

7.6

Secondary schools in Wales

Governance, policy and curriculum

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Introduction

Education in Wales has historically developed along similar lines to that of England, with UK legislation largely having force in both countries; especially following the establishment of the National Curriculum via the Education Reform Act 1988. However, following political devolution to the then National Assembly for Wales in 1999, education became the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government under Schedule 5 of the Government of Wales Act 2006. Now, the Welsh Government has had control over education policy (from Early Years through to post-compulsory education), and teachers' pay and conditions through Senedd Cymru (the Welsh Parliament) since 2020, although the UK Government still retains control of teachers' pensions. Education in Wales has developed a distinct identity, with education policy and the wider Welsh education system increasingly diverging from policies and practices in England. This is set to continue with the major education system-level reforms currently taking place at the time of writing (Welsh Government, 2020a), including significant changes to the national curriculum, assessment and qualifications.

This unit focuses on the current structure of schooling, curriculum and teacher education in Wales. Units covering education across the four nations of the UK are included in each edition of this book, which provide a historical perspective for comparisons between education in Wales and education in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The first part of the unit focuses on the history, organisation and governance of education in Wales. It then presents the emerging structure of schooling in Wales by introducing the Curriculum for Wales, published in January 2020 (Welsh Government, 2020b), which has been implemented in state-maintained primary and secondary schools since September 2022. The unit then focuses on teacher education in Wales.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Describe the background to the current and emerging structure of education in Wales.
- Explain the organisation and governance of schooling in Wales.

- Describe the new Curriculum for Wales as it will be experienced by pupils in state schools in Wales.
- Identify the range of qualifications available to pupils in Wales.
- Name the key national bodies related to education and training in Wales.
- Discuss the nature of initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales.
- Analyse the changes to the school curriculum, assessment and ITE within the broader context of system-wide reforms in Wales.

Check the specific requirements of your ITE programme to see how it relates to this unit.

Schooling in Wales

Devolution and the changing nature of education in Wales

During the latter years of the 20th century, the market-oriented reforms that were put in place by consecutive Conservative governments in England never took root in Wales. Since devolution in 1999, education (and indeed wider public) policy in Wales has been framed by an approach for all public services to be based on collaborative, citizen-centred participation rather than a consumer-based model (Reynolds, 2008).

Since 1999, education policy has emphasised expanding choice for learners, such as the development of the 14-19 Learning Pathways which set out to provide an individual learning pathway to meet the needs of each learner (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006). In 2003, the Welsh Baccalaureate was introduced to give a broader experience than traditional learning programmes, developing transferable skills useful for higher education and employment. The qualification is offered at the Foundation (Level 1), Intermediate (Level 2) and Advanced (Level 3) levels and is studied alongside a range of approved Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications (Welsh Government, 2019a).

The Welsh Government has had a clear policy direction in promoting children's rights (Welsh Government, 2019b), based on a commitment to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 2001, Wales was the first country in the UK to establish a Children's Commissioner. The Commissioner has a role to raise awareness of children's rights and promote the wellbeing of children. Thus, learner rights and entitlements have been promoted, with the majority of national tests being abolished with the aim of reducing unproductive school-level competition. In 2001, the then Welsh Assembly Government published *The Learning Country* (National Assembly for Wales, 2001); this was followed by *The Learning Country: Vision into Action* in 2006 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006). These documents outlined the government's long-term strategy for education in Wales. Children's rights are enshrined in Welsh law under the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011.

The increased emphasis on collaboration then led to the development of the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) in 2008 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008), which aimed to foster the sharing of best practice between schools and local authorities. By 2008, the relatively poor results for Wales in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were becoming a significant driver influencing education

policy (OECD, 2014; Egan, 2017). The OECD (2018) continues to influence policy, for example, by promoting the concept of schools as learning organisations with its emphasis on collaboration, a culture of enquiry, and leading professional learning.

Organisation of schools in Wales

The Minister for Education is a cabinet-level minister in the Welsh Government, with overall responsibility for the Department for Education and Skills. There has been significant variation with ministerial titles in this area since 1999; the current incumbent's title is the Cabinet Secretary for Education (see <https://www.gov.wales/cabinet-secretaries-and-ministers> for current post-holder).

Before devolution in 1999, when education policy set in Westminster was delivered and interpreted in Wales through the UK Government's Welsh Office, the relationship between schools and local authorities in Wales was less formal than in England. Up until 1996 there were only eight local authorities in Wales. The smaller scale, both geographically and in terms of population density, meant that there was often closer communication between policy-makers and practitioners; this continued after the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999.

Local government reorganisation in Wales in 1996 resulted in 22 new local authorities with responsibility for education. Since 2012, the majority of these local authorities have been grouped into regional education consortia (Welsh Government, 2015a):

- *GwE* (Flintshire, Conwy, Wrexham, Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey, Denbighshire);
- *Y Partneriaeth* (Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire);
- *Mid-Wales partnership* (Ceredigion and Powys);
- *Neath Port Talbot*;
- *CSC: Central South Consortium* (Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Vale of Glamorgan);
- *EAS: Education Achievement Service for South East Wales* (Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen).

The primary aim of each consortium is to deliver improved standards through a consistent and integrated professional school improvement service for children and young people within their area. The regional education consortia are part of a three-tier model of school improvement in which local authorities, regional consortia and the Welsh Government work together to support school leaders, governors and teachers (Welsh Government, 2020a).

Although local authorities retain the statutory responsibility for schools and school improvement, they are expected to support the aims of each consortium. The Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) is the professional group of local authority officers accountable for statutory education functions in each of the 22 local authorities in Wales.

Types of school

Schools in Wales follow the state-maintained comprehensive model of schooling, both Welsh and English medium, alongside a number of faith-based schools, largely Church in Wales and Roman Catholic. There are also a number of independent schools based in Wales, which follow their own

curricula and offer a wider selection of qualifications. For more information on schools by local authority, region and type of school, see the latest data on StatsWales <https://statswales.gov.wales/> (Welsh Government, 2024a).

The governance of schools

The governance of schools in Wales is based on the principle of stakeholder representation, as in England. The constitution of governing bodies of individual maintained schools is made up of a board of governors appointed by local authorities, elected and co-opted governors. As with governance in the business and charity sector, the board helps to ensure that there is accountability, oversight and assurance. The Welsh Government also recognised that an essential part of improving standards in the classroom is improving the governance of schools. Governors are now required to focus more on pupil performance, educational outcomes and leadership; they are also expected to work in a collaborative way to foster and share best practice. The three core duties of a school governing board thus include: providing a strategic view, acting as a critical friend and ensuring accountability (Welsh Government, 2021a).

Assessment of school performance

League tables were introduced in 1992 in England and Wales to allow parents to see how local schools measured up against each other and against schools nationally. Although there are still various league (performance) tables for schools in England, league tables were scrapped in Wales in the early 2000s. However, schools' performance has still been assessed over the period, including the introduction of the National School Categorisation System in January 2015, a framework to identify which schools needed targeted interventions based on the previous three years of performance metrics (Welsh Government, 2015b). More recent approaches have been framed around schools as learning organisations (OECD, 2018), especially in preparing for the curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2021c).

Phases of education

Education is compulsory between the ages of 5-16 in Wales, with the Curriculum for Wales providing a continuum for learners aged between 3 and 16. The types of schools catering for each age group, along with post-compulsory education, are listed as follows:

Pre-school or pre-preparatory education

Although education is not compulsory before the age of 5, many children start their education at the age of 3 or 4 at a nursery school, children's centre or in a nursery setting at a primary school. *Mudiad Meithrin*, a registered charity first established in 1971 in order to nurture a rich landscape of Welsh-medium play and learning, is acknowledged as the main provider of Welsh-medium early-years education and care.

Primary education

The majority of children enter the formal schooling system when they first attend primary school at the age of 5, either in the English or Welsh-medium sector. However, a number of parents and carers

opt for elective home education (Welsh Government, 2017). Currently, primary schools include the Foundation Phase, where structured play activities are woven into the learning experiences of children (Welsh Government, 2015c).

Secondary education

Secondary schools generally take pupils from the age of 11 to at least the end of compulsory education at the age of 16. They prepare pupils for GCSE or equivalent Level 2 qualifications. After completing compulsory education at the age of 16, young people may opt to stay in formal education or training, but are able to legally leave school, start an apprenticeship or college course, or enter the world of work.

All-age schools

An all-age school is defined as a school that combines at least two stages of a child's education (typically primary and secondary). In Wales, all-age schools are classified as middle schools and defined according to the age range of pupils that they provide for (either from age 3 or 4 to ages 16 or 19). The all-age schools' sector is growing in Wales, with more than double the number of schools open in 2020 compared with 2017 (Estyn, 2022). Most of the all-age schools in Wales provide education for pupils aged 3 to 16 years old and therefore include nursery provision; about half also include a sixth form that extends the age range up to 19 years old. Around a half of all-age schools are English-medium schools with the others being either Welsh-medium or bilingual (Estyn, 2022).

Post-compulsory education

Most learners who remain in education after the age of 16 study A levels or equivalent Level 3 qualifications in a school sixth form, sixth form college or further education college.

Further education

Further education colleges provide education and training for learners after the school-leaving age of 16. They offer a wide range of programmes, including English language courses (including English for speakers of other languages), GCSEs, A levels and other equivalent Level 1/2/3 qualifications, vocational and work-based courses, university access courses and some degree courses.

Higher education

There are nine universities operating in Wales, which offer a wide range of courses leading to various undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications (degree-level or equivalent).

Medium of instruction

All young people in Wales have the opportunity to experience their compulsory education or training through the medium of Welsh or English. As part of the Welsh Government's strategic Welsh language development - especially as per *Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers by 2050*,

acknowledging the significant cultural and heritage value of the language (Welsh Government, 2017), with its status enshrined in legislation made in Wales – bilingualism is increasingly being introduced as early as possible. This is reinforced at a post-compulsory level by the establishment of the *Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol* in 2011.

- In Welsh-medium schools, learning is almost entirely through the medium of Welsh, apart from the teaching of the subject of English. Some schools offer a choice of certain GCSEs and A level subjects such as sciences in English or Welsh, but there is a full qualification offering in Welsh available from the WJEC.
- In English-medium schools, learning is in English, although all pupils must experience at least some teaching through the medium of the Welsh language, as well as taking GCSE Welsh as a compulsory subject. All English-medium schools also encourage the use of incidental Welsh inside and outside the classroom, and Welsh is explicitly taught and developed.
- The approach to learning and teaching in bilingual schools can vary substantially; in some, a large proportion of the curriculum is delivered through the medium of Welsh, whilst in others only a few core elements of the curriculum are taught through the medium of Welsh. In some local authorities, subjects are currently offered in both English and Welsh (Welsh Government, 2022).

In certain areas of Wales, late immersion programmes are available which enable pupils in Year 6 who have been educated in an English-medium school to transfer to Welsh-medium secondary education.

The changing National Curriculum in Wales

Background

The National Curriculum was introduced into England, Wales and Northern Ireland as a nationwide curriculum for all state-maintained primary and secondary schools (but not statutory for the independent sector), following the Education Reform Act of 1988. Following devolution in 1999, the education system in Wales became increasingly independent, diverging from the dominant model in England. Although the original intention to review the National Curriculum in Wales every five years did not happen, there were reviews in 1995–1996, 2000 and 2008 (Evans, 2021). At the time of writing (2025), the curriculum currently in effect for all state-maintained schools in Wales is the *Curriculum for Wales 2008* (Welsh Government, 2020c). However, this changed with the passing of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, which received Royal Assent in April 2021 (Senedd Cymru, 2021), and the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales from September 2022 onwards (Welsh Government, 2020b).

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted on education systems and learning globally (Siegel et al., 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2021) and thus inhibited preparation for the Curriculum for Wales since it was published in January 2020 (Crick, 2020; Marchant et al., 2021). Therefore, guidance, policies and resources are still being refined and implemented as part of the wider system-level reforms currently taking place in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020d). Therefore, this section largely highlights key links to the statutory guidance available on the Curriculum for Wales 2022 area on Hwb (Welsh Government, 2020b), as well as strategic themes for practitioners.

Co-constructing a Curriculum for Wales

Whilst there have been various political, social and economic drivers for the development of the Curriculum for Wales over the past ten years, there is a clear sociocultural imperative. There have been long-standing calls for developing a distinctive curriculum and qualifications system in Wales; one that was made in Wales, for Wales (Donaldson, 2015). This is both to address the specificity of challenge and opportunity, but also to explicitly embed and embody the unique cultural characteristics of Welsh history and heritage (Welsh Government, 2013). Since 2015, Wales has taken a 'democratic' approach to curriculum design and has been developing a new co-constructed, purpose-led curriculum (Donaldson, 2015, 2016), in line with international trends towards school autonomy in determining curricular content, learner-centred pedagogy and a focus on so-called '21st century' competencies (OECD, 2020; Sinnema et al., 2020). Professor Graham Donaldson's independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales (Donaldson, 2015) followed on from a number of discrete consultations and reviews, including a review of the information and communications technology (ICT) curriculum in 2013 (Arthur et al., 2013; Moller and Crick, 2018).

Whilst there exist concerns and critiques of the ongoing curriculum reforms in Wales (Power et al., 2020; Taylor & Power, 2020; Evans, 2023), the ambitions of these wider system-level reforms are perhaps best articulated by the Welsh Government's (2020a) Minister for Education in October 2020, as part of the 'Education in Wales - our national mission' strategy:

Taken together, our reforms and new curriculum will support young people to develop higher standards of literacy and numeracy, to become more digitally and bilingually competent, and to be confident, capable and compassionate citizens – citizens of Wales and citizens of the world.

The four purposes of the curriculum are the shared vision and aspiration for every young person. In fulfilling these, we set high expectations for all, promote individual and national wellbeing, tackle ignorance and misinformation, and encourage critical and civic engagement.

New structures

The 2015 independent review thus identified a number of shortcomings in the current curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales. It argued that the curriculum had become overloaded, complicated and, in many parts, outdated (Donaldson, 2015; OECD, 2017). It articulated four over-riding purposes for the curriculum, recommending that the entirety of the curriculum should be designed to help all children and young people to develop as:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world;
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to live fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The Curriculum for Wales guidance (Welsh Government, 2021b) forms part of the Curriculum for Wales framework, which has been developed by practitioners, for practitioners, and includes both the curriculum requirements set out in legislation and a range of supporting guidance.

The Curriculum for Wales guidance sets out the curriculum requirements as defined in legislation for all learners aged 3 to 16; to ensure all schools cover the same core learning and to secure a consistency of approach for learners across Wales; guidelines for schools in developing their curricula; and expectations around assessment arrangements to support learner progression. Teachers will have more flexibility to develop a curriculum in their school that meets the needs of their learners. Therefore, a school's local curriculum is everything a learner experiences in pursuit of achieving the four purposes; it is not simply what is taught, but how and, crucially, why it is taught. This will connect their educational experiences, as well as preparing them for their future, with a range of careers and work-related experiences. They will be able to do this by using a common framework that includes six Areas of Learning and Experience:

- Expressive Arts;
- Health and Well-being;
- Humanities;
- Languages, Literacy and Communication;
- Mathematics and Numeracy;
- Science and Technology.

Within the Areas of Learning and Experience, the following are mandatory elements: English; Relationships and Sexuality Education; Religion, Values and Ethics; and Welsh (Senedd Cymru, 2021). Traditional subject-to-subject boundaries are broken down in the process of curriculum design, helping learners to better consider different concepts and issues in the broadest possible way. The Areas support cross-curricular planning, so learners can apply learning to different academic or real-life situations. It should be organised as a continuum for learning across ages 3-16 years, with progression steps at five points: 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16 years old.

Literacy, numeracy and digital competence are mandatory cross-curricular skills within the Curriculum for Wales. It will be the responsibility of all practitioners, across all curriculum areas, to develop and ensure progression in these skills. How literacy, numeracy and digital competence skills are developed in and across the curriculum will be decided at a local level and will fit with individual schools' approaches. To support schools and practitioners in providing opportunities to develop, extend and apply these skills, the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) and the Digital Competence Framework (DCF) have been updated and continue to be available as non-statutory supporting guidance (Welsh Government, 2020b).

The Curriculum for Wales guidance (Welsh Government, 2021b) consists of the following:

- Introduction to the Curriculum for Wales guidance;
- Curriculum and assessment legislation requirements;
- Designing your curriculum – general guidance on developing a curriculum across all Areas of Learning and Experience;
- Introduction to each Area of Learning and Experience;
- Statements of what matters – the 'big ideas' and key principles in each Area;
- Principles of progression – how learners make progress throughout their learning across the curriculum;
- Descriptions of learning – how learners should make progress within each statement of what matters;

- Designing your curriculum - principles for each Area - more Area-specific guidance on developing a curriculum;
- Supporting learner progression - assessment guidance.

We refer readers to the latest online version of the framework, guidance, summary of legislation and all related resources for designing your own curriculum; see: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales>. Task 7.6.1 asks you to look at the Area of Learning and Experiences relevant to you.



Task 7.6.1 Review your Area of Learning and Experience

It is also important that you are familiar with the requirements for your Area of Learning and Experience, as well as relevant cross-curricular connections. Look closely at the specific Area online at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales>.

What is your school's or department's vision regarding the purposes of the curriculum; how are these reflected in documentation and practice?

How is your school interpreting the four purposes, the six Areas and the cross-curricular responsibilities; what will this look like in practice?

Discuss your findings with your peers.

New qualifications

Qualifications Wales is the independent organisation responsible for regulating general and vocational qualifications in Wales. Formed in 2015, they are an independent body (but accountable to the Welsh Government) focused on publicly funded qualifications, including GCSEs, A levels and vocational qualifications. They regulate awarding bodies offering qualifications in Wales, linking to the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, which recognises all forms of learning across all levels and abilities. As part of the wider Curriculum for Wales reforms, there will be significant changes to the assessment and qualification regime and offering in Wales, which at the time of writing are still under development. Recent developments as part of Qualifications Wales' *Qualified for the Future* work (Qualifications Wales, 2021) have identified the prospective new bilingual GCSE-type offerings at Level 2, aligning to the Curriculum for Wales. The wider offer in this space refers to all non-GCSE qualifications studied by learners aged 14 to 16 in Wales, across academic and vocational offerings. Qualifications Wales is also looking at qualifications from entry level and up and looking at a range of subjects such as the World of Work, Financial Capability, Careers Development, Equality and Diversity, Food Safety, Essential Skills, Sport and First Aid. As per the recent consultation and ongoing development, it is anticipated that new Level 2 qualifications will be available in 2025/2026, for the first pupils to sit in 2027/2028. There is also anticipated work to look at the AS/A level (Level 3) offering for learners in Wales (Qualifications Wales, 2021).

For more information about the current approved qualifications available in Wales, please see: <https://qualifications.wales/> and <https://www.qiw.wales/>.

Task 7.6.2 asks you to look at the new qualifications relevant to you.



Task 7.6.2 Preparing for new qualifications

Visit the website <https://qualifications.wales/> or <https://www.qiw.wales/>.

Select the subject or Area that you teach and look at the nature, structure and requirements for a specific approved qualification in your subject.

Consider how you could ensure pupils are prepared for studying for this qualification. How might this change going forward? How might you ready yourself to teach emerging qualifications in Wales, linking back to the Curriculum for Wales reforms?

Discuss your ideas with your peers.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

Alongside the design and construction of the Curriculum for Wales from 2016, there has also been the reorganisation and development of a new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system – a new statutory support system for children and young people aged 0–25 years with a learning difficulty or disability; the ALN system was enacted from September 2021 (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). Whereas the previous Special Educational Needs (SEN) system has been criticised for being segmented and inconsistent, the recently introduced system brings together early years (pre-3-years-old), 3–16 and further education (16+) to create a unified approach for ages 0–25 (Welsh Government, 2021d). This aims to ensure greater consistency and continuity in provision, and places the protection of children and young people's rights as a priority regardless of the severity or complexity of needs (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). However, even with a strong policy focus on 'inclusive education' as part of the wider system-level reforms in Wales, it is not yet clear how the curriculum and qualifications reform will align with the emerging ALN reforms (Knight and Crick, 2021; Knight et al., 2022).

Key bodies relating to education and training

Accountability: Estyn

All education and training providers in Wales are inspected and accredited by Estyn, the office of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. Estyn is independent of, but funded by, the Welsh Government. Its role is to inspect education and training in Wales, to improve the quality of education and training and outcomes for all learners by developing a self-improving and learning culture. In February 2019, the Welsh Government's Minister for Education announced plans for Estyn to play a greater role in supporting schools to prepare for the new curriculum, as part of a wider proposed reform of inspection arrangements in Wales (Donaldson, 2018).

Estyn plays an important role in maintaining and enhancing quality in ITE, and can inform relevant regulatory bodies if provision is judged not to satisfy accreditation requirements. A common inspection framework is used for all inspections of education and training providers in Wales, updated in 2024 for schools (Estyn, 2024) and with the ITE guidance due late 2025. From September 2024, all maintained schools and PRUs will receive both a core inspection and an interim visit within a six-year cycle, with interim visits aimed at supporting self-evaluation and improvement to enhance learner outcomes.

Under the current arrangements, providers can be inspected at any time during the six-year cycle: there is no link to the time of the previous inspection, which means that the timing of inspection cannot be predicted. Currently, Estyn must give schools at least a ten-working-day notice period of inspection (recently reduced from 15, in response to sector feedback). Inspection schedules and reports are available from the Estyn website, along with a range of improvement resources created to share ideas and inspiration for education providers.

Professional competence: Education Workforce Council

The Education Workforce Council (EWC) (*Cyngor y Gweithlu Addysg* (CGA)) was established by the Education (Wales) Act 2014. Under the Act, the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) was reconfigured and renamed, with the EWC coming into being on 1 April 2015. The EWC is the independent body for the registration and regulation of teachers in maintained schools, further education (FE) teachers/lecturers and learning support staff in both school and FE settings in Wales. It seeks to raise the status of teaching by maintaining and promoting the highest standards of professional practice and conduct in the interests of teachers, pupils and the general public. The EWC provides the Professional Learning Passport (PLP) for all registrants in Wales, a fully bilingual and flexible online tool to support practitioners in capturing, reflecting upon, sharing and planning their own learning with the ultimate aim of improving professional practice.

It is also responsible for the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for the education workforce in Wales. The revised Code was published by the EWC and came into force from 1 September 2019 (EWC, 2019). The Code sets out the key principles of good conduct and practice for registrants in Wales:

- Personal and Professional Responsibility;
- Professional Integrity;
- Collaborative Working;
- Professional Knowledge and Understanding;
- Professional Learning.

The Code sets out the key principles of professionalism and maintenance of trust in the education workforce in Wales. The Council has statutory powers to investigate and hear cases of alleged unacceptable professional conduct, serious professional incompetence and criminal offences involving registrants. Failure to comply with the key principles of good conduct and practice may result in a person's registration being withdrawn under the relevant EWC Fitness to Practice procedures.

Leadership: National Academy for Educational Leadership

The National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) (*Academi Genedlaethol ar gyfer Arweinyddiaeth Addysgol Cymru*) existed from 2018 to 2025 as an arm's length body accountable to the Welsh Government, whose main purpose was to:

- contribute to the development of the professional capabilities of current and aspiring leaders across the education system by providing coherence and quality assurance for the range of educational leadership development opportunities available in Wales;

- act as a thought leader; developing, articulating and implementing a vision and strategy for educational leadership in Wales;
- be a respected and active member of the education middle tier in Wales, the first point of contact for the educational workforce in regard to leadership matters.

In late 2025, NAEL was replaced by Dysgu (Welsh Government, 2025), the new national professional learning and leadership body for maintained schools and settings in Wales. Dysgu will lead a joined-up approach to professional development for educators in Wales, bringing together national programmes in literacy, numeracy, well-being, leadership and more. The focus of their work is on three key areas: Vision and Leadership, Curriculum and Teaching, and Well-being and Inclusion. By working closely with schools, Estyn, local authorities, and the Welsh Government, Dysgu aims to ensure every educator feels supported to thrive and develop, and that every learner benefits from this shared commitment to excellence.

The Academy was a central feature of the education reform journey in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020a), working collaboratively to raise standards and improve leadership across the profession (Harris et al., 2020).

Initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales

Review of ITE in Wales

As part of the Schools Implementation Plan published in October 2012 (Welsh Government, 2012), the Welsh Government commissioned Professor Ralph Tabberer to undertake a review and to report on the quality and consistency of ITE provision across Wales (Tabberer, 2013). Following his recommendations, in March 2014, Professor John Furlong was appointed as Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET) Adviser for Wales. He was tasked with making recommendations regarding the changes needed to bring about improvements to ITE in Wales. His report (Furlong, 2015) recognised recent research evidence available (BERA-RSA, 2014), which sets out the core principles and features of high-quality ITE available internationally. These are to:

- ensure that ITE programmes attract the best and most suitable candidates into the teaching profession;
- offer academic awards that are competitive, practice focused and built on relevant educational research;
- develop strong links between theory and practice, in a way that helps students to understand and explore the interconnectedness of educational theories and classroom practices;
- establish strong links between ITET and continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers within schools;
- ensure that all of the above principles are underpinned by a clear understanding of evidence about how student teachers learn to teach and that the courses themselves are the constant subject of research and development.

(Furlong, 2015, p. 8)

The changes in ITE in Wales were deemed necessary because of the need to produce highly qualified, reflective practitioners with the appropriate qualifications and skills. Beginning teachers need

to demonstrate the required resilience to support the curriculum and wider system-level reforms in Wales (Donaldson, 2015; Welsh Government, 2020a).

Current ITE provision in Wales

To enter the teaching profession and work in a maintained school in Wales, a period of education and training known as ITE must be successfully undertaken in order to obtain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

ITE in Wales is currently delivered by six accredited providers. Providers are comprised of a partnership between schools and universities. The accredited providers in Wales currently are:

- Bangor University (*CaBan Partnership*);
- Cardiff Metropolitan University (*Cardiff Partnership for Initial Teacher Education*);
- Swansea University (*Swansea University Schools' Partnership*);
- The Open University;
- University of South Wales ITE Partnership;
- University of Wales Trinity Saint David (*Yr Athrofa*).

In Wales, there are two main routes to gaining QTS, one undergraduate and one postgraduate. Providers typically offer separate courses for those wishing to be primary or secondary teachers, although since September 2022 options to undertake an 'all-age' experience may be offered by some. The secondary programmes on offer vary from provider to provider, and some also offer a PGCE post-compulsory education and training (PCET) qualification, for teaching in post-compulsory settings.

In the autumn of 2015, a new Teacher Education Accreditation Group was established by the Welsh Government. ITE programmes in Wales are assessed, evaluated and monitored against the Welsh Government's criteria for accreditation. As part of the accreditation process, partnerships are required to demonstrate:

- an increased role for schools;
- a clearer role for universities;
- joint ownership of the ITE programme;
- structured opportunities to link school and university learning; and
- the centrality of research.

The accreditation process is carried out by the EWC's ITE Accreditation Board. The process is ongoing, with providers receiving regular monitoring visits from the EWC and re-accrediting their programmes on a three- or five-year cycle. This means that programmes are continually updated and reviewed, so it is advisable to check the Educators Wales website for the most up-to-date information on what the current available programmes are (<https://educators.wales/>). Accreditation criteria are reviewed in the light of national policy and priorities, such as changes to ALN legislation and regulations (National Assembly for Wales, 2018) and the National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry (Beauchamp et al., 2021; Welsh Government, 2021e).

Programmes all offer a balance of university and school-based experience. On standard one-year postgraduate programmes, school experience comprises approximately two-thirds of the programme; on three-year programmes, subject studies and school experience should constitute

approximately one-third each of programmes. More specific requirements on school experience requirements, as laid out in the Accreditation Criteria, are as follows:

- 32 weeks for all four-year primary undergraduate programmes;
- 24 weeks for all two- and three-year undergraduate programmes;
- 24 weeks for all secondary and primary postgraduate programmes.

All postgraduate programmes offer credits at master's degree level. These credits can be taken into consideration for future Level 7 study to enable a teacher to obtain a master's degree. In September 2021, a new National Masters programme was launched across Wales. This was designed collaboratively by Swansea University, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Aberystwyth University, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Bangor University, University of South Wales, and Cardiff Metropolitan University. Through this programme all education professionals in Wales have the same opportunity to enhance their professional knowledge, engage with research and improve their professional practice. Whilst it is open to all practitioners, including support staff and those working in further education, funding is available to those teachers in their third to sixth year of teaching, or those working in a partnership school. The Additional Learning Needs Pathway on the programme is also funded for further education and staff working in regional consortia and local authorities. Applicants for the National Masters will need to be registered with the EWC.

Funding

The Welsh Government provides financial assistance for the recruitment and retention of teachers in Wales. Funding varies according to the first-degree qualification and the area and phase of teaching chosen. In addition to priorities in funding reflecting the need to recruit teachers in specific key areas and age phases it also reflects policies of the government which require an ever-changing workforce to support, e.g. LNF, emphasis on digital competence and computer science rather than ICT. Currently in Wales the highest priority subjects for secondary education include mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, information technology, design & technology, Welsh and modern foreign languages (Welsh Government, 2024b). The highest priorities for primary education are for those gaining first-class honours in degrees specialising in English, Welsh, mathematics and science, in order to raise standards in primary schools in numeracy and literacy and to support the sciences. It is advisable to check what funding incentives are available, as these change from year to year.

Fluent Welsh-speaking student teachers can complete secondary ITE through the medium of Welsh and are eligible for the Welsh Medium Improvement Supplement. This is aimed at student teachers who need extra support to raise confidence in their ability to teach effectively in Welsh.

Entry requirements

Currently in Wales, a standard equivalent to GCSE Mathematics and English (or Welsh for those entering a Welsh-medium programme) at grade C or higher are required for all ITE routes. GCSE science grade C or above is required for primary PGCE or physical education secondary PGCE (note that Wales maintains letter grades rather than numeric grades at GCSE, unlike England). These entry requirements are currently under review, so it is advisable to check the Welsh Government ITE funding website (Welsh Government, 2024c).

In Wales, national skills tests are not a requirement of applications for entry to any of the routes into teaching, although individual ITE providers have literacy and numeracy tests and audit

processes that need to be passed in order to be accepted on the programme. Providers may also audit digital competence skills.

Applicants for secondary postgraduate programmes are expected to have at least 50 per cent of their degree relevant to the specialist-teaching subject they are applying to teach, as well as how it supports the relevant Area of Learning and Experience. However, there is a degree of flexibility where degrees contain relevant subject knowledge or where native speakers of modern foreign languages apply with or without the relevant degree.

Applicants for primary postgraduate programmes will need to be able to teach across all Areas of Learning and Experience in the Curriculum for Wales and are expected to have a relevant degree and A level or equivalent qualifications. There is a degree of flexibility if an applicant can show relevancy in their qualifications to one or more Area of Learning and Experience.

All student teachers in Wales undertake some Welsh language learning as part of their ITE programme as it is a core curriculum theme and is compulsory for pupils until the age of 16. This is typically 35 hours across the programme for a postgraduate student.

Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)

To become a teacher and teach in a maintained school in Wales requires QTS. This is achieved by meeting a set of Professional Standards that are set out in legislation and regulations. Once a programme of ITE has been successfully completed the provider will inform the EWC of the results, who are responsible for awarding QTS.

New entrants also need to register with the EWC to work in a maintained school in Wales. Having obtained QTS and registered with the EWC, a new entrant will need to complete a period of induction; on completion of the induction period EWC will issue an induction certificate.

What are the professional standards for teaching and leadership in Wales?

The Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership are the skills, knowledge and behaviours that characterise excellent practice and support professional growth. In recent years significant work has been undertaken to review the professional standards for the education workforce in Wales. This is to ensure that they reflect practice that is consistent with the realisation of the curriculum, reforms in ITE and that reflect career-long development and leadership.

The standards aim to:

- set clear expectations about effective practice during a practitioner's career including, where applicable, entry to the profession;
- enable practitioners to reflect on their practice, individually and collectively, against nationally agreed standards of effective practice and affirm and celebrate their successes;
- support practitioners to identify areas for further professional development;
- form a backdrop to the performance management process;
- reflect practice that is consistent with the realisation of the curriculum for Wales.

There are five Professional Standards: *Pedagogy*; *Collaboration*; *Leadership*; *Innovation* and *Professional Learning*. Each Professional Standard is divided into elements with descriptors that exemplify how the Professional Standard could apply to a practitioner's work, depending on where that practitioner is in their role and career: see Figure 7.6.1.

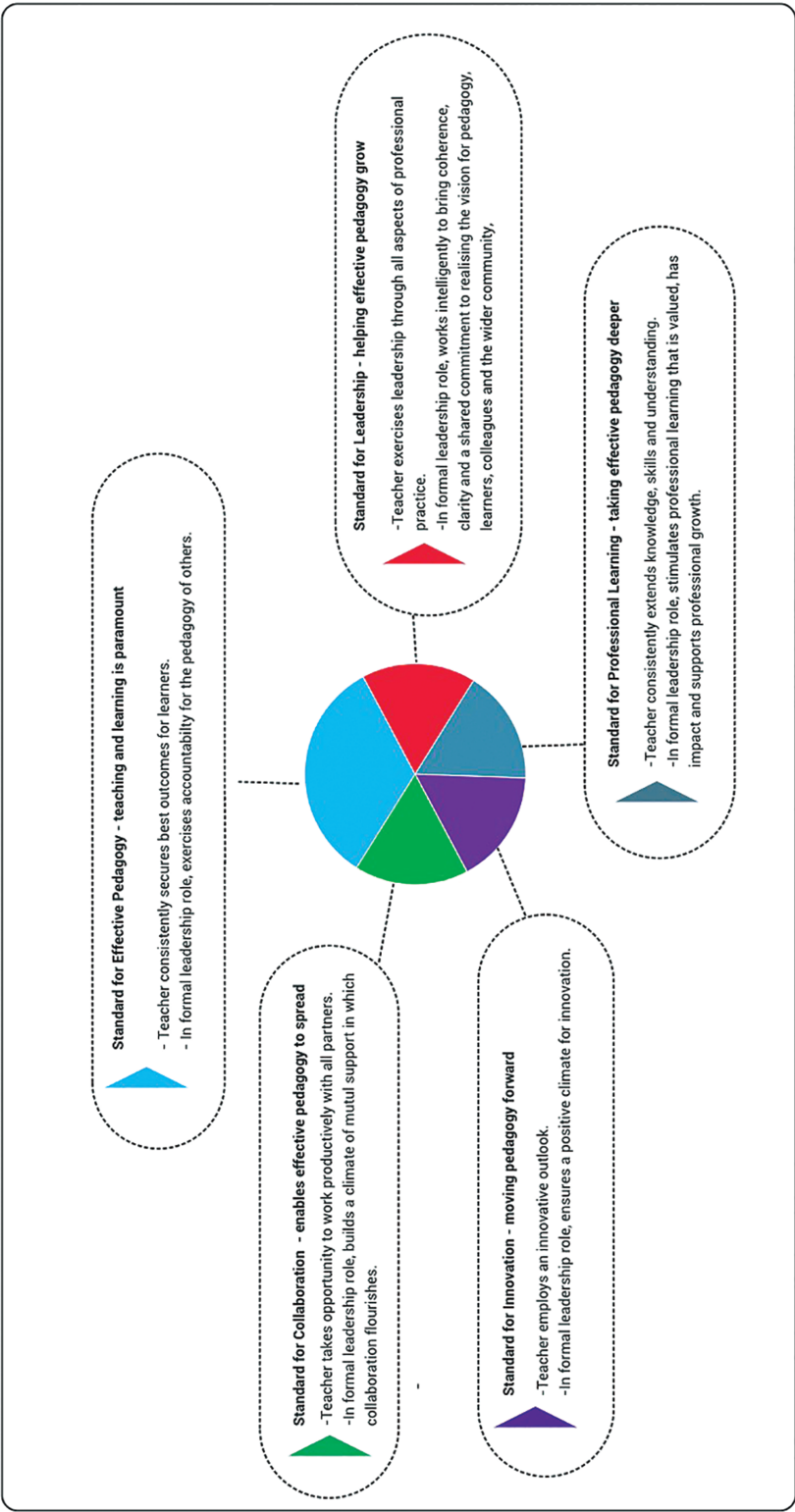


Figure 7.6.1 The Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership in Wales

Source: For more information about the Professional Standards refer to the Welsh Government website: <https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-development/professional-standards/>

During the course of their ITE programme student teachers are required to capture evidence against each of the Standards. This evidence is stored electronically, in their PLP. This is a tool that is available for all registrants to the EWC. For more information about the PLP refer to the EWC's website: <https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/professional-development/professional-learning-passport>.

SUMMARY AND KEY POINTS

In this unit, we have introduced you to the distinctive features of education in Wales. You should now have an understanding of:

- the background to the current and emerging structure of education in Wales;
- the organisation and governance of schooling in Wales;
- the Curriculum for Wales as it will be experienced by pupils in state schools in Wales;
- the place of your own subject within the six Areas of Learning and Experience in the Curriculum for Wales;
- the range of qualifications available to pupils in Wales (now and in the future);
- key national bodies related to education and training in Wales;
- the nature of ITE in Wales;
- more generally, how the emerging changes to the school curriculum, assessment and ITE form part of wider system-level reforms in Wales.

Check which requirements for your ITE programme you have addressed through this unit.



ONLINE RESOURCES

For bonus digital resources designed to enhance your learning, head to routledgelearning.com/learningtoteach.



Further resources

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2017) *The Welsh Education Reform Journey: A Rapid Policy Assessment*, viewed 31 July 2025, <https://web.archive.oecd.org/2018-10-21/429167-the-welsh-education-reform-journey-final.pdf>

The Welsh education system has undergone some rapid developments in recent years. This independent report was commissioned by the Welsh Government to analyse the impact of reforms adopted since 2014, and to offer recommendations to inform next steps.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2020) *Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales*, viewed 31 July 2025, <https://www.oecd.org/publications/achieving-the-new-curriculum-for-wales-4b483953-en.htm>

This OECD report analyses the progress made with the curriculum since 2016, and offers suggestions on the actions Wales should take to ready the system for further development and implementation. The analysis looks at the four pillars of implementation - curriculum policy design, stakeholders' engagement, policy context and implementation strategy - and builds upon the literature and experiences of OECD countries to provide tailored advice to Wales.

Wales Journal of Education, 22(1) (2020), viewed 31 July 2025, <https://journal.uwp.co.uk/wje/issue/18/info/>

This special edition focused on reforms to initial teacher education in Wales. Published in the academic year when the first of the newly accredited ITE courses commenced, the issue contains contributions from each of the newly accredited providers, views from other parts of the UK and an international perspective. Contributions from the editors on the historical and intellectual background to the reforms and case studies from school leaders in Wales complete the edition.

The Curriculum Journal, 31(2) (2020), viewed 31 July 2025, <https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/14693704/2020/31/2>

This special issue of The Curriculum Journal, published simultaneously in English and Welsh, draws on a range of empirical studies undertaken during the design and development phase of the Curriculum for Wales. It brings together ten papers that each examine a different aspect of the curriculum reform journey in Wales, providing more detail on the reforms and offering their insights into how this reform journey is going and what challenges may still lie ahead.

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