



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Evaluation of the professional standards for teaching, leadership and assisting teaching: year 1 (summary)

This research evaluates the implementation, effectiveness and anticipated impacts of the professional standards, and their ability to support the development of a highly-skilled workforce.

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Introduction

Welsh Government has commissioned Arad Research, in partnership with OB3 and the University of South Wales, to evaluate the professional standards for teaching and leadership and the professional standards for assisting teaching (referred to in this document as the ‘professional standards’ or ‘the standards’). This report presents a summary of the findings from the first year of this evaluation.

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About the professional standards

The Welsh Government is committed to developing a high-quality education profession as set out in its strategy for the education sector up until 2021, [Education in Wales: Our National Mission \(the Strategy\)](#) and its more recently [updated action plan](#). The professional standards are one of eight elements within the Welsh Government's National Approach for Professional Learning.

The standards were published in September 2017 and comprise three inter-connected sections:

1. Professional standards for teaching and leadership
2. Professional standards for formal leadership
3. Professional standards for assisting teaching (published later, in 2019)

All three sets of standards are based on five essential elements of effective teaching and learning:

1. Pedagogy
2. Leadership
3. Professional learning
4. Innovation
5. Collaboration

The Education Workforce Council (EWC) offers an online professional learning passport (PLP) for registered practitioners to reflect on their practice and record their professional learning. The PLP is funded by the Welsh Government, and each user's PLP includes professional learning templates and a 'standards workbook' in which practitioners can map their professional learning experiences and upload evidence against each of the standards.

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About the evaluation

The aim of the evaluation is ‘to evaluate the implementation, effectiveness and anticipated impacts of the professional standards for teaching, leadership and assisting teaching in terms of their ability to support the development of a highly-skilled workforce ready to meet the challenges of education reform in Wales’ (Welsh Government, 2019a: Specification for: Evaluation of the Professional Teaching and Leadership Standards. Unpublished.)

The evaluation has primarily involved gathering qualitative evidence through interviewing education practitioners and stakeholders as well as reviewing available secondary data on engagement with the standards. Interviews have focused on examining:

- levels of awareness and understanding of the standards among school practitioners and stakeholders
- how practitioners and stakeholders have used or responded to the standards on a day-to-day basis
- the effectiveness of implementation of the standards, including factors and conditions enabling and impeding effective implementation;
- views on the support provided to facilitate implementation
- views on the anticipated impacts as a result of the implementation of the standards (along with any initial outcomes experienced)

Year 1 fieldwork was conducted between October 2020 and April 2021 (Fieldwork had initially been planned to start in May 2020, but was delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic). A total of 83 practitioners were interviewed across 20 schools, with a total of 49 stakeholders also interviewed. Of these, 40 were ‘national’ or ‘regional’ stakeholders identified during the scoping phase and 9 were ‘practitioner support stakeholders’ who were identified by settings. A purposive approach was taken to sampling, drawing on qualitative evidence from stakeholders to identify schools who were considered to have engaged with the standards ‘in depth’, and schools who were considered to be at an ‘earlier stage of engagement’ with the standards. A full description of the methodology is presented in the main report.

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Findings: awareness and understanding of the standards

A range of information, guidance and self-evaluation tools are available from different sources to inform practitioners about the standards, and these are widely accessed and used. Practitioners also rely heavily on school-level information and resources when engaging with the standards. School leaders play a key role in raising awareness and enhancing understanding of the standards among staff and schools hold INSET sessions and staff meetings on the standards.

School leaders and practitioners who contributed to the study were very familiar with the standards, although feedback from stakeholders suggests that levels of awareness and understanding are more varied than the study sample.

The findings suggest that practitioners who are most familiar with the standards are newly qualified teachers (NQTs), Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students, NQT induction mentors and external verifiers. Support staff and experienced, long-standing class teachers are the least familiar with them.

Overall, practitioners regard the standards more positively than the previous standards and consider them to be more manageable and allow them to build upon their strengths as practitioners. Stakeholders regard them as a more holistic, developmental and aspirational approach than the previous standards.

Engaging with the standards has been daunting for some practitioners, particularly teaching assistants, due to the use of unfamiliar terminology and language, however some practitioners were said to have built confidence with the terminology over time.

The standards are very well aligned with other key policy developments, particularly Curriculum for Wales, but their promotion and implementation has been overshadowed by these other strategic developments.

Applying the standards across ITE provision when awarding Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) creates challenges for providers, as they are too broad to be used

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as an effective pass or fail mechanism when determining a QTS award to a student.

Use of the standards

Limited data is available on practitioners' levels of engagement with the standards. At national level, data has been gathered on engagement with the previous standards via a National Education Workforce Survey (EWC, 2017), while some data are also collected via the PLP. Use of the PLP does not necessarily reflect levels of engagement with the standards, because practitioners can log in to the platform to record evidence of their professional learning without mapping it to the standards. However, data on the use of the platform, which has been designed to facilitate engagement with the standards, do provide useful insights into teachers' behaviours in recording their development.

An overview of the data on PLP use is presented in the full report. Data for March 2021 show that:

- 13,923 registered teachers (including headteachers and NQTs) and 10,652 Learning Support Workers (LSWs) have created their own PLP [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
 - this represents 40% of all registered teachers and 28% of all registered LSWs in March 2021
 - there has been significant growth in the numbers creating their own PLP since its launch, largely driven by NQTs using the platform
- just under half of teachers who have created their own PLP (41%) logged in to the platform during the twelve months to March 2021
 - over half (61%) of LSWs who have created their own PLP had logged in during the twelve months to March 2021

[\[1\]](#) There are 2,783 PLP users who are registered as both as a teacher and a LSW, and they are included in both categories.

[\[2\]](#) LSW is used to refer to both Teaching Assistants and Higher-level Teaching Assistants.

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Findings from interviews show that the extent to which the standards are used by practitioners varies across and between settings. Findings suggest this depends on a number of factors including:

- the emphasis placed on them by setting leaders
- the extent to which they are embedded in performance management processes including the templates and self-assessment tools being used in settings
- whether practitioners are allocated specific time to reflect on the standards for example, to complete self-assessment tools or the PLP)
- whether the setting and/or its practitioners are engaged in ITE or induction processes
- whether practitioners are following formal leadership courses, undertaking induction or seeking Higher Level Teaching Assistant status

Settings that have embedded the standards in their school and staff development value them and consider them to be beneficial, although the extent of use of the standards varies by role within these schools. The standards tend to be used less often by some practitioners, specifically teaching assistants (TAs), and more experienced teachers who have not followed formal leadership courses.

Use of the standards is limited in some settings, with some initial awareness-raising activity reported but less evidence of embedding them in professional learning and performance management activity. Some settings have embedded the standards in their professional learning and development activity; however, most consider themselves as being at an 'early stage' of implementation.

COVID-19 has delayed or limited planned activity relating to the standards during 2020 and 2021. However, settings consider that much progress has been made in terms of professional development against some of the standards, particularly innovation.

The standards are considered to be an effective tool for setting out the expectations for practitioners as professionals. They are valued as a developmental tool but there are split views as to their use in more formal structures such as job descriptions.

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Settings consider it important that the professional standards for assisting teaching (PSATs) have been developed as they help underpin professional learning activity for support staff.

The standards are valued by practitioners in pupil referral units (PRUs) as they feel it provides greater status for professionals in the sector.

Settings whose practitioners consider that the standards are being used effectively tend to:

- have leaders who have placed a significant emphasis on the standards, often for a number of years
- have a culture of professional learning with regular opportunities for staff to discuss and unpick aspects of the standards in a non-threatening way as part of a professional dialogue
- have a collaborative approach to professional learning which encourages practitioners to take ownership of their professional learning
- have adopted tools for practitioners to self-assess against the standards, have trained staff to use these and are using (or plan to use them) as part of performance management
- have developed approaches that enable them to strike a balance between using the standards for individual-level reflection and collecting data that can inform the planning of professional learning at setting level
- encourage practitioners to use standards as a 'natural' part of discussions when sharing their reflections and experiences with colleagues

Support available to use the standards

Interviewees were asked their views on the support available for schools and practitioners to use the standards and how this could be improved at national, regional and school level.

There was a variation in the support available to practitioners with some stating they had received excellent support from their school and consortia, whereas others said they had not. Practitioners perceived that more support and

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information was available when the standards were initially launched, with less support reported to be available more recently. Practitioners reported that the pandemic has affected momentum in engaging with the standards, indicating that there is a need to boost the support and information that is available.

It was reported that there was good support available for practitioners and schools supporting those practitioners at the start of their careers and through middle leader programmes.

Practitioners and stakeholders consider there to be a lack of clear guidance and training aimed specifically at TAs, and that there is a need for more support to increase use of the PSATs within schools.

There were a number of examples of NQTs leading sessions on the standards to other staff during INSET days, with NQTs more familiar with the language and use of the standards.

Additional support would be appreciated for practitioners in using the standards, these included:

- clearer guidance for various levels of practitioners / supporting staff on how to interpret the standards
- continued awareness-raising activities to support further engagement with the standards
- a need for more structured cascading of support across Wales to ensure consistency of support for practitioners and support staff
- further time and capacity for teachers to be able to work on the standards during self-reflection periods

Perceived and anticipated impacts

Most practitioners and stakeholders interviewed commented that the impacts of the standards would not be seen for a number of years. Interviewees explained that, in their view, this was because most schools were at an early stage of engagement with the standards, and that this meant not all practitioners were

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using the standards as extensively as they hoped they would in future. Related to this, interviewees explained that use of the standards was highest among NQTs, and that it would take time for these early-career practitioners to move through the education system and for the whole education workforce to become familiar and comfortable with using the standards.

Most interviewees consider it too soon to observe the impact of the standards at a workforce or setting level. However, practitioners and stakeholders also provided a number of examples of emerging impacts they had observed. Emerging examples of impact were more often mentioned by practitioners in settings where the standards were considered to be more embedded in professional learning and development.

Practitioners and stakeholders anticipate that the standards are likely to be having a greater impact on those who use them most, primarily ITE students and NQTs. Stakeholders report that they have observed greater understanding of leadership skills and career progression among NQTs and early career practitioners in recent years. Practitioners report that the standards have encouraged self-reflection by providing an aspirational framework and a common language for discussions.

Practitioners in some settings report that the standards have helped improve their practitioner self-assessment processes by providing a more aspirational, developmental structure around which these processes can be based. In particular, practitioners in PRUs and TAs report that the standards have helped 'professionalise' discussions around professional learning and note that this could contribute towards improving practitioner wellbeing. Some interviewees anticipated that the standards would improve perceptions of working in PRUs and TA roles.

In some settings, senior leaders and stakeholders provided examples of practitioners taking greater autonomy and ownership of their professional learning. Practitioners and stakeholders report observing examples where the standards have increased practitioner awareness and understanding of leadership, and have encouraged higher levels of collaboration and innovation.

Some practitioners and stakeholders anticipate that the increased focus on

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pedagogy in the standards will contribute to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Some anticipated that impacts would be more likely to be seen as the Curriculum for Wales is enacted.

Contact details

Full Research Report: Thomas, Hefin; Duggan, Brett; Grover, Tanwen; Glyn, Eluned, Bryer, Nia; and Bebb, Heledd (2021)

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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