa Federici.

Ethical Approval was granted by the School Research Ethics Committee on 20/12/2023.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical consideration for all questionnaires concern anonymity, confidentiality, and safe data handling.

For all questionnaires Microsoft Forms was used in anonymous mode, so the email address of the participant is not communicated to the researchers. All questionnaires were administered via Cardiff University user IDs. Data collected in connection with the research project will be retained according to Cardiff University Research Records Retention Schedule, section 2.9, and will be retained for a minimum period of 5 years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data. Data will be retained in a secure folder in University online storage: MFA protected Cardiff University OneDrive. The folder will be deleted and any hard copies will be destroyed via confidential waste management at the end of the retention period.

Each questionnaire report briefly discusses ethical considerations and data handling with regard to the specific target populations.

The Participant Information Sheet for each questionnaire was attached to the Call for Participants. Informed consent was requested as the first question of each questionnaire as an obligatory yes/no field. Any participants who did not tick that they had read the PIS and gave their informed consent would be removed from the data set.

Team members each led on the administration of one questionnaire and guiding the student interns in writing the data analysis, discussion, and implications of findings. Authorship for each section is noted by questionnaire below.

Student Questionnaire Report

Report author and supervisor: **Marion Heuchert**

Report analysis and collaborative authors of the discussion and implications: **Anna Kiddier** and **Sophie Waite**.

Introduction
This questionnaire was designed to be sent to all undergraduate students at Cardiff University School of Modern Languages with the aim to collect data and information to aid in the transitions research project. The project's aim is to design a development plan and resources to support undergraduate students in the School of Modern Languages in their transition into academic life and language learning specifically. Students were asked to participate in a short anonymous MS-Forms questionnaire, consisting of mainly multiple choice and Likert scale questions on their perceptions of student-readiness for Higher Education at the end of A level or equivalent study/at the start of their university studies. The questionnaire took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Access to sample
This questionnaire is one of three questionnaires aimed at gathering a comprehensive review of the transition experience from the perspective of Cardiff University School of Modern Languages Students on transition reflecting on their experiences so far.

The questionnaire was sent out through internal comms to all MLANG undergraduate students, including Year 1, Year 2, Year Abroad and Final Year Students. Student reps then also sent a reminder out through their networks. Participation was on a self-selecting basis in the cohorts, there were no rewards for participating.

Sample
Give numbers of participants, break the numbers down by characteristic when we have asked for them i.e. for students, we asked language studied, academic year etc.

28 students answered the questionnaire, out of those 7 Year 1 Students, 12 Year 2 Students, 1 YA/Year 3 Student, 7 Final Year Students and 1 Incoming Exchange Student.
17 of the participants are on a Single or Joint Honours language degree, 5 in BA Modern Languages and Translation, 3 in BA Translation (3-year programme, no year abroad) and 3 on a Joint Honours degree with another school.

Of the participants 11 study French, 9 German, 13 Italian, 4 Japanese, and 13 Spanish. The number here is larger than the overall number of participants due to many of our students being joint honour students who study 2 languages.

There are no representatives for Mandarin Chinese and Portuguese, for the other languages we have a good representation of the different languages studied that largely reflects the student demographic.

Ethical Considerations
To maintain anonymity and confidentiality within this questionnaire, students were not asked for any protected characteristics. This includes gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality and disability. Therefore, the questionnaire can maintain complete confidentiality and none of the answers can be traced back to a specific student.

We have access to information such as age and gender through other data sources. However, it is not pertinent to what we want to find out with this questionnaire, at this point in time the level of information is sufficient as this is only a pilot questionnaire to gain first insights.

Limitations
We had low numbers of responses for this first roll out of the questionnaire, therefore the data is not truly representative of the entire MLANG student population, but it gives us a flavour and first insight. There were zero participants that studied Portuguese or Mandarin Chinese. The questionnaire was sent out at the start of the exam period which could be a possible explanation of the low participation.

Implementation
The questionnaire was released on May 6th 2024 and it was closed on July 1st 2024. The questionnaire was circulated through internal comms via email and announcements. It was also being circulated by student representatives in other non-university communication channels such as student WhatsApp groups.

Data Analysis

Q11
This question asked participants to rank a list of 10 items from most to least looking forward to in their University experience.
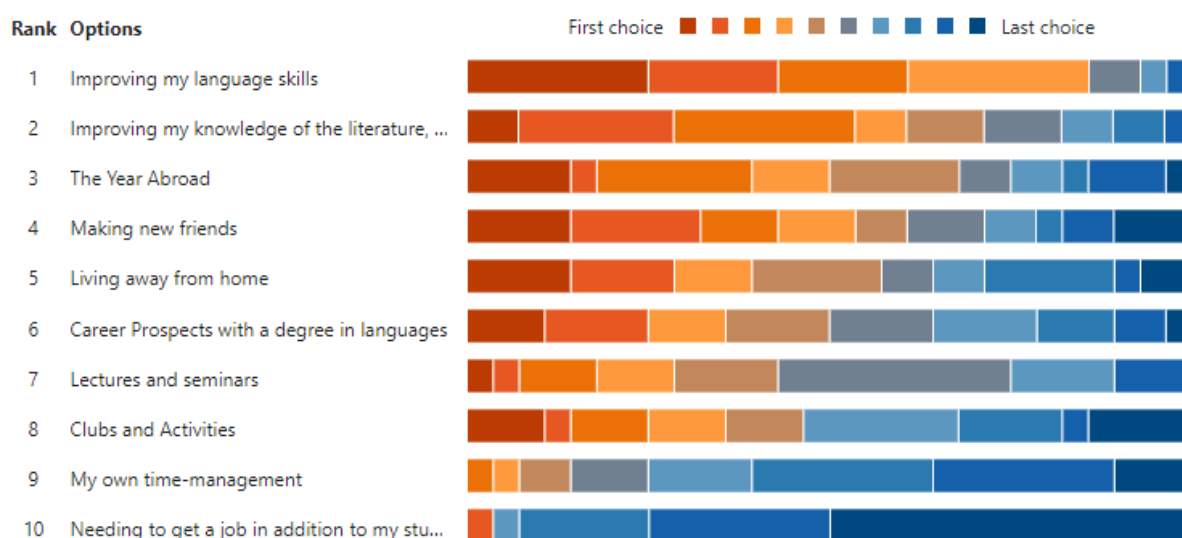
25% of participants ranked 'improving my language skills' as their first choice of what they looked forward to the most before coming to university. Also, 61% of participants ranked 'improving my language skills' in their top three. Only 7% of participants ranked improving my knowledge of the literature, history and culture first whereas 21% ranked it second and 25% ranked it third. The year abroad was ranked third overall with 21% of participant placing it there. Living away from home was ranked 5th overall with 18% of participants 50% of participants ranked 'needing to get a job in addition to my studies' as last choice.
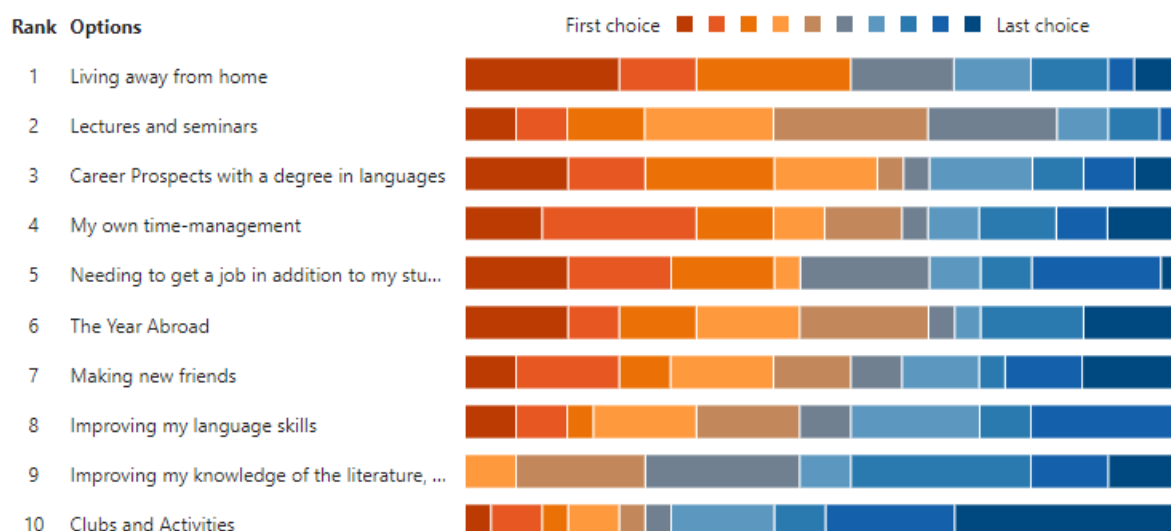
Q12
This question prompted an open-ended response for alternative criteria that participants were looking forward to before coming to university. There were ten responses to this question however four responses were not applicable. Language learning was mentioned in 30% of responses as well as enhancing their language skills. Participants also responded that they were

looking forward to getting more exposure into different language areas that they are interested in.

Q13
This question required participants to rank 10 options in order of what they were most to least concerned about before starting university.

| Rank	Options
1	Living away from home
2	Lectures and seminars
3	Career Prospects with a degree in languages
4	My own time-management
5	Needing to get a job in addition to my stu...
6	The Year Abroad
7	Making new friends
8	Improving my language skills
9	Improving my knowledge of the literature, ...
10	Clubs and Activities

Living away from home has the highest concern with 21% ranking it first choice. This could be argued as the biggest transition when coming to university. Lectures and seminars were ranked number two. Career prospects with a degree in languages was the third highest ranking category. My own time management was ranked fourth however in the breakdown of the rankings, for 21 % of participants it ranked second. Needing to get a job in addition to my studies ranked 5th with over 50% of participants choosing to rank it between 6th and 10th place. Improving my language skills ranked in 8th place overall as 46% of participants chose to rank it between 7th and 9th place. Improving my knowledge of literature, history and culture ranked 9th overall, this category was not in any participant's top three as what would concern them the most. Clubs and activities were ranked last with 32% of participants choosing to put it in last place.

Q14
Being asked for any further corncerns that were not on the list in Q13, there were 8 responses overall for this question, however three responses consisted of N/A. One participant emphasised mental health concerns stating that they were particularly concerned about 'being really lonely' and 'feeling really sad and sick all the time. Another response was concerned with self-study to supplement lessons and information to pass each year. There were also concerns about the Coronavirus and personal time management.
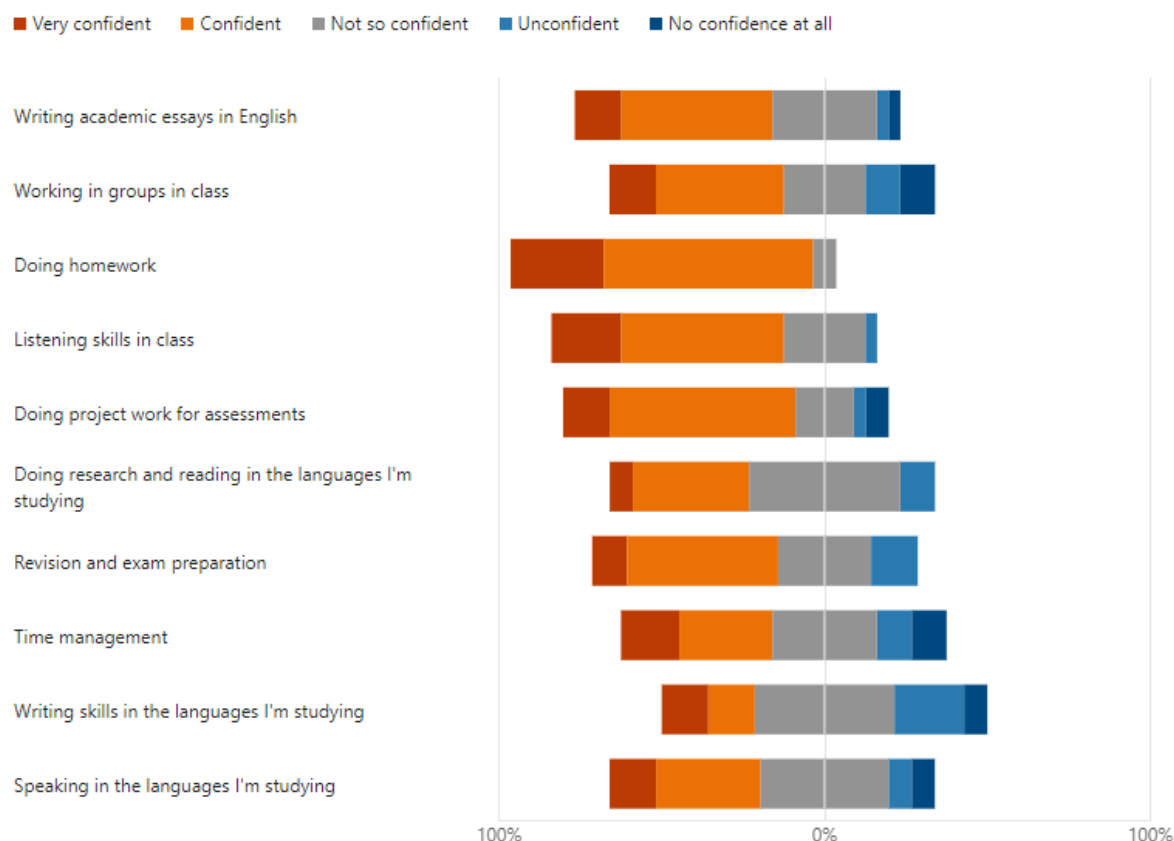
Q15

In this question, participants were asked to what extent they agreed with five statements.
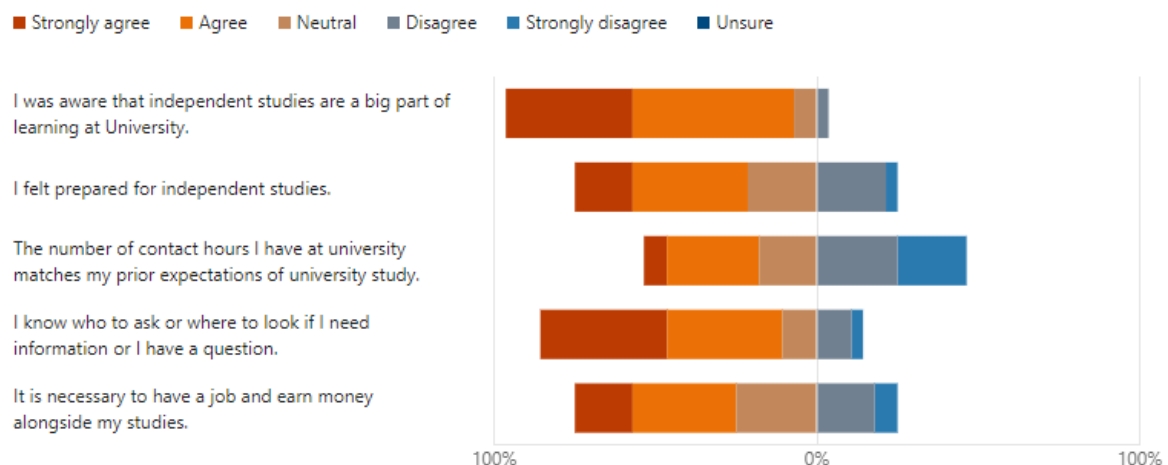
75% agree that they know who to contact or where to look if they need help or to ask a question. 46.4% of participants disagree that the number of contact hour they have at university matches expectations of university study. Only 35.7% agree that the number of contact hour they have at university matches expectations of university study. 89.3% of participants agree that they were aware of how independent studies are a big part of learning at university. 53.6% agree that they felt prepared for independent studies however 21.4% disagree that they felt prepared for independent studies at university. 50% of participants agree that it is necessary to have a job and earn money alongside their studies.

Q16

This question asked the participants to reflect on how confident they felt in specific areas of academic study when they first started at university.

Legend: Very confident | Confident | Not so confident | Unconfident | No confidence at all

Categories (top to bottom):
Writing academic essays in English
Working in groups in class
Doing homework
Listening skills in class
Doing project work for assessments
Doing research and reading in the languages I'm studying
Revision and exam preparation
Time management
Writing skills in the languages I'm studying
Speaking in the languages I'm studying

Only 28.6% of the participants are confident about writing skills in the language of study at the start of their first year of university. More than half of the participants didn't feel confident at all with speaking in the languages that they are studying. Almost three quarters of participants felt very confident or confident about their in class listening skills. 53.6% felt confident in their ability to work in groups in class. 57.1% felt confident in doing project work for assessments when they first transitioned to university. 46.4% of participants felt not so confident about doing research and reading in the languages that they are studying when they first started a university. 46.4% felt confident in revision and exam preparation and 32.1 % felt not so confident in their time management.

Q17
In this question students were given a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree with a neutral option and an unsure option. They were asked to think about their experience in their first year of university and respond accordingly to a set of statements.

17. Again thinking about when you started your first year of university, how much do you agree with the following statements:
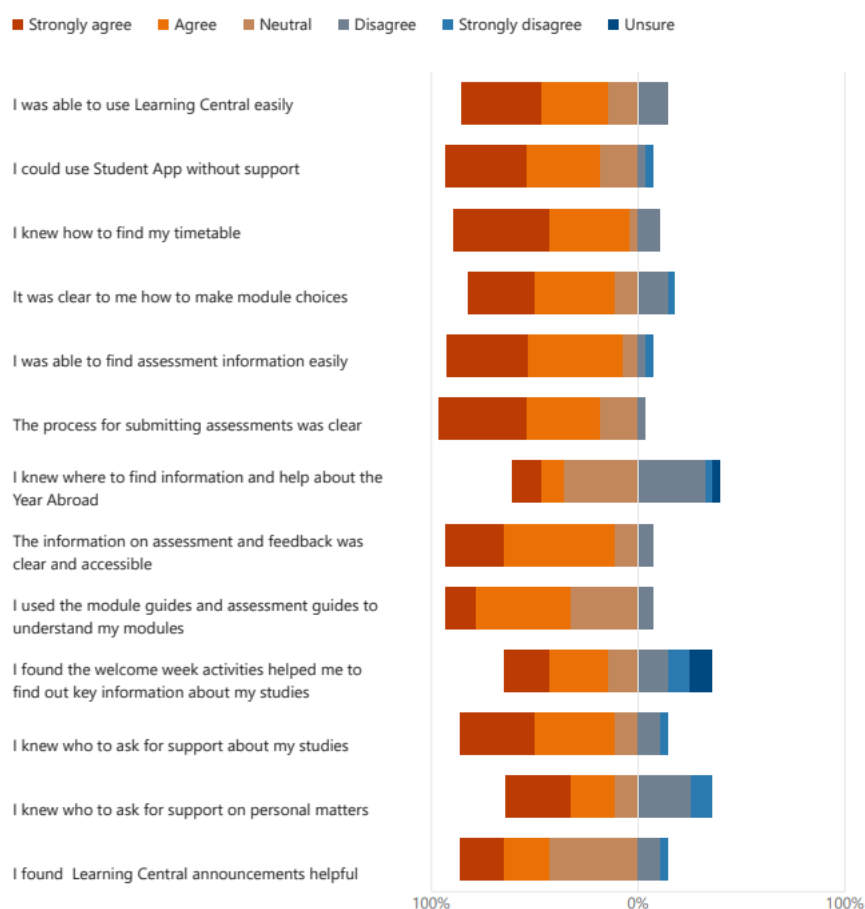
Over 70% agreed or strongly agreed that they could use LC easily.

75% said they agreed or strongly agreed that they could use the student app without support.

Over 85% knew where to find their timetables.

Over 70% said how to make module choices was clear.

Over 85% could find assessment information easily.

Over 75% found submitting assessments was clear.

How easy it was to find Year abroad information falls heavily into Neutral (35.7%) and Disagree (32.1%).

Over 80% found assessment and feedback clear and accessible.

In terms of using the module guide to understand modules, 46.4% agreed and another 32.1% said neutral suggesting this resource may not be being used as much as intended or may not be as clear and helpful for students as it aims to be. -> Module Kit – Assessment Information.

Only 50% of students found welcome week helpful.

Around 75% of students knew to to ask for support with their studies.

Just over 50% knew who to ask for support on personal matters and 25% disagreed saying they did not know to go to for this type of support.

Over 40% found LC announcements helpful and another over 40% were neutral on the matter – key for knowing ways to communicate.

Q18
In terms of their emotional and mental wellbeing in first year, 16 students knew where to access support, 11 students didn't, and 1 student continues to not know where they can access this support

Q19
When provided with an open comment section about areas where students would like more support, we had 12 responses, Half of these responses related to personal support or mental and emotional health support. Other responses mentioned essay writing support, issues with timetabling and needing support or guidance on reasonable adjustments.

Q20
When asked how they went about seeking help/guidance, the graph highlights the most frequent areas students access for support. Interestingly three students solely selected "Talk to my family/friends at home" as their means of accessing support.

● Look on Learning Central	20
● Look on the Student Intranet	17
● Contact Student Connect	12
● Ask for help from staff in the M…	8
● Ask my student mentor	2
● Talk to my student rep	1
● Ask friends on my course	17
● Ask my personal tutor	16
● Ask my lecturer	16
● Talk to my family/friends at home	20
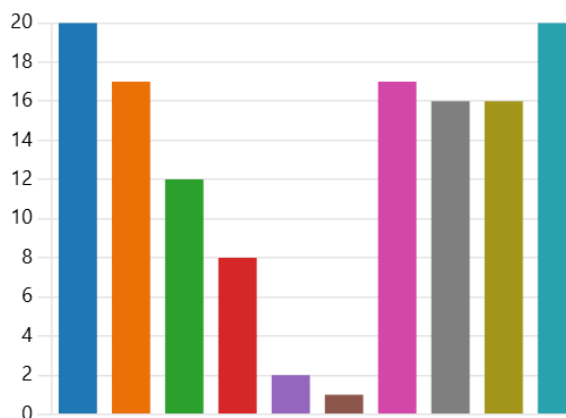
Q21
Other ways students accessed support, one student used online communities/reddit, one student spoke to other friends who had accessed counselling services through the university, One used Wellbeing services, DRT (disclosure response team) and the Student Union for support and the last student to respond to this section, other than two who replied with N/A, said therapy, MHULS (Mental Health University Liaison Service) and extenuating circumstances people.

Q22
In response to the question, "Before applying for your degree course, were you aware that you have to go abroad for a full year (with the exception of BA Translation Students)?", 24 students said yes and 4 said no.

Q23
This question gave space for any other comments on their experience in moving from school/college to Higher Education that are not covered in the questions above but was only responded to by 3 students stating with N/A or No, thank you.

Discussion

Independent studies and academic learning
Independent studies are a big part of university life therefore it is imperative that students are prepared and aware of this factor. In this questionnaire, 89.3% of participants agree that they were aware of how independent studies are a big part of learning at university and over half agreed that they felt prepared for independent studies. Participants felt more confident doing project work for assessments because of the coronavirus more independent learning has been installed in pre-university schooling. Students are more comfortable with doing the work in their own timeframe in contrast to completing time-constricted assessments in person and by hand.

A talking point is that for question 11, the top three choices for what participants were looking forward to the most are all academically inclined. Furthermore, language learning and exposure to different language related areas were mentioned in the open-ended answer section of question 12. This shows that students are looking forward to the academic areas of university and expanding their knowledge.

Impact of Covid
It is apparent from the data that the Covid-19 Pandemic has had a large impact on people's lives and their concerns about the future. In question 13, living away from home was ranked first for what our participants were most concerned about when coming to university. This is normal for student's moving away to go to university however the pandemic has heightened this concern for students due to increased time spent at home recently.
On the other hand, due to online learning, more than half of the participant's felt prepared for independent studies. This could be seen as a positive impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic as these independent study skills can help the transition to university life. However, the social impact is still imminent as just over half of our participants felt confident working in groups in class. This negative impact of online learning makes the transition to university more difficult as students must navigate many group work settings in university life. Another effect of online learning is the impact on student's speaking skills in their respective languages. More than half of participants didn't feel confident with speaking in the languages that they are studying when they first transitioned to university. This is also shown in the data as less than 30% felt confident in their writing skills in the languages they're studying.

Mental Health
A recurring theme within responses from students is the need for emotional and mental wellbeing support. Students have outlined various sources that they have accessed this support but out of the 28 student respondents, 11 students did not know where to access this support in their first year and 1 student answered saying they continue to not know where or how to access this support. Similarly, 25% of students in response to this questionnaire said they did not know who to go to for support on personal matters. One student had also responded to a question outlining their concerns about university saying they were particularly concerned about 'being really lonely' and 'feeling really sad and sick all the time'. Mental health support also came up 6 times in an open comment question about areas students feel they need support.
This is evidently an area of great concern for students and for staff as this is an area that needs more attention. There are many services and people available for students to access support, but it appears that students are not aware of their options and support systems within the university. Many people will also struggle to ask for support or where to go for support, so clearer signposting and information needs to be available to students to access the support when they need it most. Students look for support in different ways from different people and it is important

that students know the options available to them and the responses to this survey suggest that they do not know where or how to access the support they need.

Information on the Year Abroad
The responses to Q17 suggest that students would like more and clearer information on the Year Abroad. However, it needs to be considered that out of the 28 students who responded to the survey, 12 were Year 2 students just about to embark on their Year Abroad, hence the increased focus. This information is not yet relevant to such a degree for Year 1 students who are just about to start their university studies and is therefore not included in the implications of findings in this report.

Implications of findings
Based on the findings and discussion of the report, we can identify areas in students' academic and social environment where more support is needed.

Academically:
- According to the survey, students feel largely confident and prepared for independent studies and project work that they complete in their own time at university. However, they feel less confident in performing group work.
- The first part is encouraging, however, it should be compared with perceptions of teaching staff in the staff survey to assess if this perception is shared and if not, identify any discrepancies and their causes, e.g. what exactly falls under independent study.
- Since the questionnaire had been closed, NSS results came in, stating quite a low satisfaction rate (66.33%) among students for NSS Q8: 'To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study?'. This is evidence that more support and clarification is needed for students on independent studies and how they can be structured and tie in with their overall university experience as there seems to be a discrepancy between the students' perception and expectation when they start university and students looking back at the end of their degree.
- As group and team work is an important part of academic and post-academic work life and a skill employers look for, it is important to support students in this area, both academically and through creating opportunities for students to get together with peers at university and within an academic context more to help develop good work relationships as well as strategies to go about team work.
- Students feel less prepared for exams at university as they sat less or no exams in the past during the Covid 19 pandemic.
- There is an ongoing discussion about assessments within the University and School of Modern Languages with an overall trend to have less time-restricted exams. However, particularly in language teaching there is the feeling that exams are still needed as a measure of competence in the language. Therefore students should be better prepared throughout their journey. A collaboration with Academic Study Skills as well as the integration of exam preparation in classes would be beneficial.
- Students are mainly looking forward to broaden their academic skills and language skills as well as their language learning skills coming to MLANG, with speaking and writing in target language being the areas that are flagged most.
- Despite there being a large offer of extracurricular activities such as language cafés, film screenings and extra conversation classes, these are only taken up by a small percentage of students, same as the broad offer of Academic Study Skills. This is an area to work on.

Social Skills and Mental Health and Wellbeing:
- We see an emphasis on mental health and wellbeing in the transition process outlined by students that suggests more support is needed in this area.

- This is confirmed by the NSS outcome for MLANG for NSS Q26: 'How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing support service?' that only got a satisfaction rate of 62.89%.
- A collaboration with the Personal Tutor Team to include a better working network for mental health support that can give students more security during their university journey.

Following these findings and reflections, we also suggest the following more general and overarching actions to be taken into consideration:

- Repeating the student questionnaire at the start of the Autumn Semester 24/25 in order to gain more insights and a much larger, more representative sample to work of and check the collected data and findings from the first roll-out against.
- A follow-up student-champion-led workshop with a focus-group of students (on a voluntary basis) to discuss some of the findings and questions in more detail and involve students in creating a better support system to help with the transition into Higher Education.
- A Xerte resource that collects all relevant information in one place instead of sending students to numerous different websites. The link could then be included on LC in all modules and be easily re-shared with students any time.

Staff Questionnaire Report

Report author and supervisor: **Samia Zitouni**

Report analysis and collaborative authors of the discussion and implications: **Anna Kiddier** and **Sophie Waite**.

Introduction
The questionnaire was emailed to the teaching staff of the School of Modern Languages to collect data on their perceptions of students' awareness and abilities regarding key aspects of university learning. Respondents were asked to complete a short, anonymous MS Form questionnaire, primarily consisting of multiple-choice with an "I don't know" option and Likert scale questions, designed to take approximately five minutes to complete. The aim of this project is to identify areas for improvement and to enhance support for students transitioning from secondary to higher education. By gathering insights from teaching staff, the project seeks to pinpoint specific challenges and strengths in students' academic preparedness, thereby facilitating the design of a development plan and resources that can better equip students for the demands of university life.

Access to sample
The participation in the research project was entirely voluntary and anonymous.
The questionnaire was sent by email via MS Forms with anonymity enabled, so we could not see the email address or identity of the participant. This circulated via the DG MLANG All Staff group. (all teaching staff T&S; T&R).

Sample
29 members of staff responded to the questionnaire. As the questionnaire was anonymous, we don't know what language they are teaching and which year.

T&S: 34 members of staff
T&R: 28 members of staff
Less than 50% of the staff responded.

Ethical Considerations
We did not collect personal data. This survey circulated within MLANG using an anonymised MS Forms form. Data will be scanned and stored securely on Cardiff University OneDrive with MFA protection, with TLS and SRTP data encryption, adhering to GDPR guidelines.

Data collected in connection with the research project will be retained according to Cardiff University Research Records Retention Schedule, section 2.9, and will be retained for a minimum period of 5 years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data. Data will be retained in a secure folder in University online storage: MFA protected Cardiff University OneDrive. The folder will be deleted, and any hard copies will be destroyed via confidential waste management at the end of the retention period.

Limitations
MLANG staff survey: participants must be teaching staff within MLANG. Not all staff contacted have direct contact with First Year students.

Implementation

The questionnaire was released on the 03/05. For MLANG staff, we circulated email requests. The first one was sent on the 03/05, a reminder was sent on the 22/05/24 and a final email sent on the 05/06/24. The survey closed on 27 June 2024.

Data Analysis
Question 2
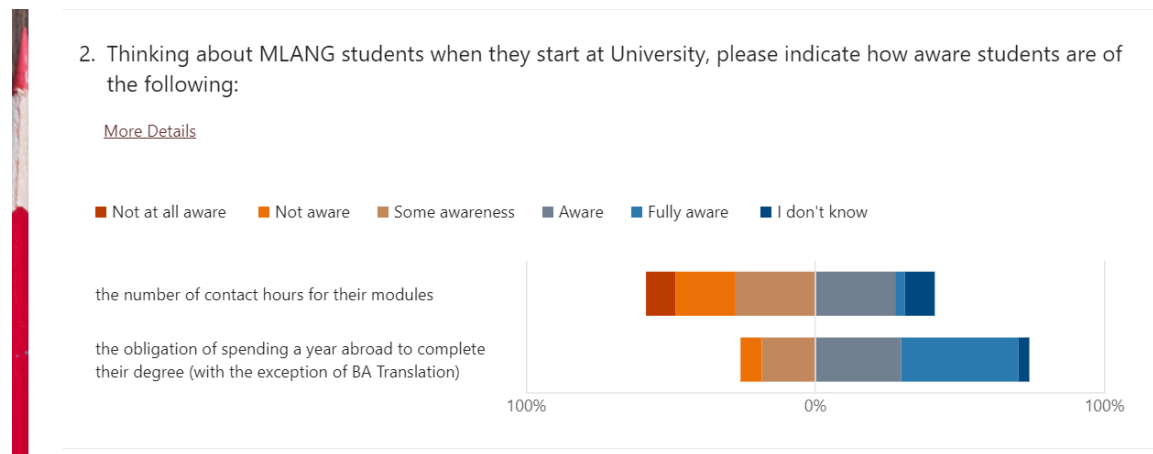
Staff believe that 55.2% of students are aware or have some awareness of the number of contact hours for their modules. Whereas 31% of students are perceived to be not aware or not aware at all of the contact hours for their modules. However, it is thought that just over 70% are aware of the obligation of spending a year abroad to complete their degree with the exception of BA Translation. It is believed by staff that 25.9% of student are not aware of the obligation to spend a year abroad.
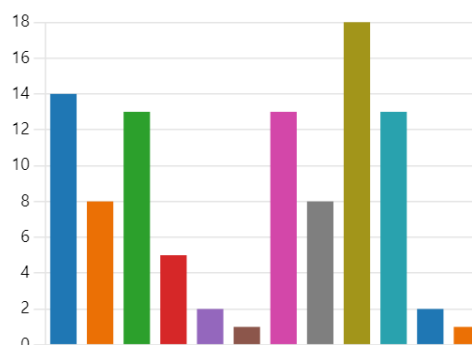
Question 3
When coming to university, the perception of staff is that student's biggest priority is their social life and making new friends with participants selecting 21 and 14 times respectively. Whereas time management is considered the lowest priority. Independence and academic life are deemed equally the second biggest priorities of students as well as the cost of living at university. Career prospects and living away from home are viewed as student's third priority when coming to university.

4. From the same list, what do you think are the areas that cause students most concern when starting university?

More Details

● academic life	14
● social life	8
● living away from home	13
● independence	5
● career prospects	2
● clubs and activities	1
● time-management	13
● making new friends	8
● cost of living at university	18
● needing to work in addition to s...	13
● I don't know what students' con...	2

Question 4
Staff believe that the cost of living at university causes students the biggest concern when they start at university as it was selected by 18 participants. Academic life was second with 14 selections. Needing to work, living away from home and time management are third with 13 selections. Career prospects and clubs and activities are perceived to be the least concerning for students.
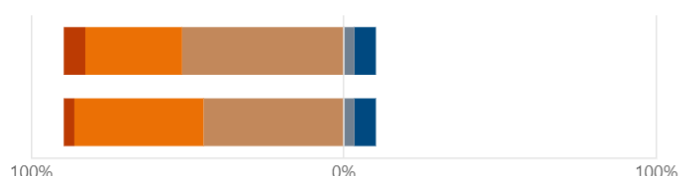
5. Thinking specifically about students' independent study skills and autonomy, please indicate how aware students are of the following when starting University:

More Details

■ Not at all aware   ■ Not aware   ■ Some awareness   ■ Aware   ■ Fully aware   ■ I don't know

the emphasis put on independent learning and autonomy in university

the resources available to support independent learning, such as libraries, online databases, or study...
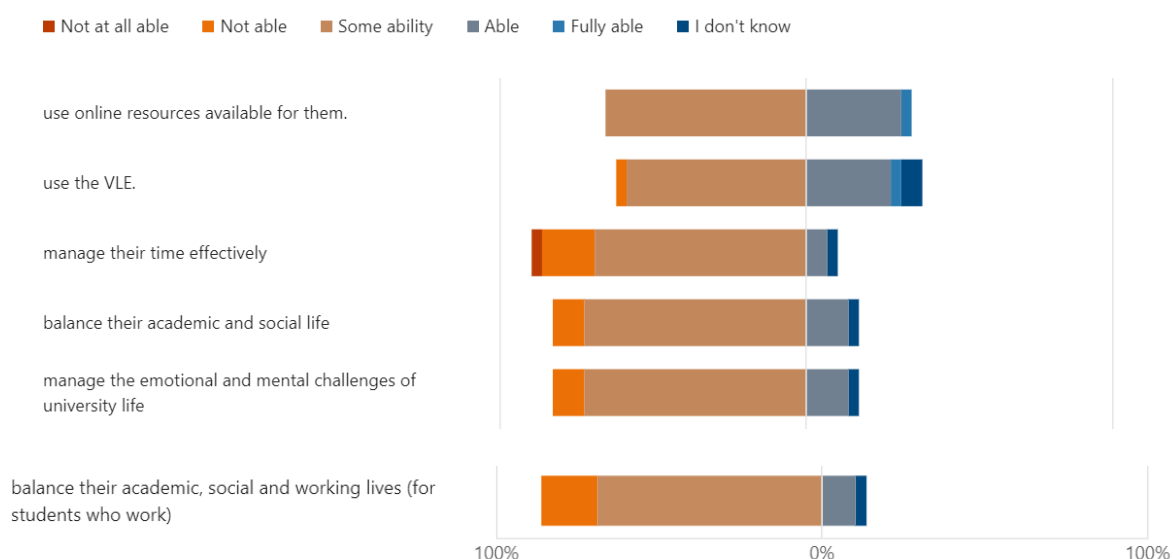

Question 5
Staff felt that students are not aware of how they will be taught at university. 51.7% are believed to have some awareness and 31% are not aware of the emphasis put on independent learning and autonomy in university. It is presumed that students do not know where to get resources that will enhance their independent learning. 86.2% of students have some awareness or not aware of the resources available to support independent learning.

6. Thinking specifically about students' independent study skills and autonomy, please indicate how able students are to the following, when starting University:

More Details

Question 6

Staff think that 65.5% of students have some ability to use online resources. For VLE use, the statistic of students that have some ability is 58.6%. It is believed that only 69% of students have some ability to manage their time effectively and 72.4% have some ability to balance their academic and social life. It is also deemed that 72.4% of students have some ability in managing the emotional and mental challenges of university life. This is similar for balancing their academic, social and working life with 69% of students only having some ability of doing that. Staff think that students mainly have some ability when it comes to independent study skills and autonomy when transitioning at university.

7. Thinking about students' mental health and well-being, please indicate how aware students are of the support available to them.

More Details
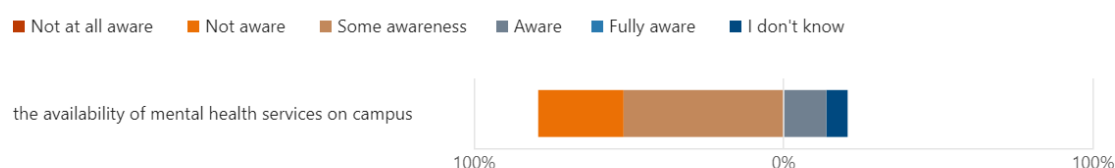
Question 7

Staff deem that students are not fully aware of the support available to them. 51.7% of students have some awareness and 27.6% are not aware of the availability of mental health services on campus.

8. Thinking about students' aspirations and goals, please indicate students' awareness of how they can use their language degree after graduation.

<u>More Details</u>
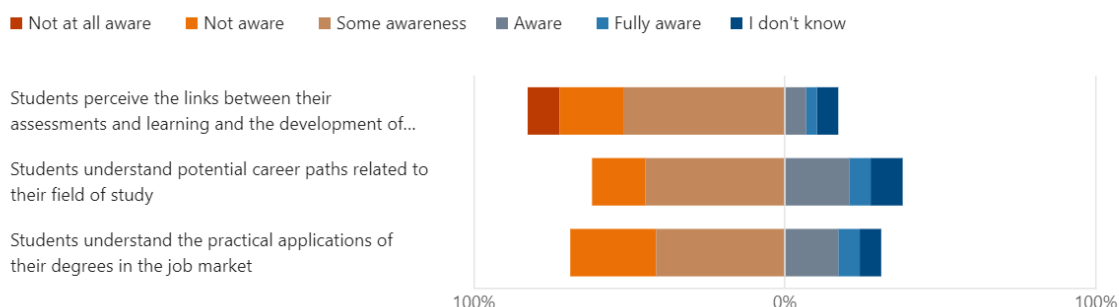
Question 8

It is viewed by staff that 51.7% have some awareness of the links between their assessments and learning and the development of graduate and transferable skills. 44.8% of students have some awareness about the understanding of potential career paths related to their field of study. 69% of students are believed to have some awareness or are not aware of the practical application of their degree in the job market.

Question 9

This question was an open-ended response question asking for further comments about student's perceptions and priorities when transitioning to university. One response highlighted the newfound use of AI and how that effects student's perceptions of functional language competence. There were comments about participants not having direct contact with Year 1s therefore they did not have constructive comments. One response emphasises the need to raise awareness on how to access information and services but still encouraging independence and trying not to 'spoon-feed'. Another response mentioned the lack of awareness around students needing to take historical and cultural modules to enrich their language skills.
Image of language learning and career prospects. Furthermore, time management was stressed again as something students to manage effectively especially in Year 1. One response highlighted that they do not have any direct contact with Year 1 students therefore they could not comment on student's abilities and capabilities.

Discussion

Although not all staff who responded to this questionnaire have direct contact with First Year students, staff believe students aren't fully aware of the resources available to them. Some staff also believe students are not aware of contact hours and not all students are aware of the obligation to go on a Year Abroad for most programmes. This means the school needs better advertisement of the obligations of the programmes and the way in which it is outlined, involving in person (lectures, seminars and workshops) and independent learning, as well as the year abroad and the reasons behind it.

Although the data is limited, there are clear similarities between staff thoughts and students' responses. Data from the two questionnaires validate each other. Staff felt 51.7% of students have some awareness and 27.6% are not aware of the availability of mental health services on campus, more needs to be done to highlight these services and allow our students to access

them. We could be highlighting personal tutors as a point of contact, and they can signpost to other services that are more specific to the needs of their individual tutees.

Staff perception of student priorities centre around social life whereas students felt they prioritised academics. There are great concerns regarding independent learning and learners' autonomy - 31% are not aware of the emphasis put on independent learning and autonomy in university. We also see that staff think most students have some to no awareness of the practical application of their degree in the job market, which emphasises the need to rethink assessments and how we advertise and involve students throughout the transition and degree as a whole to prepare them and allow them to see the professional value of their degree but also the transferable skills that are often spoken about but may not be directly understood and seen by students. This could be highlighted from Year 1.

Impacts of Covid and AI are universal but remain relevant to conversations about student support within MLANG and looking to the systems set up centrally throughout the University.
Further advice for time management seems to be wanted and required and advice for autonomous learning. Maybe raise awareness of secondary schools' teachers so they can explain or draw attention of their pupils about the stress put on autonomous learning in HE. Therefore Y 1 students would come more prepared for the change.

Implications of findings
- More training and support to Year 1 tutors to then be able to better support Year 1 students.
- Further advice for time management seems to be wanted and required and advice for autonomous learning.
- Signpost mental health advice, Action plan -> Personal tutor as a point of contact and they can signpost you to other services
- World Mental Health Day – Anna planning an event as a Rep – build it into action plan. Use it to build community and signpost.
- Impacts of Covid and AI are universal but remain relevant to conversations about student support within MLANG and looking to the systems set up centrally throughout the University.
- Highlight the practical application of their degree in the job market from Year 1 (see potential collaboration with Careers Advisors from Student Futures).

Schools Questionnaire Report

Report author and supervisor: **Nadia Nebot**

Report analysis and collaborative authors of the discussion and implications: **Anna Kiddier** and **Sophie Waite**.

Introduction
This questionnaire was sent to a range of secondary schools who teach Modern Languages across England and Wales with the purpose to collect data and information to smooth transition for starting undergraduates. The project's aim is to design a development plan and resources to support undergraduate students in the School of Modern Languages in their transition into academic life and language learning specifically. Teachers of languages and career advisers were asked to participate in a short anonymous MS-Forms questionnaire, consisting of mainly multiple choice and Likert scale questions on their perceptions of student-readiness and competencies for Higher Education at the end of A level or equivalent study/at the start of their university studies. The questionnaire took approximately 4 minutes to complete.

Access to sample
The questionnaire was sent to out via email to a range of High schools and 6th form schools across England and Wales. Schools targeted were state schools, faith schools, academies and private schools. Language teachers and career advisers were asked to participate. Participation was completely anonymous, and no rewards were offered for participation.

Sample
The questionnaire collected 27 responses across England and Wales which may be a limitation. However, the current questionnaire is only used as a pilot. The responses will support us in understanding what questions we need to ask in the full revised questionnaire version sent at a later date.
The responses collected come from Schools in Wales (78%) and England (22%).
Out of the 27 responses, the breakdown of responses is the following:

Type of School	Response
State School	15
Faith 6th form College	5
Private school	3
Academy	2
State 6th form College	1
Faith school	1

Location of Schools	Response
Wales	21
England	6

Type of School	Response
State School	15
Faith School	1
Private School	3
Academy	2

State Sixth Form College	1
Faith Sixth Form College	5

There was a wide range of roles held by respondents to the questionnaire including, Heads of MFL, language teachers, pastoral tutors and a French language assistant.

Role	Response
Head of MFL	3
Teacher	4
French Teacher	3
German Teacher	3
Welsh Teacher	2
French and Welsh bac Teacher	2
Head of year and Welsh Teacher	1
MFL Teacher	1
Assistant Head	1
Faculty Leader	1
Curriculum Leader and EAL Coordinator	1
Pastoral Tutor	1
Modern Language Assistant	1
French Assistant	1

When identifying what languages are taught at GCSE within the institutions of the respondents, the most taught languages are Welsh, French, German and Spanish. Those who responded with 'other' do not teach GCSE languages, only teach modern languages at A-level and one respondent specified that they used to teach French, but they had to stop due to low numbers, but their school does offer a range of GCSE languages that they can facilitate for bilingual students.

|	
Welsh	14
French	21
Spanish	11
German	16
Italian	0
Mandarin	0
Japanese	0
We do not teach at A-level	0
Other	5
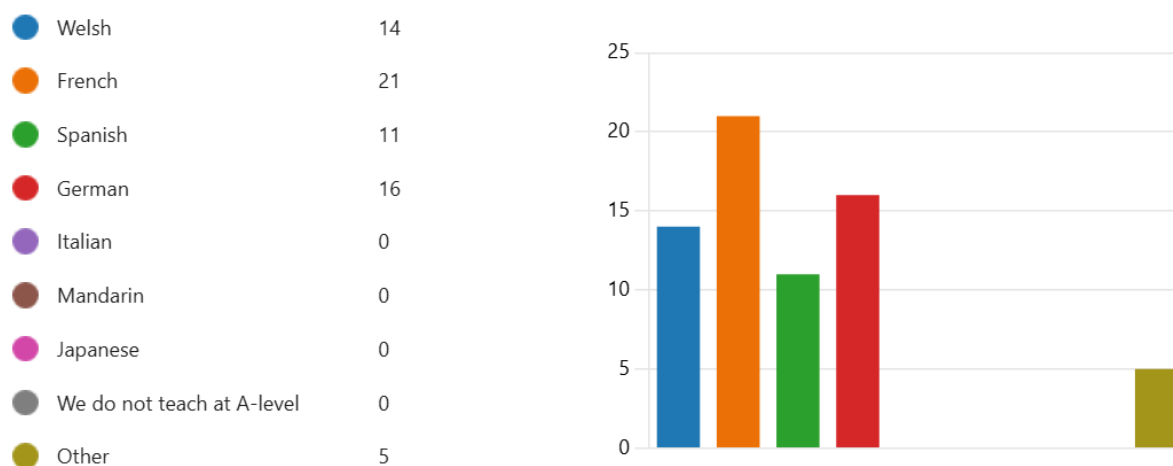
In terms of Higher Education initiatives, 78% of participants work in schools in Wales and have access to Routes into Languages and the Modern Language Mentoring Project. However, when

asked if respondents participate in a variety of initiatives and language opportunities, only 8 work with Routes into Languages and 6 work with the Modern Language Mentoring Project.

HE –led initiatives and language learning opportunities	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes	No	Blank
Routes into Languages	32%	68%	8	17	2
Modern Language Mentoring Project	28.6%	71.4%	6	15	6
Extra-Curricular language activities	88%	12%	22	3	2
Language Assistant	58.3%	41.7%	14	10	3
School exchange	33.3%	66.7%	8	16	3
Language clubs	61.5%	38.5%	16	10	1
Similar HE – Led Initiatives	38.1%	61.9%	8	13	6

8. Does your school participate in any of the following:
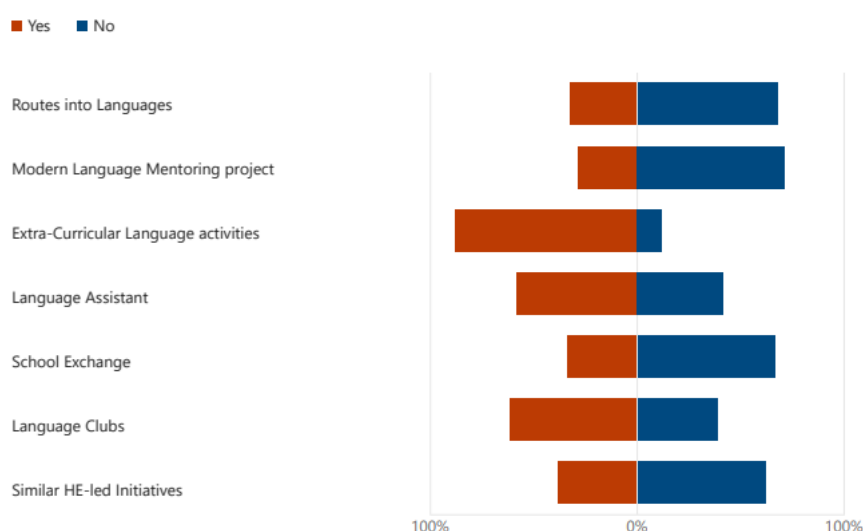
Ethical Considerations

To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, questionnaires were circulated to schools identified to us through MLANG/Routes into Languages/MFL project/ other. These questionnaires were sent to members of staff within the Language department of the school, career advisers and A Level language teachers.

Questionnaire were sent via MS Forms with anonymity enabled, so we will not see the email address or identity of the participants.

The consent process will record informed consent, role, workplace. The research team will have access to this data. Data will be scanned and stored securely on Cardiff University OneDrive with MFA protection, with TLS and SRTP data encryption, adhering to GDPR guidelines.

Limitations

This questionnaire is used as a pilot. Although, I would not classify 27 responses as low for a first roll out. The responses will give us some insight into how schools support and perceive their contribution to transition to University.

Implementation

The questionnaire was released on May 6th, 2024, and it was closed on July 5th 2024.
Emails were sent to network of schools who regularly engage with MLANG but also to school who have no link whatsoever with MLANG.

Data Analysis
The questions that categorise participants, such as role, course studied etc. will be discussed in the Sample section. This section focusses on the questions asking participants to evaluate and rank their experiences and the open-ended (written) answers provided.

Q9

When asked what types of independent studies are included in their curricula, 7 all of the above,13 Homework, 1 Competitions, 2 Revision, 1 all other than Listening Skills, 1 Projects, 1 didn't know what the question was asking.

9. What types of independent studies are included in your curriculum?

More Details

Revision	2
projects	1
Homework	13
Research	0
Listening Skills	0
Other	10
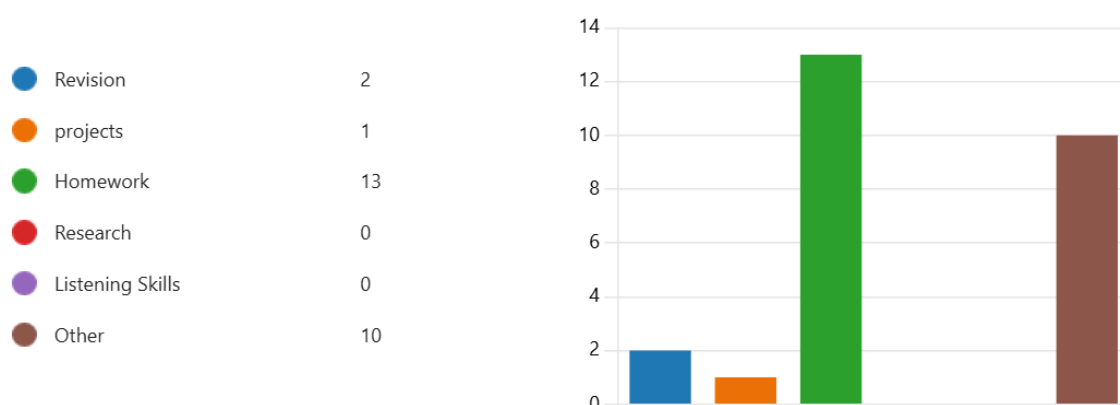
Q10
48% of the respondents felt their institution makes learners 'very' prepared for the transition to Higher Education, 41% felt they were preparing learners to 'some' extent for Higher Education and the other 11% indicated either 'little' or 'not at all'.
Q11
When asked if they discuss the type of academic skills students will need in Higher Education, 24 respondents said yes and 3 said no.
Q12
In response to whether their career service offer guidance in terms of jobs involving languages, 22 said yes and 5 said no.

Q13

1 Social Skills

2 Independant Learning

3 Time Management

4 Financial Management

■ Yes ■ No

It was asked whether they discuss life skills that support the transition to Higher Education. The life skills were split into 4 categories, Social Skills, Independent Learning, Time Management and Financial Management. As can be seen in this stacked bar chart, 80% felt they were preparing students in terms of social skills. 96% felt they were preparing students for Independent Learning and Time Management. However, only 67% felt they were preparing students in terms of Financial Management.

Q14

The last question asked for comments as to what they would do with more time and resources to better support students in their transition to university.

Responses that involve the university included taster sessions, visits to language departments at universities or visits from university students and discussions with graduates or Q &A sessions with current students and mini webinars that can be seen by students independently.

Other responses included time to look at courses together in more detail (students and teachers looking into university programmes), real world experience of languages in action, working on learners' autonomy.

Some responses felt like they already had a lot to offer students and one emphasised a lot was available, but it was up to the learners to take advantage of it or not.

Discussion

Throughout this questionnaire, it is apparent that schools feel they prepare their students well to transition into university life. 89% of participants feel they make their student prepared for university life. This can also be seen in question thirteen when the parameters of what they prepare their students are discussed. Almost all the participants feel they prepare students for time management and independent learning. However financial management is only prepared in 67% of participants schools. It could be argued that financial management is one of the biggest skill areas that needs developing during you transition to university.

The open-ended responses to question fourteen are of interest. There is a theme of participants wanting more access and exposure to the university language learning experience. This would include taster sessions, webinars and Q&As with current students. However, this is only useful if the learners take advantage of it. It would be imperative to make sure that transiting students are aware that all this information is available and that it is simple to access it.

Implications of findings

The key areas identified in this questionnaire are that schools would like more communication and information from universities during the first stages of choosing the university pathway. These include taster sessions, webinars and visits to language departments. In the action plan, we could implement and organise visits with students from schools so they could participate in taster sessions and Q&A session with current students and academics. This is already taking place. However, a more strategic approach could be implemented, not only on delivering sessions but on advising how to approach studies at university level.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to continue the discussion with schools. This could be achieved in the form of a workshop where an open discussion can be had, and more detail can be acquired by follow up questions on students and universities' expectations.

Conclusion

Questionnaire data indicate that there are substantial areas of disagreement across the surveyed populations particularly with regard to notions of preparedness for Higher Education. More discussion with schools and 6th form colleges is needed to understand what is meant by preparation for Higher Education, if this is exclusively focused on support and guidance for the application process, or if there is a shift in teaching strategies to include a wider range of self-governed learning activities in order to develop time management and independent learning skills.

Student questionnaire data suggest that students arrive at university with a perception of being prepared for the kind of learning that will take place, but many find the expectations of independent learning are not what they were anticipating. A key area for targeted support has been identified as this gap in understanding on the meaning of independent studies and how to support students in adjusting to the requirements of University study.

Section 3: Combined Findings and Areas for Action

Implications and Analysis of Findings for all Questionnaires

This section brings together the data analysis and identifies 4 key areas for action. The areas are discussed below with reference to all data collection sources.

Perceptions of preparedness for university life and learning

We see some discrepancy between the perception of preparedness of students for university life and learning here between the three different groups: students, university staff and school teachers. This discrepancy shows most in the area of independent studies. 89% of schools feel that they prepare students well for independent learning and time management. The student questionnaire results confirm that students feel largely prepared for independent studies when first coming to university. However, time management issues are then mentioned in free text comments and the newest NSS results for MLANG indicate a low satisfaction rate on students' side for the balance between directed studies and independent studies.

University staff are under the impression that students are not fully aware of all the resources available to them and of the emphasis put on independent studies and autonomous learning at university. This is backed up in tracking numbers on additional learning resources and materials on Learning Central, when only a handful of students ever open these.

Extracurricular activities to enhance academic studies and progression in learning languages as well as the academic skills services are only used by a very small percentage of students.

These findings indicate that there might be different perceptions and ideas what exactly independent studies are and include and what is expected in that area from students. A clear definition and communication between the different groups is needed.

Perceptions of aptitude in the transition to university life and learning

There is a discrepancy between school style learning, which is largely guided, even though more free research on students' side is included in A-levels, and the level of independent and autonomous learning that is expected at university level. It is vital to bridge this gap in independent learning early on, so that students not only feel ready to tackle university life learning when they first transition, but that their perception is also brought in line with staff' perception and expectations.

Staff feel that further advice for time management and autonomous learning is wanted and required by students to build autonomy and competence in this field, which links well to the previous mentions of involving academic skills services more and better promote or even include these services for students during their first year and throughout their studies.

Due to the amount of online work and resources available and used by students, students feel unequipped for the written exams, this is also partially due to the Covid-19 pandemic which saw students not sitting GCSE and A-Level exams and working entirely online and remotely. This may change as we leave this period of students who were affected academically by the pandemic, but the lack of written work continues to leave students feeling unprepared for exams. Use of the academic skills services and focus within the classroom on handwritten and timed tasks will aid students transitioning and preparing for end of year exams.

Additionally promoting teamwork, groupwork and collaboration is important as these are skills students will need and use regularly when working and these are skills employers look for. Students' and staff' perception is that students are often lacking in this area, which may also at least partly be due to Covid where students had considerably less exposure to working with peers.

The extracurricular activities like language cafes and film screenings are not in high attendance by students and need better promotion and a better connection to the degree programme as these activities play an important role in a successful transition to university and building up confidence and knowledge outside of classes.

Perceptions of engagement in the transition to university life and learning

Here we are looking at different stages and areas of engagement in the transition process: engagement from and at school, between schools and universities and from student side or rather between students and university.

The key areas identified are that schools would like more communication and information from universities during the first stages of choosing the university pathway. These include taster sessions, webinars, and visits to language departments. A lot of this is already taking place, however, a more strategic approach could be implemented, not only on delivering sessions but on advising how to approach studies at university level.

In the action plan, we could implement Q&A sessions for school students with current university students and academics.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to continue the discussion with schools. This could be achieved in the form of a workshop where an open discussion can be had to gain better understanding and insight on what is being done at school level and what at university level. More detail can be acquired by follow up questions on students' and universities' expectations.

Perceptions of support during the transition to university life and learning

The main area highlighted under this section is students' mental health and wellbeing. Students and staff are in agreement that more support and work is needed in this area. We see this confirmed in NSS results for this question: *How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing support service?* only got rated 62.89%.

There was a clear call in the staff survey for more training and support to Year 1 tutors in order to enable them to better support Year 1 students.

There was emphasis on mental health and the need for better and clearer support for students and better information on how to access the support available to them in the student survey as well.

A collaboration with the Personal Tutor Team to create a better working network for mental health support that can give students more security during their university journey within MLANG is strongly suggested.

Additionally, a collaboration with the Student Mentor scheme to include MLANG specific advice and support is desirable, given that the student questionnaire revealed that current students

don't seem to turn to their student mentor for help and support, although from a university perspective that would be highly advisable.

Similarly, the academic skills service is not being used by our students and offers services and advice that our students often look for and need to prevent mental health problems that stem from overwhelm in their workload and studies. Better promotion and use of these services would aid students and staff and needs better promotion and incorporation into students' academic commitments.

While a lot of support is in place already, students often struggle to find the relevant information on the student intranet. We therefore propose the creation of a Xerte resource that collects all relevant information in one place clearer and more streamlined for staff and students. The link could then be included on LC in all modules and be easily re-shared with students any time.

In addition, staff wanted to highlight the practical application of the degree programmes in the job market from Year 1 and suggested seeking discussion with Careers Advisors from Student Futures for further advice on how to best work with him to involve students in preparation for work, finding experience and seeing the professional skills they are developing throughout the entirety of their time here at University, but especially as modern languages students.

Recruitment and Retention data supporting the areas of action

Academic Information

A significant number of students come to Cardiff via clearing, around one third in the years covered by the data.

Students with grades below the offer requirements are more likely to withdraw, transfer, repeat, or take interruption of studies. These may be students who come through clearing or through grade softening.

Students without an A Level in the language they are studying are less likely to progress.

The academic provision in the School of Modern Languages is aimed at students meeting the qualification requirements of BBB and above. Given the number of students whose A levels and tariff points are below this threshold, the School needs to do more to support students who do not meet this threshold.

Students on a single honours programme also appear to struggle much more than those on joint honours programmes and therefore may require more support, be that through meetings with tutors or opportunities to meet with peers and student representatives or other support systems within MLANG and the University. These students may take more classes that do not fall within their single honours programme which means that they may not connect as well with their peers or with the works as often single honours students take supplementary modules in the first year or two depending on the language they study. This could affect their overall motivation and lead to transfers and withdrawal if they are unmotivated or lack the enthusiasm across all the modules they take and subjects they study.

Demographic Information

Students are predominantly from England.

MLANG does not attract overseas students.

Students from more affluent areas are more likely to progress.

Students domiciled in Wales have lower rates of progression than students from elsewhere in the UK.

Further research would be welcomed to investigate any link between contextual flags linked to socio-economic factors including POLAR4 quintile and domicile, particularly with regard to students domiciled in Wales. Many young people in the UK see Higher Education as part of a journey of personal independence involving going *away* to university (Champion, 2022). It is possible that young people domiciled in the Cardiff area who attend Cardiff University also have contextual flags or responsibilities that prevent them going away to university and at the same time increase their vulnerability to withdrawing from studies.

Personal Information

The student body is not ethnically diverse.

There is a significant gender imbalance in the student population.

Students who have contextual flags, carer status, disabilities, or who are over 21 are significantly more vulnerable in Year 1 and require addition support.

Section 4: Outcomes and Recommendations

Outcomes

This section details the outcomes of the project and the changes implemented in the academic year 2024/25 in the School of Modern Languages before discussing recommendations that can be implemented at a School level and an Institution-Wide level.

Outcome: Increase awareness of study resources, hidden curriculum, and skills development through School-wide Assessment Briefs

A new and standardised approach to communicating assessment information across all year groups (levels 4-7) was implemented by MLANG for 2024/25. Based on the data analysed in sections 1 and 2 of this report, an Assessment Brief form was developed by Theresa Federici that brings together in a single place information on assessment literacy, planning and skills training, purpose of assessment and skills gained. This inclusive approach to assessment literacy ensure that all students have access to the support they may need to understand and complete assessments to the best of their abilities. The form contains three sections: General Guidance, Assessment Information, Assessment Brief.

General Guidance provides information and links to the module assessment map (an overview of all formative and summative assessments with the dates for submission and feedback), the Marking Criteria, submission information, coversheets, links to key information on extenuating circumstances and other support available. This section is fixed for all assessments and provides a roadmap for navigating the unseen expectations of submitting assessment at university.

Assessment Information is specific to the individual assessment and provides information on the type of assessment, links to learning outcomes, permitted collaboration and AI usage, guidelines for referencing, style, and word/time limits, links to university-wide academic study skills classes and resources.

Assessment Brief provides information on the context of the assessment and how it supports students' development of graduate skills. Where possible assessments should have an authentic purpose, provide information about the intended audience and why this task is needed by that population. This section also supports students in articulating the skills they are gaining by linking the purpose of the assessment to their learning on the module and their future learning. The assessment also maps to the Cardiff University Graduate Attributes so that students are able to perceive the development of their professional and graduate skills progressively through the assessments they submit.

This approach is based on PRIME, an assessment design framework developed by Theresa Federici (2021) for inclusive assessment. The Assessment Briefs have been presented at national and international conferences, and have been commented on positively by students, staff, and external examiners.

Outcome: Further consultation with students.

In November 2024, a second round of the student questionnaire was administered in order to assess the views of students in their first semester. In order not to have repeat participants from the first questionnaire, the questionnaire was specifically targeted to students in year 1 and also in year 4, as they had been on a year abroad and were not included in the first round. 28 students

responded to the questionnaire, 16 from Year 1 and 11 in their final year. One participant was on their year abroad. In November 2024 the project also ran a student-led workshop 'How can we support you in your transition to Higher Education?'. Participation was a limitation in the workshop, with only 7 participants, however the comments and discussions from the workshop provided valuable insights into how to enhance support for students. The analysis and particularly the free-text comments from these consultations have been included in School level recommendations that have been implemented for academic year 2025/26. The comparative analysis of the student data will be published as a separate study.

Outcome: Move student skills sessions into timetabled slots during teaching weeks.

In 2024 the School of Modern Languages made key changes to the delivery of information regarding assessments, citing and referencing, and study skills for new students. The approach taken was a micro-transition approach in which students were given time to adjust and feel comfortable with the new learning environment and key information was discussed contiguous to its application to studies. This scaffolding approach supports student to engage with key elements of academic study at points in time when these skills are relevant and pertinent. Topics usually associated with induction week were built into timetabled sessions during teaching weeks. The sessions were organised at point of need. Assessment and Feedback, for example, was scheduled in Week 8 of the first semester to coincide with when students are introduced to the first assessments in their modules. This approach ensured scaffolding of student skills and knowledge in an inclusive way. Information on these topics continues to be available from the start of the programme in course information kits, module guides, assessment information, and student handbooks and are references by module teachers during classes, so students who wish to engage with these resources have every opportunity to do so. Attendance figures for the assessment and feedback training session as a timetabled session during teaching indicate significantly higher attendance and engagement than the same session run during Skills Week (Reading Week) in previous years, with over half of first year students attending, compared to one tenth in previous years.

MLANG offers a wide range of extracurricular learning and social opportunities for students and staff, such as cultural events, film club, language cafés, and talks. To support the micro-transition approach, in 2024/25 MLANG has organised inter-year social events that give final year students, who have spent a year abroad, the opportunity to talk to second- and first-year students about their experiences, the planning and preparation, things that went well, and things that were challenging. These safe, social spaces allow first- and second-year students to think about how to manage their own year abroad and to start considering how they may adapt to that transition.

In addition, in the academic year 2024/25, Deputy Head of School Dr Caroline Lynch and Director of Learning and Teaching Marc Schweissinger transformed Induction Week into Welcome Week in which new students had opportunities to meet staff and other students, attend short orientation meetings, participate in a European Day of Languages event with games and activities. These sessions were open to all returning students from all academic years, thus creating an opportunity for students to meet staff and students from other academic years and degree programmes. Sessions were offered to students from all academic years with the primary function of introducing students to key members of staff who they could contact for specific queries. Analysing the student survey from April 2024 and the survey from November 2024 gives some insight to the benefits of the welcome week plus micro-transitions and scaffolding for

tasks. Question 17 '[...] Thinking about when you started your first year of university, how much do you agree with the following statements:' indicates more responses in the strongly agree/agree sections in November than in the April cohort whose induction training was less focussed on interaction and whose skills training took place during the reading week. The benefits of Welcome Week can be clearly noted as can a greater awareness of who to contact for academic and personal matters.

April 2024

17. Again thinking about when you started your first year of university, how much do you agree with the following statements:
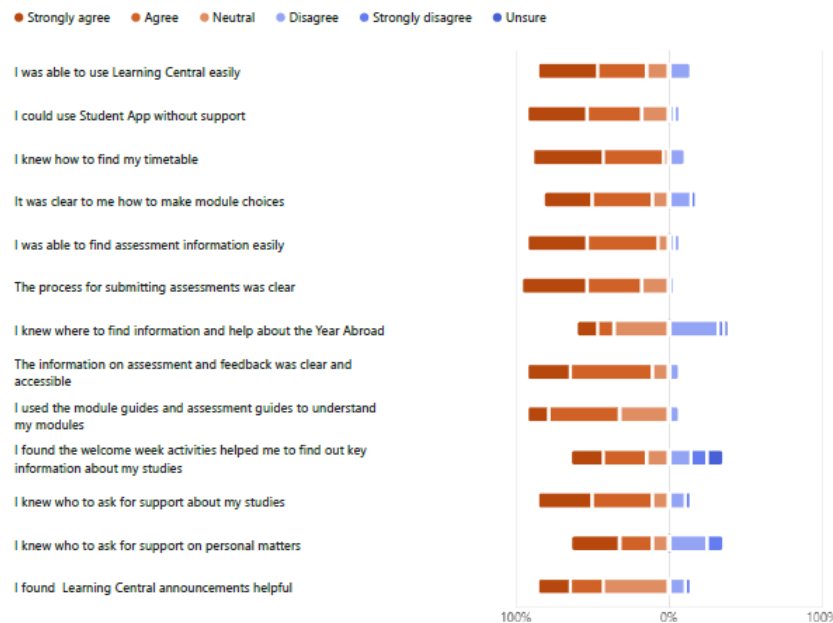
November 2024

17. Again thinking about when you started your first year of university, how much do you agree with the following statements:

Outcome: Conference on Transitions to Higher Education.

The outcome was to organise an event bringing together schools, universities, students, and support organisations to collaboratively discuss transitions to Higher Education, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, this was completed in January 2025.

On 17 January 2025 the project ran a one-day conference event. Attendees came from Schools across Cardiff University, the Cardiff University Learning and Teaching Academy, 6th form colleges, secondary schools, Cardiff University students, third sector educational trusts, charities and organisations supporting under-represented student groups.

The project is grateful to the University Council for Languages for the funding of this event.

The project is grateful to Professor David Clarke for his support of the event and for opening the conference with a welcome address.

Presentations

MLANG Transitions Project

Theresa Federici, Lecturer in Italian and Project Lead; Nadia Nebot, Lecturer in French; Marion Heuchert, Lecturer in German; Samia Zitouni, Lecturer in French, School of Modern Languages, Cardiff University.

The project team provided an overview of the methodologies for data gathering and analysis for the project's qualitative and quantitative data related to student characteristics and the views of staff, students, and school/college teachers. The presentation focused on the 4 areas of perceptions identified from the study:

Perceptions of:

- Preparedness for university life and learning
- Aptitude in transition to university life and learning
- Engagement in Transition to university life and learning
- Support in Transition to university life and learning.

The presentation concluded with the Action Plan for future development and recommendations that could be applied across disciplines and across the institution.

Moving On Up

Catherine Purcell, Reader in Healthcare Sciences, Cardiff University and Sally Scott-Roberts, Senior Lecturer in Occupational Therapy, University of South Wales.

Dr Catherine Purcell and Sally Scott-Roberts are internationally recognised experts in the field of Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) and neurodivergence. The presentation highlighted areas in making the transition to university may be more challenging and adaptation to the new environment may take longer, leading to heightened fatigue and anxiety. The presentation discussed the strengths of people with DCD and neurodivergent people and provided concrete examples of protective factors that support people in transition and support strategies that can be implemented by individuals or that institutions can put in place to support learners. A key message from the presentation was that transition is something that happens at multiple points and that micro-transitions need to be acknowledged and supported.

Inclusive Education Project

Rachel Johns, Learning and Teaching Academy, Cardiff University.

Rachel Johns, Education Developer for the Inclusive Education Project, presented the Cardiff University strategy for conceptualising inclusion and diversity in Higher Education and the theoretical models underpinning the Inclusive Education Project. The presentation examined transition as a journey in, through, and out of Higher Education and provided concrete examples of ways in which induction activities can be devised to facilitate social connections and a sense of belonging. The presentation contained important guidance and resources that support the creation of an inclusive transition to Higher Education.

MLANG Students' Perspectives

Anna Kiddier and Sophie Waite, Final Year Undergraduate Students, School of Modern Languages, Cardiff University.

Anna and Sophie, who worked with the MLANG Transitions Project as summer interns delivered a presentation on student perspectives of transition processes during undergraduate study. Drawing on their personal experiences and their student support roles as Student Representative (Anna) and Student Mentor (Sophie), the presentation articulated transition as a journey from the student perspective.

Widening Participation – supporting under-represented groups into Higher Education

Sian Catley, Widening Participation Manager, Cardiff University.

Sian Catley presented an overview of Widening Participation, the initiatives that exist to support students, the groups of people the Widening Participation team work with, and the support offered. The presentation featured projects such as Discovery, for Autistic young people; Confident Futures, for students who are care-experienced, estranged, adopted, or carers; Together at Cardiff, for all students with UCAS flags, and the dedicated and tailored support offered. The presentation gave insight into the diversity of the student body and the different support needs students may have. In terms of transition to higher education, the presentation discussed issues around developing a sense of belonging at university and supporting students to get the support they need.

Transition and Support

Julie Kiddier, Villiers Park Educational Trust.

In this presentation, Julie Kiddier provided an overview of Villiers Park, a social mobility charity dedicated to empowering young people from under-represented backgrounds to realise their potential. Based on Possible Selves theory, Julie explained the process in which Villiers Park support students from secondary through to higher education. Through one-to-one coaching, Villiers Park supports young people to take charge of their academic journey. The presentation examined the transition process not only from an academic perspective, but also the social, financial, academic, independence, and responsibilities that young people need to consider in the transition to higher education.

Round table with teachers from secondary schools and 6th form colleges

Chaired by Nazaret Perez-Nieto, Academic Director of Routes into Languages Cymru and Senior Lecturer in Hispanic Studies, School of Modern Languages, Cardiff University.

Panel: Lorraine Ledentu, St David's College, Cardiff; Mike Bond, ASC 6th Form Base, Llanishen High School, Cardiff, Juliette Courtais, Brynteg Comprehensive School, Bridgend; Megan Harries, Routes into Languages Cymru.

The round table was an open forum in which panel members and attendees contributed to discussion around four key questions. The questions are reported in bold followed by a summary of the discussion.

Connection with Transition: How does your role connect with supporting students in their transition from school to higher education?

Panel members work with students in Yr 12 and 13, or in FE colleges as form tutors, teachers, and leads, or working with schools to organise outreach activities. Panel members support students generally through their choices and application processes whatever subject students go on to study at University. With regard to outreach, support is not just for 6th form students, but activities range from primary school involvement up to A level master classes. Teachers noted that students who are taking A level languages do not necessarily intend to take languages in Higher Education, and in one school the A level language programme is not currently active due to lack of student uptake of languages post-GCSE. University is one route for progression, but schools and colleges cannot only promote University education and need to provide space and opportunities for apprenticeship routes, and employment routes. Much of the outreach that is offered to schools from universities tends to focus on mainstream education, with limited opportunity for students in specialist teaching bases to be involved in existing opportunities. Widening access in terms of outreach activities would be welcome, as would specialist provision, giving students in specialist teaching bases the opportunity to discuss how their needs can be met in Higher Education.

Challenges: What are the main challenges or pressures you face in facilitating this transition, either as a student or as a professional?

Panellists agreed that one of the major challenges facing education and outreach at the moment is funding. With funding being restricted, it is increasingly difficult to organise trips, activities, or school visits. Issues with funding also impact initiatives like Routes into Languages. A key challenge also concerned readiness for higher education, where some students would benefit from undertaking something different, such as work and travel, before making their decision on what they might want to study at university, or indeed if university is the right decision. A key challenge is in the timing of the application processes. Students fresh out of GCSEs need to start thinking about their choices for university almost as soon as they start their AS year. Applications need to be submitted so far in advance that some students end up just applying for the disciplines they have chosen for A Level without knowing what they want to do in the future or even if they would enjoy the degree. Sometimes students would benefit from being able to take a step back, or a year out, in order to think what they would like to do after A Levels, this is a difficult dynamic for teachers to manage. Challenges are also present in students' awareness of the expectations of HE, information tends to come to students when they are already in 6th form, and this is very close to the time when they have to submit their applications. Much of the information from universities is aimed at mainstream education, it would be helpful to have targeted support for students with additional needs in mainstream and specialist bases. A specific challenge for languages is the widespread lack of awareness among students that they can begin studying a language at university level from scratch, through ab initio programmes, without requiring any prior knowledge. This misconception often deters potential learners who may feel unqualified or

hesitant to explore language studies, limiting the diversity and number of students entering the field. Addressing this challenge through targeted outreach and clear communication about ab initio opportunities is crucial to ensuring that students recognise the accessibility and value of language learning, regardless of their starting point.

Supporting Transition: What strategies or initiatives do you currently use to support students during this transition period?

Routes into Languages offers taster sessions and on-campus visits so potential students can see what university is like from as early as Year 5 through to A Level. Schools and colleges support students individually to write application forms and to engage with open days and resources to decide what courses they may be interested in. There is a lot of support for students in writing personal statements. Teachers find that students are keen to have personal opinions, to learn about others' experiences of higher education, including anecdotes from the teachers' experiences. There may be an opportunity here to have more ambassador activity, where university students go to schools and colleges to talk about what university is like in general.

Future Networking: What possibilities do you see for creating stronger networks or partnerships to enhance transition support in the future?

Networks need funding, but outreach activities have seen excellent results through engaging with schools across sectors. Materials about university courses and what kind of thing can be studied could come earlier, perhaps during the GCSE years, so that students can start to think about whether they want to go to university and the kind of thing to expect at university from an earlier stage, and before they are under pressure to complete UCAS forms and make decisions. Information provided by universities needs to be inclusive and there needs to be more available to support students in under-represented groups. This could include autistic students who are already studying at university visiting schools and specialist bases to talk about their journey to higher education.

Conference Outcomes

The findings of the MLANG Transitions Project and the MLANG Transitions conference have been adopted as the basis for a newly-established institution-wide project to support and improve student transition to, through, and from Cardiff University.

MLANG and Cardiff University Business School run talks for prospective students and their guests at Open Days covering topics such as managing student expectations; awareness of potential issues that may arise such as concerns linked to housing, academic study, social activities; life skills for independent living. These talks aim at supporting students through raising awareness of potential sources of difficulty so that prospective students and their friends and family can think of how to prepare for university life.

New inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaborative networks have been established as a result of the conference.

Recordings of the conference papers can be accessed on the Cardiff University School of Modern Languages You Tube Channel as a playlist Transitions into Higher Education: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLY0U-_Js-AQdDazeGWrY9_UyZC_Mfr7YU.

Recommendations

School Level Recommendations

These actions have been identified by the project as areas the School of Modern Languages can act on, they are not discipline specific and therefore function as a set of recommendations for other Schools and disciplines.

- To develop training sessions on Independent Study that support students to access the hidden curriculum, understand the skills they are developing, and increase their academic and assessment literacy.
- To include the Independent Study session as part of a series of skills awareness sessions that are timetabled into the curriculum at appropriate times.
- To develop a discipline-specific question set for Academic Tutors of Year 1 students to support learners in transition to Higher Education. This question set should include awareness of periods of study abroad/in industry; awareness of academic workload; awareness of which types of classes require compulsory attendance (i.e. lab work, seminars, practicals), which teaching delivery is recorded (i.e. lectures), and where students can find these recordings. Discipline-specific information on social activities, study groups, opportunities to engage in extra-curricular events.
- To work in collaboration with Careers Advisors from Student Futures to promote support sessions, careers fairs, and awareness of careers related to the discipline.
- To support students in organising their own study groups.
- To promote the opportunities available for students to come together in extra-curricular activities to create a sense of belonging and community within the discipline.
- To tailor student mentor engagement and role towards specific discipline.
- To work with schools, colleges, and third sector educational organisations to offer different modalities for outreach. Examples include webinar or online taster sessions if schools are not able to organise in-person events; workshops or further discussions with school teachers such as an online forum in a late afternoon, so to enable school teachers to attend remotely. This could be done asynchronously, where 6th form/A-Level students and teachers submit questions and a team of student reps and mentors, academic, and professional services provide video recordings or written replies.

Institution-Wide Recommendations

The findings detailed in this report have identified measures to continue to support students in an inclusive transition to, through, and from Higher Education and enabled the School of Modern Languages to implement them. It is acknowledged that individual Schools do not hold responsibility for all aspects of the transition process, and the following are recommendations for institution-wide implementation.

Increase awareness of micro-transitions

Structure the delivery of student training and information in a micro-transition approach so that information is repeated at points of need, students have access to resources in a variety of oral and written forms and have sufficient opportunity to adapt and adjust to different forms of learning and assessment. Awareness of micro-transitions to be built into pre-admissions activities and into schools outreach activities with space for student ambassadors to talk to

school and college students about university life in general not just outreach about the academic subject.

Personal Tutor Guidelines

To create a resource that signposts and guides students towards the various support services available in the University. A staff-facing and student-facing version of this resource will be provided to support Personal Tutors. Personal Tutors should be trained in mental health awareness and disability awareness including neurodivergence.

Mental Health Awareness

To further promote awareness of and access to support services. To hold student-led events that raise awareness of mental health support, such as World Mental Health Day.

To ensure staff and students are aware of services available and how to access them. To produce a university-wide presentation slide with information so it can be included in module presentations at regular intervals.

To work with the Student Union to promote and raise awareness of the Student Union Networks (https://www.cardiffstudents.com/your-voice/networks/) and Student Union support services.

Video Tours and Greetings

Academic Schools provide video tours of the buildings, teaching rooms, and access from public transport. Academic staff to be encouraged to have a short introduction video of around 90 seconds. These resources will support students who have not had the opportunity to attend open days, such as international students or students coming through clearing, to get a sense of the new environment prior to arrival and may help to increase a sense of familiarity and belonging to students. These resources will also support neurodivergent students to manage new and unfamiliar environments.

Resources to support assessment literacy and the hidden curriculum

Easy-access and centrally located student-facing resources that demystify academic language around learning and teaching. This could include a glossary of academic terms, support in understanding how to approach assessment tasks, access to planning apps and resources.

Staff-facing resources that support staff members to communicate the 'rules of the game', the expectations, the independent learning expectations, and assessment processes in a way that is unambiguous.

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