



Evaluation of the professional standards for teaching, leadership and assisting teaching: Final report

Executive summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Welsh Government 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 of the evaluation.

2. About the professional standards

- 2.1 The Welsh Government is committed to developing a high-quality education profession as set out in its plan for the education sector up until 2021, 'Education in Wales: Our National Mission Action Plan 2017-21'.¹ The professional standards are one of eight elements within the Welsh Government's [National Approach for Professional Learning](#) (NAPL) and feature as a key component of the [National Professional Learning Entitlement](#) (NPLE).
- 2.2 The standards were published in September 2017 and comprise three inter-connected sections:
- Professional standards for teaching and leadership
 - Professional standards for formal leadership
 - Professional standards for assisting teaching (PSATs, published later, in 2019).
- 2.3 All three sets of standards are based on five essential elements of effective teaching and leadership:
- Pedagogy
 - Leadership
 - Professional learning

¹ Welsh Government (2020) [Education in Wales: Our national mission. Update October 2020](#).

- Innovation
 - Collaboration.
- 2.4 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.

3. About the evaluation

- 3.1 The aim of the evaluation was '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).²
- 3.2 The evaluation primarily involved gathering qualitative evidence through interviewing education practitioners and stakeholders as well as reviewing available secondary data on engagement with the standards. Interviews focused on examining:
- levels of **awareness** and **understanding** of the standards among 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).
- 3.3 Fieldwork with practitioners and stakeholders comprised the following:
- In Year 1 (October 2020-April 2021):³ a total of 83 practitioners were interviewed across 20 settings, with a total of 71 stakeholders also interviewed.⁴ The [Year 1 evaluation report \(Welsh Government, 2021\)](#).
 - In Year 2 (May-July 2022): A total of 44 practitioners took part across 18 settings (two of the 20 settings engaged in Year 1 were unable to take part).
 - A total of 40 out of the 44 practitioners took part in both waves of the research.
 - A total of 30 stakeholders were interviewed in Year 2.⁵
- 3.4 A purposive approach was taken to sampling, drawing on qualitative evidence from stakeholders to identify settings that were considered to have engaged with the standards 'in depth', and settings who were considered to be at an 'earlier stage of engagement' with the standards. The qualitative nature of the methodology means that the findings in this

² Welsh Government (2019a). *Specification for: Evaluation of the Professional Teaching and Leadership Standards*. Unpublished.

³ Fieldwork had initially been planned to start in May 2020, but was delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴ This includes 22 interviewed during an initial scoping phase between January and April 2020)

⁵ All of these 30 interviewees were from 'national' or 'regional' stakeholder organisations engaged during Year 1. Two of these 30 interviewees were individuals who did not participate in Year 1 interviews but represented organisations who were engaged.

summary should be considered to be indicative of the sample of settings and practitioners engaged and the findings cannot be generalised to the wider population of practitioners. A full description of the methodology is presented in the main report.

4. Findings: awareness and understanding of the standards

- 4.1 Findings from Years 1 and 2 of the evaluation show that 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 rely heavily on setting-level information about the standards and senior leaders play a key role in raising awareness and enhancing understanding through disseminating information about the standards (e.g. in presentations, during professional learning and when distributing information relating to performance management).
- 4.2 Over the course of the evaluation, relatively little change was observed in practitioners' overall awareness of the standards, due to other pressures and priorities faced by settings. However, several of the settings who contributed to the Year 2 evaluation fieldwork did report increased understanding as a result of deeper engagement with the standards within their own setting. This appears to reflect the fact that awareness-raising approaches have become more embedded into existing practices within settings, including informal professional dialogues and professional learning activities.
- 4.3 Senior 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. In both waves of the evaluation fieldwork, the practitioners who were most familiar with the standards were:
- newly qualified teachers (NQTs)
 - Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students
 - NQT induction mentors and external verifiers
 - senior leaders.
- 4.4 Support staff and experienced class teachers were the least familiar with the standards in both waves of the evaluation fieldwork. For some practitioners, engaging with the standards was daunting, due to the use of unfamiliar terminology and language. The PSATs are valued as a framework underpinning the professional development of support staff. However, there appears to be a need for further activity to encourage and increase use of these in settings. Without further encouragement, and possibly greater regulation, the findings suggest that settings who have not already done so are unlikely to extend the standards to support staff.
- 4.5 Although little change was observed in overall awareness of the standards, practitioners who were engaged in formal professional development programmes were most likely to have improved their understanding of them over the course of the evaluation. This appears to reflect the fact that the standards have become embedded into some professional development programmes. These programmes have played an important role in enhancing practitioners' understanding of them, particularly middle and senior leaders.
- 4.6 The standards are considered to be well-aligned with the Curriculum for Wales and other education reforms. However, settings do not appear to be fully integrating the standards into their curriculum design activity yet, and have prioritised the implementation of the curriculum over the past year. Some practitioners and stakeholders believed that reviewing

and refreshing the wording of some of the standards, in light of curriculum and other education reforms, could be valuable.

- 4.7 Practitioners regarded 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.

5. Use of the standards

- 5.1 Limited quantitative data is available on practitioners' levels of engagement with the standards. PLP data provides useful insights into teachers' behaviours in recording their development, but this does not necessarily reflect levels of engagement with the standards, because practitioners can log in to the PLP to record evidence of their professional learning without mapping it to the standards.
- 5.2 An overview of the data on PLP use is presented in the full report. Data for September 2022 show that, 31,101 practitioners had created their own PLP. This number comprised:
- 14,017 teachers
 - 1,408 senior leaders⁶
 - 2,412 NQTs
 - 13,264 LSWs.⁷
- 5.3 The total number of practitioners who have created their own PLP has grown steadily since its inception in 2017, largely driven by NQTs using the platform.
- Around half (51 per cent) of all registered teachers (including senior leaders and NQTs) had created their own PLP by September 2022, compared with 13 per cent in March 2017
 - Just under a third of LSWs (31 per cent) had created their own PLP by September 2022, compared with 12 per cent in 2018 (when LSWs first started using it)
 - Around half of practitioners who had created their own PLP had logged in during the last 12 months, representing around a quarter of all registered teachers and around 15 per cent of all LSWs.
- 5.4 Use of the standards varied significantly across settings and were mainly driven by:
- the emphasis placed on them by senior leaders, for example whether they allocated time for practitioners to reflect against the standards as part of professional learning and performance management and had developed self-assessment tools structured around the descriptors
 - whether practitioners were engaged in ITE, induction processes or other formal professional learning (e.g. leadership courses)
 - the role of the practitioner: senior leaders, NQTs, ITE students, mentors and external verifiers were most likely to be using them, while TAs and experienced teachers were least likely to be using the standards.

⁶ Senior leaders include head teachers, deputy head teachers and assistant head teachers.

⁷ LSW is used to refer to both Teaching Assistants and Higher-level Teaching Assistants.

- 5.5 Over the course of the evaluation, several of the settings had further embedded the standards in their activities and systems including performance management, professional development and professional learning. In a few settings, practitioners reported that the language and terminology of the standards were increasingly being used as part of staff meetings and informal professional dialogue among staff. Those who had participated in formal professional learning programmes reported that the standards were prominent within these and that this had helped them to use the standards in their own setting.
- 5.6 Use of the standards remained relatively unchanged in some settings, due to other pressures and priorities faced by practitioners. In a few settings, limited use of the standards continued to be reported, with activity focused on initial awareness-raising, induction processes, and senior leaders considering them as part of strategic planning.
- 5.7 In a few settings, senior leaders were using the standards as a framework for gathering aggregate, setting-wide data on the professional development of their workforce. These senior leaders reported that this type of data was helpful in identifying professional development needs and using this, alongside other quality assurance data (e.g. classroom observations, peer review), to help plan professional learning to address these needs.
- 5.8 The standards continued to be valued as a framework setting out the expectations for practitioners, with practitioners considering them as a useful developmental tool. Practitioners in PRUs valued them as providing a consistent framework which provided them with greater status. Views on the extent to which the standards can be used in a more structured, quantitative way varied, with some preferring a more qualitative approach, and others valuing them as a framework for gathering data on professional development.
- 5.9 The case studies set out in Annex B of the main report illustrate a range of ways in which the sample of settings engaged in this evaluation are using the standards at setting-level and practitioner-level. These have been summarised in three broad typologies which illustrate the range of practice reported in the settings engaged:
- Typology 1: the standards used as a holistic framework for discussing professional development
 - Typology 2: the standards used as part of dialogue and data-driven approaches to professional development
 - Typology 3: the standards mainly used as a reference point by senior leaders.

It is important to recognise that these typologies are not mutually exclusive and that settings can demonstrate elements of more than one of them.

- 5.10 Practitioners continued to believe that much progress has been made in terms of professional development against some of the standards over the last few years, particularly innovation and collaboration. Some of this has been at least partly driven by the necessity to adapt working practices in response to the pandemic.

6. Support available to use the standards

- 6.1 There were variations in the amount and nature of support accessed by practitioners to use the standards. This was closely linked to:
- how much emphasis their setting placed on using the standards, for example, whether they were trained to use self-assessment tools structured around the standards, or had detailed discussions around the descriptors in performance management discussions

- whether they had been engaged in professional learning which was structured around the standards, and therefore had been supported to reflect on and interpret the descriptors.
- 6.2 Stakeholders highlighted the increasing emphasis placed on the standards within professional learning courses and the findings during Year 2 of the evaluation indicate that this is starting to permeate through to senior leaders and practitioners.
- 6.3 There is evidence of regular attempts within settings to ensure that practitioners use the standards in ways that are consistent with some aspects of the Welsh Government's guidance on '[How best to use the Professional Teaching Standards](#)'. However, there was limited evidence of practice that was consistent with other aspects of the guidance, such as:
- practitioners using the PLP as a tool to reflect on their practice (with the exception of NQTs and those engaged in formal leadership courses)
 - support being provided across the board to ensure rounded development and deep reflection
 - practitioners and settings linking descriptors together, or supporting each other in exploring a particular standard together.
- 6.4 The evaluation findings suggest that more work needs to be done to raise awareness and understanding of the standards. In both waves of the evaluation, senior leaders and practitioners reported a need for support to raise understanding and use of the standards. More experienced practitioners and TAs in non-leadership roles continue to be reliant on setting-level support to understand and use the standards, which can be variable. However, this remains a challenge against a backdrop of responding to the aftermath of the pandemic and increasingly, the roll-out of the Curriculum for Wales.
- 6.5 There is a call for a more consistent approach to the support being provided across Wales. The findings indicate that clearer guidance on how to interpret and use the standards would be welcomed, aimed at particular groups of practitioners (e.g. support staff). Examples included:
- developing exemplification materials to show how practitioners can meet the descriptors in various contexts
 - continued awareness-raising activities and support linked to other education reforms (e.g. how the standards can be used to support curriculum design and realisation)
 - guidance on how the standards should be used as part of settings' performance management processes
 - guidance on allocating time and capacity to practitioners to reflect on the standards as part of professional learning.
- 6.6 The findings suggest that there may be a case for delegating specific responsibilities for raising awareness and promotion of the standards to one or more stakeholder organisations.

7. Perceived and anticipated impacts

- 7.1 Over the course of the evaluation, the evidence indicates that, gradually, the standards are having an increasing impact on practitioners' behaviours and practice. The standards were considered to be providing a framework that supports deeper processes of self-reflection and discussions around professional development.

- 7.2 Evidence indicates that practitioners are taking greater responsibility for their own professional development, partly driven by the Curriculum for Wales. It was suggested that there was a gradual shift towards many teachers taking a more active role in identifying the types of professional learning needed to improve specific aspects of pedagogy or leadership.
- 7.3 During Year 2 of the evaluation, senior leaders reported greater collaboration between practitioners, and that this was often related to or informed by the standards. This included practitioners being more open to discussing their pedagogy, professional development and areas for further improvement. Some senior leaders described an improvement in the quality of professional dialogue relating to teaching and learning methods, planning and behaviour management. The standards were considered to provide a vocabulary and language that supports more in-depth discussions on professional development.
- 7.4 In some settings, the PSATs are leading to further opportunities for TAs to engage in professional learning by setting out pathways for professional development and encouraging greater aspirations. Some TAs reported that the standards have contributed to them feeling more valued as members of the workforce.
- 7.5 A range of other observed changes in teacher behaviour and practices were reported by senior leaders. Staff were reported to be more comfortable in taking risks and in trialling new approaches. This was considered to be partly driven by curriculum reform but also by the emphasis on innovation as part of the professional standards. Examples included digital innovation and engaging in action research to inform new pedagogical approaches.
- 7.6 There was some evidence to indicate that the standards were impacting or contributing to settings' approaches to supporting continuous improvement. Some settings use information linked to the teachers' development in relation to the professional standards to identify priorities for CPD to help drive improvements in teaching and learning. Senior leaders suggested that the professional standards are supporting the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales by helping to develop appropriate pedagogy among teachers.
- 7.7 Limited evidence was presented by senior leaders and teachers of any direct impacts of the standards on learners. Some senior leaders were confident that the standards could support better learner outcomes but that this would only happen over time.
- 7.8 Some settings reported that the standards had led to an increased focus on learner wellbeing, peer-learning, peer-assessment and developing learners' skills in independent learning. Senior leaders and teachers also noted that professional enquiry relating to the professional standards was helping to improve the support for children's mental health and wellbeing.
- 7.9 Stakeholders noted that the growing awareness and use of the standards was gradually leading to more evident impacts on setting processes and teaching practice. However, they felt that the impacts remained very variable across the wider system and that impacts were highest among NQTs and senior leaders who engage more fully with the standards. The challenge is to ensure the standards are promoted and embedded more widely.
- 7.10 Some senior leaders felt that the standards' impact was not helped by the disconnect between the standards and performance management arrangements. Although some of the schools interviewed as part of the evaluation had introduced processes that had meant the standards were embedded as part of performance management, this was the case in a minority of settings.

8. Issues for consideration

8.1 A series of issues for consideration are presented in the main report. A summary of these is set out below:

- Further activity to raise awareness of the standards should be considered at national level, particularly aimed at those practitioners whose awareness and understanding is reported to be lower (e.g. support staff and more experienced teachers).
- A working group of key stakeholders should be convened to review and refine the wording of the standards, and alignment of this wording with other guidance, and to consider how best to support practitioners to use them in future.
- The Welsh Government should take into account the practices observed in schools and reported by stakeholders in this evaluation when reviewing the current guidance on using the standards.
- A review of the guidance on how best to use the standards should be considered, exploring:
 - how the standards should be used as part of schools' performance management processes
 - the development of exemplification materials (e.g. videos) to illustrate how practitioners can meet the descriptors in various contexts,
 - the development of materials aimed at making the links between the standards and other education reforms more explicit (e.g. how the standards can be used to support curriculum design and realisation)
 - the development of guidance on allocating time and capacity to practitioners to reflect on the standards as part of professional learning.
- Senior leaders should be encouraged to involve their staff with more familiarity with the standards, such as those who are, or have recently been, engaged in ITE and induction processes, in the process of raising awareness and understanding of the standards among their workforce.
- The Welsh Government should consider whether responsibility for promoting the use of the standards and developing tools to support their use should be delegated to one or more stakeholder organisations.
- The Welsh Government and local authorities should consider strengthening the expectation that settings engage TAs in using the standards as part of their professional development, building on the expectations set out in the NPLE guidance.
- The Welsh Government should continue to monitor how the PLP is used by practitioners, particularly those who have completed their statutory induction period. It should consider how the PLP might be improved and what usage data could be made available at the level of settings.

Full Research Report: Thomas, H. Duggan, B. Bryer, N, Bebb, H. (2023). *Evaluation of the professional standards for teaching, leadership and assisting teaching*. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 54/2023.

Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/evaluation-professional-standards-teaching-leadership-and-assisting-teaching-final-report>

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

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

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