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Research on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 2 report

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Research on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 2 report

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

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Table of contents

List of tables.....	1
Glossary.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	2
Executive summary.....	3
1. Introduction	16
2. Methodology.....	23
3. Profile of respondents	32
4. Progress in implementing the new curriculum.....	36
5. Careers and Work-related Experiences (CWRE)	46
6. Welsh language	56
7. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories	65
8. Other elements of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) framework	76
9. Progression	84
10. Assessment.....	97
11. Equity and inclusivity	106
12. Parent and carer engagement.....	115
13. Views of learners.....	121
14. Conclusions and issues for consideration	130
Annex A: Discussion guides used during the research	143
Annex B: Wave 1 sample profile	152

List of tables

Table 1. Profile of sample of senior leaders in schools and settings implementing the curriculum during 2022/23 interviewed in Wave 2 by sector and language medium	33
Table 2. Profile of senior leaders in schools and settings implementing the curriculum during 2022/23 interviewed in Wave 2 by region.....	33
Table 3. Profile of sample of interviewees by sector and language medium.....	153
Table 4. Profile of interview sample by region.....	153

Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
ALN	Additional learning needs
All-through school	Schools for learners aged 3–16/19
Areas/AoLEs	Areas of learning and experience
CfW	Curriculum for Wales
CWRE	Careers and work-related experiences
DARPL	Diversity and Anti-Racist Professional Learning
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
INSET	In-service Education and Training Day
LLC	Languages, Literacy and Communication (one of the six areas of learning and experience)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRU	Pupil referral unit
REC(s)	Regional Education Consortia
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education

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Executive summary

1. This report presents findings of the second wave (Wave 2) of qualitative research with 62 senior leaders in schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) carried out by Arad Research and the Open University in Wales. The aim of this research was to undertake two waves of qualitative research during academic year 2022/23 to understand how the curriculum and assessment reforms were working for practitioners and learners in schools and settings, and the barriers and facilitators to successful implementation.
2. This report follows on from the [Wave 1 report](#), which presented findings of the first round of interviews with senior leaders.¹ In addition to presenting findings from follow-up interviews with senior leaders, it also presents evidence from fieldwork with groups of learners in primary and secondary schools, outlining their experiences of curriculum delivery during the academic year 2022/23.
3. This report provides a brief overview of findings from Wave 1 but focuses principally on issues raised during the second phase of the research.

Methodology and analysis

4. The first wave of the research ('Wave 1') involved interviews with 64 senior leaders in schools and PRUs who were implementing CfW during 2022/23 as well as six focus groups with a total of 30 learners. During Wave 2, the research team sought to re-interview as many as possible of those same senior leaders interviewed during the first phase. The findings of this report draw on the following:
 - Interviews with 62 senior leaders in schools and settings who were implementing CfW during 2022/23 (56 of these were also interviewed during Wave 1; six senior leaders were newly recruited)
 - Interviews with 12 senior leaders in secondary schools that were preparing to implement CfW from September 2023
 - Nine focus groups with a total of 54 learners.

¹ [Research with schools on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 1 report](#) (Welsh Government, April 2023)

5. Purposive samples of senior leaders were recruited to ensure regional coverage and the inclusion of a variety of settings stratified by type of setting (primary, secondary, all-through, special, PRU) and by language medium (Welsh-medium, (including dual language); English-medium).²
6. To guide the process of selecting participants for the learner focus groups, senior leaders were asked to randomly select three learners from a specific year group (4, 5, 6 or 7) or registration class, ensuring a mix of gender representation, and then invite each of the three selected learners to bring a friend with them to the focus group. This meant that half of the participants were randomly sampled and half were friends of those selected who were invited to come along.
7. It is important to acknowledge the risk of selection bias among the sample of schools that engaged with the research. Settings that had progressed further than others in their preparation activities may have been more likely to agree to contribute to the study. A description of the methodology is set out in Section 2 and the profile of contributors to the research is included in Section 3.
8. Research tools were developed to guide the fieldwork with senior leaders and learners (see Section 2 of the main report). Findings below are structured according to the discussion themes in the interview guide for senior leaders. Some discussion themes (Overall progress in implementing CfW; Progression; Assessment; Parental engagement; Equity and inclusion) were explored in both Wave 1 (November 2022-January 2023) and Wave 2 (May-July 2023), and findings from both waves are referenced below. Three themes (CWRE; Welsh language; Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories) were explored in Wave 2 only. Three themes (Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE); International Languages; Working across areas of learning and experience) were only explored in Wave 1 and briefly revisited in Wave 2; findings on these themes are set out in Section 8 of the main report.

Progress in implementing the new curriculum

9. The Wave 1 report had found that most senior leaders were content with the progress they had made to date in designing and implementing their curriculum.

² Throughout this report the term 'Welsh-medium schools' is used to refer to findings from senior leaders in both Welsh-medium schools and in relation to Welsh-medium provision in dual language schools.

Senior leaders reported that practitioners were increasingly taking responsibility and ownership for curriculum implementation. Interviewees reported that there was an increased focus on pedagogy and collaborative activity in schools and settings and across clusters. Senior leaders also reported that designing and implementing their curriculum had created challenges in terms of staff capacity and time.

10. During Wave 2, senior leaders reported continued good progress in implementing the new curriculum. Developments highlighted during the Wave 1 interviews had advanced in many schools and settings, and senior leaders were generally satisfied with the changes since they had begun implementation.
11. In a minority of cases senior leaders noted they were struggling to advance, and that progress had been slower than expected. These senior leaders reported feeling overwhelmed with the scale and complexity of the reforms.
12. Senior leaders noted that implementing changes under Curriculum for Wales (CfW) was an iterative process, and that continuous monitoring, review, and redesign were required. Senior leaders commonly reported undertaking periodic reviews and audits of their curriculum plans.
13. A minority of senior leaders reported that some staff were reluctant to move away from well-established frameworks and systems, particularly in areas such as assessment. In these cases, senior leaders highlighted that more time and support was needed to build the confidence and knowledge of these staff members.
14. Senior leaders commonly highlighted being part of strong clusters of schools and settings with effective working relationships that provided guidance, reassurance and opportunities to work collaboratively. In the main, cluster relationships appeared to be strong and had evolved since senior leaders were spoken to in Wave 1. There was variance, however, in the nature of cluster-working and the extent to which clusters were integrated and developing common approaches.
15. Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 had decided to delay roll-out in order to spend more time trialling and refining aspects of their new curriculum. Some referred to factors such as the impact of the pandemic, school inspections and recent changes to school leadership as having influenced their decision. Most considered they were making good progress with their

preparations for roll-out, although these schools noted concerns about the nature of reformed GCSE qualifications and their alignment with CfW.

Careers and work-related experiences (CWRE)

16. Some senior leaders indicated that they were at a relatively early stage of implementing CWRE within their curriculum and that this was a new focus for their school or setting. These senior leaders reported that they required more support with implementing CWRE. Senior leaders reported that other elements of their curriculum had been prioritised over cross-cutting themes such as a CWRE.
17. Senior leaders highlighted the links their school or setting had made with local employers and organisations to support them in implementing CWRE. Senior leaders in both primary and secondary schools described their efforts to integrate these experiences within their curriculum activity, themes or projects.
18. Senior leaders emphasised the importance of CWRE in increasing learners' aspirations by enabling them to consider career opportunities which they would not necessarily be aware of. Senior leaders reported that their school or setting had effective working relationships with Careers Wales which were valuable in supporting CWRE.

Welsh language

19. Reinforcing views expressed during the Wave 1 interviews, senior leaders in Welsh-medium (including dual language) schools reported that the pandemic had impacted upon learners' confidence and ability to use Welsh. This was particularly felt to be a challenge for learners who did not speak Welsh at home. Senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools also reported that they continue to face challenges in recruiting and retaining staff who were able to teach through the medium of Welsh.
20. Senior leaders in English-medium schools noted that progress was being made on the use of incidental Welsh in their school and reported that they were focused on further promoting this in the classroom and wider school environment. Senior leaders

had positive views on the Siarter Iaith (Welsh Language Charter) as a framework for increasing the use of Welsh in their school or setting.³

21. Senior leaders in English-medium schools reported difficulties in filling vacancies both for Welsh-speaking staff and those qualified to teach Welsh as a subject. Some senior leaders indicated that the shortage of staff with Welsh language skills meant they faced challenges in meeting the high expectations of CfW relating to the teaching and learning of Welsh.
22. In schools preparing to implement from September 2023, senior leaders reported an increased focus on Welsh history and culture across the curriculum, and on promoting the value of the Welsh language as a skill among learners and parents.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories

23. The inclusion of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories as a mandatory element of the CfW was welcomed by senior leaders. However there was considerable variation in the progress they reported in this area across schools and settings: some reported that it was early days in their thinking about this aspect of the curriculum, while others stated this was not a new area for them.
24. Senior leaders in earlier phases of engagement with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories had undertaken initial planning and delivery but felt that it needed greater attention during the following school year. Schools and settings that had made more progress on this aspect of the curriculum were often located in more diverse areas and had a history of exploring diversity within the curriculum that pre-dated CfW. Senior leaders spoke of the importance of auditing the curriculum to ensure it was reflective of the diversity of their learners.
25. A number of senior leaders highlighted low staff knowledge and confidence in this area of the curriculum, especially where there were low levels of diversity amongst the learners and/or the teaching staff. Several senior leaders had engaged with external specialists such as DARPL⁴ to develop staff knowledge and understanding.

³ [Siarter Iaith framework: Initial guidance for schools](#)

⁴ [DARPL - Diversity and Anti-Racism Professional Learning](#)

26. Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 reported similar issues and concerns to those already implementing CfW, with some expressing a desire for more training and examples of good practice.

Progression

27. During Wave 1 Senior leaders reported that they were working across their schools and settings and in clusters to develop a shared understanding of progression and to develop new progression frameworks (or progression maps). Primary and secondary school senior leaders recognised the greater emphasis on the progress made by the individual learner as part of their thinking and planning in relation to progression. Schools expressed concerns or noted challenges in relation to several aspects linked to progression, notably a perceived risk of divergence as schools and clusters adopt different approaches to recording and reporting progression.

28. During Wave 2 interviews, senior leaders noted that schools and settings are continuing to develop their approaches to progression. Over the course of the academic year, schools and settings have continued to refine approaches to recording progression and reporting on learner progress. Schools and settings are working in clusters to develop and further refine their approaches to supporting learner progression. Some clusters are taking a phased approach, focusing on specific Areas to develop an approach that can inform an approach taken forward by other Area teams or groups.

29. Senior leaders described progression models that were being used to track learner development and progress. Progression steps provided a broad framework for planning progression in many schools and settings, with models also often organised around Statements of What Matters, and linked to descriptions of learning.⁵

30. Reflecting similar comments presented during Wave 1, some senior leaders noted that progression in learning is embedded as part of curriculum design. A number of senior leaders noted that progression is 'built in' at the design stage, and is informed by the principles of progression. Senior leaders noted that curriculum content has become narrower in some Areas, with an emphasis on developing deeper knowledge

⁵ [Statements of What Matters Code](#)

(and retention of knowledge) and the application of learning and skills over time and in different contexts.

31. Primary and secondary school senior leaders noted that approaches to progression were more learner-focused and involved encouraging learners to reflect on their progress in new ways.
32. Senior leaders reported that they had valued the external support provided to help shape their approaches to progression. This includes involvement in national projects (e.g. the Welsh Government's [Camau i'r Dyfodol](#) project), and support from local authorities, regional consortia and other experts.
33. Senior leaders noted some concerns or challenges as they continue to develop their approaches to progression, including: different interpretations of progression steps between schools; that a lack of quantitative data is making it difficult to understand individual learner progress; that some schools have jumped to an operational phase in relation to progression without having engaged fully in strategic planning and thinking at a whole-school level.
34. Some secondary school senior leaders noted that there was apprehension among teachers (and some parents) about moving away from levels to an approach that doesn't give a clear indication of attainment, or the standard of learners' work relative to expected GCSE grades, for example.
35. Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 reported that they were developing their approaches to progression, but a few were at an early stage of planning and were unsure of their approach. Senior leaders were considering how to ensure a balance between reporting on progress to parents and also including some measure of pupils' likely future attainment.

Assessment

36. Senior leaders interviewed during Wave 1 reported progress in developing new approaches to assessment, with an increased focus on formative, day-to-day assessment. Formative assessment was used to inform planning and differentiated approaches to teaching that respond to individual learner needs. Many senior leaders reported a reduction in the overall volume of formal assessment during the school

year; however they continued to use the mandatory national personalised assessments to gauge learners' progress in reading and numeracy. Many senior leaders reported feeling unclear and concerned about the assessment data they will be required to provide as part of future accountability arrangements.

37. During Wave 2 senior leaders continued to report progress in developing their approaches, with an increased focus on formative assessment. Senior leaders in both primary and secondary schools reported that assessment takes place through assignments and coursework on a continuous basis. They also noted that teachers are engaging in more professional discussions (as Area teams or in other groups) about what the outcomes from formative assessments tell them about the progress learners are making.
38. Echoing views expressed during Wave 1, Senior leaders commented on the change in mindset and attitude required to design and implement new approaches to assessment. Senior leaders reported that they had continued to observe increased confidence among teachers in the use of formative assessment; this was being supported through professional learning.
39. Schools and settings continue to use external tools to support assessment and their understanding of where a particular cohort is, often alongside in-school formative assessment methods.
40. Reflecting views expressed during Wave 1 of the research, senior leaders reiterated the point that there was still considerable time and work needed to refine and further develop their assessment arrangements. Many interviewees noted that they felt they were still trialling new approaches and that they remain unsure of their fitness for purpose. There remains uncertainty among some senior leaders about how to assess certain aspects of the CfW framework.
41. Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported that they were undertaking more formative assessment for learning, piloting new approaches in one or more Areas and involving learners in the assessment process. Some senior leaders were hesitant about moving away from standardised, national approaches to assessment until they had more reassurance about accountability arrangements.

Equity and inclusivity

42. During Wave 1 senior leaders emphasised that equity had always been an important focus in their school or setting, but they were now more learner-centred in their approach to curriculum design, with the flexibility to tailor support accordingly. There was a greater focus on the use of learner voice to support and inform curriculum development. Senior leaders referred to the importance of being inclusive and meeting the requirements set out in the [ALN Code](#), commenting that CfW is allowing them to promote and focus on inclusivity.
43. Senior leaders re-emphasised points raised during the Wave 1 interviews regarding the importance of a purpose-driven and 'learner-centred' curriculum. This included an ongoing learner voice input, with several senior leaders commenting on the strength of this in their school or setting. They also welcomed that the new arrangements enabled them to be responsive and flexible, and to be guided by learners.
44. Senior leaders referred to a range of specific initiatives delivered in schools and settings to ensure equity and inclusivity. In some instances, these activities require additional staffing and resources.
45. Funding pressures were mentioned by senior leaders as a cause of concern, undermining the ability of schools and settings to ensure an equitable learning offer for pupils of all abilities. Senior leaders highlighted difficulties in providing adequate staffing levels to meet learner needs, not only with regards to learners who require more targeted support, but also in being able to challenge the most able pupils. Senior leaders noted these challenges were against the backdrop of also supporting expectations for the ALN reform. The focus on improving equity through CfW, whilst supported and prioritised by senior leaders, is undoubtedly a challenge that is dependent on the resources available to schools and settings.
46. Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 had mixed views on whether the curriculum would improve equity and inclusivity and help to address gaps in attainment. Some felt that the increased focus on pedagogy would improve the quality of teaching and learner support which could subsequently improve outcomes for learners. However, others felt this was already a focus for

schools and that other factors, particularly school funding and the cost-of-living crisis, were likely to have a greater influence.

47. Some senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 reported that CfW had reinforced equity and inclusivity as priorities, particularly through an increased focus on pedagogy, wellbeing and individualised approaches to progression and assessment.

Parent and carer engagement

48. During Wave 1 senior leaders reported using a variety of approaches to disseminate information on the curriculum to parents. Some expressed caution in communicating CfW changes to parents and highlighted a range of methods used to 'drip-feed' information. Schools reported using their mandatory curriculum summaries to share information with parents about the reforms.

49. Compared with Wave 1, senior leaders in schools and settings who were already implementing CfW reported a greater range of approaches to engaging parents and carers during Wave 2. While challenges in engaging parents in 'curriculum-specific' events persisted, senior leaders reported some success in adopting more innovative and informal approaches to engage with parents and carers. These included presentation events or showcases where learners were actively involved in sharing their work. During Wave 2 senior leaders reported being more focused on reporting learner progression to parents. Senior leaders reported that some parents and carers had positive views on the increase in experiential learning opportunities their child was accessing.

50. Senior leaders in schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported similar approaches to those reported by schools and settings who were already implementing the curriculum in terms of informing and engaging parents and carers in their new curriculum. These included consultations on curriculum content, developing curriculum summaries and 'bite-size' information on specific elements.

Learner experiences

51. Learners in primary schools reported that they enjoyed learning through topics and projects, which provide opportunities to explore subjects in depth and also helps

demonstrate how areas of learning are connected. Primary school learners reported that they were often involved in decisions about their learning, contributing to choosing topics, tasks or learning activities. Learners noted that they value being involved in decisions, saying that it helps motivate and enthuse them.

52. Primary school learners reported that teachers set out specific learning objectives and regularly talk with them about their progress. Learners also noted that they are encouraged by teachers to review their own work, discuss their work with peers and think about how they can continue to improve.

53. Secondary school learners generally reported having less of an influence on their learning than was reported by those in primary schools. They also felt that there were fewer clear links between Areas or subjects they were studying, albeit that learners in some focus groups did provide examples of links between subjects that had been planned by teachers.

54. Secondary school learners felt that teachers placed an emphasis on providing feedback to support their progress in learning. Some learners felt that teachers placed an emphasis on getting learners to review their own work and to also look to improve the quality of their work.

55. In both primary and secondary schools, learners underlined the importance of a good classroom environment to their learning experiences.

Issues for consideration

56. The following issues for consideration draw on the findings of both the Wave 1 and Wave 2 reports.

- i. The Welsh Government should continue to encourage collaboration between schools and settings, focusing on supporting joint working among Area leads as part of curriculum planning, and evaluation. This should include collaboration between primary and secondary schools.
- ii. The Welsh Government should continue to promote the CWRE guidance and resources that are available and encourage schools and settings to embed CWRE across all Areas and connect learning to real world contexts. This

includes promoting the [CWRE toolkit and toolbox](#) and the work of key partners, including Careers Wales.

- iii. The Welsh Government should continue to encourage and support schools and settings to embed Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories across all Areas. Welsh Government and stakeholders should consider how they can facilitate schools and settings in accessing high quality and appropriate guidance and support to inform their planning, delivery and self-evaluation.
- iv. There is recognition of the need to increase the number of teachers and support workers able to work through the medium of Welsh and teach Welsh in order to support the aims of CfW. As part of processes to monitor the delivery of the '[Welsh in education workforce plan](#)', the Welsh Government and stakeholders should identify any aspects of curriculum delivery across Wales which require additional focus or support.
- v. The Welsh Government should continue to monitor how schools and settings are promoting Welsh language oracy through their new curriculum arrangements and disseminate good practice where it is identified.
- vi. The Welsh Government should consider whether there is a case for the development of additional resources to support RSE provision, particularly in primary and special schools.
- vii. The Welsh Government, working with regional partners, should ensure that international languages are promoted and delivered as an integral part of the new curriculum arrangements in all schools and settings, particularly in primary schools.
- viii. The Welsh Government should continue to encourage schools, settings and clusters to collaborate in developing joint approaches to learner progression based on a shared understanding.
- ix. The Welsh Government should continue to monitor the potential implications of divergence in schools', settings' and clusters' approaches to monitoring progression, particularly in considering how to monitor progress at a national level.

- x. Senior leaders frequently referred to a desire for reassurance that the approaches they are taking to curriculum planning, progression and, particularly, assessment were appropriate (and 'on the right track'). While collaborative working between schools goes some way to providing reassurance, Welsh Government should consider whether there is a need for a role that provides external constructive challenge to schools (particularly around progression and assessment) during these early years of implementation.
- xi. The Welsh Government should continue to monitor how schools and settings report to parents and carers on learner progression. This should include the approaches being taken in some secondary schools to provide parents with reports that include learners' 'projected journeys' or 'trajectories' relating to their likely achievement of qualifications.
- xii. Senior leaders highlighted the financial challenges facing schools and settings as they work towards implementing a curriculum that supports equity and inclusivity for all. They noted that there are costs associated with providing appropriate challenge and support to enable all learners to realise their full potential. The Welsh Government should consider whether there are opportunities to provide more targeted funding to schools and settings to address some of these challenges.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This section provides an overview of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales and the purpose of the scoping study in helping to support future research and evaluation priorities.

Curriculum for Wales

- 1.2 The Curriculum for Wales (CfW) is the cornerstone of the Welsh Government's efforts to reform education in Wales and build an education system that raises educational standards and enjoys public confidence. The four purposes of the curriculum are the starting point and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 'Improving Schools in Wales' report (2014)⁶ and Professor Graham Donaldson's independent review (2015)⁷ set out a rationale for the reforms as well as recommendations for how to design a new curriculum fit for modern day Wales. Under the reforms each school and pupil referral unit (PRU)⁸ is developing its own curriculum, supported by national guidance, which will enable learners to embody the four purposes of the curriculum by becoming:
- **ambitious, capable learners** who are ready to learn throughout their lives
 - **enterprising, creative contributors** who are ready to play a full part in life and work
 - **ethical, informed citizens** who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
 - **healthy, confident individuals** who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.
- 1.3 Under the CfW, subjects are organised around six Areas of Learning and Experience (Areas): expressive arts; health and well-being; languages, literacy and communication; mathematics and numeracy; and science and technology.

⁶ [Improving Schools in Wales](#)

⁷ [Successful Futures](#), Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales (2015)

⁸ In addition, local authorities are responsible for developing curricula to support the provision of education other than at school (EOTAS) in other settings.

- 1.4 The CfW guidance promotes an integrated approach to learning and teaching. It encourages collaboration and cross-disciplinary planning and teaching to enable learners to make links between the different Areas and apply their learning to new situations and contexts.
- 1.5 Under the new curriculum arrangements, schools and PRUs support the progression of each individual learner along a continuum of learning from ages 3 to 16. The CfW guidance describes mandatory principles of progression for the curriculum and for individual Areas, and progression steps which are supported by the statements of what matters and descriptions of learning. Linked to this, assessment should be formative, learner-focused and used to inform how practitioners respond to the needs of individuals and groups. A defining characteristic of the new approach is that curriculum, assessment and pedagogy are seen as parts of an integrated whole.
- 1.6 The curriculum reforms are supported by a national approach to professional learning; new evaluation and improvement arrangements; a transformation of additional learning needs support and provision; and the development of new qualifications.
- 1.7 The Welsh Government has set out guidance for schools and PRUs on how to approach curriculum design and implementation, recognising the iterative process of curriculum development. The most recent guidance document ‘Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum roll-out’ (first published in 2021)⁹ built on earlier publications and set out the phases involved in curriculum design, which were:
- **engagement** to develop a whole-school understanding of the curriculum and a vision for the teaching and learning that supports it
 - **design, planning and trialling** – drawing on guidance and support
 - **evaluating and preparing for first teaching**
 - **first teaching**, begin to implement the curriculum, reflecting on its effectiveness over time and refining its design as learners progress.

⁹ See [Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum roll-out - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

1.8 In addition, the Welsh Government set out the principles that should underpin schools' and settings' curriculum preparation and design: development through **co-construction**; effective **pedagogy**; engagement with **professional learning** and networks; embedding the qualities of **schools as learning organisations**; considering the **wider school context**, including how the curriculum can support the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code, Cymraeg 2050, tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment and the promotion of learner health and well-being.^{10,11}

Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales

1.9 In 2021, Welsh Government commissioned a scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales. Several reports were published as part of this study:

- A survey was carried out in June and July 2021 to gather robust information on the readiness of schools and settings for CfW roll-out from September 2022. In January 2022 the Welsh Government published the [survey findings](#) (Welsh Government, 2022a).
- In June 2022, Welsh Government published '[Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms](#)' (Welsh Government, 2022b) presenting the findings of 48 follow-up interviews with senior leaders and practitioners in October and November 2021. The purpose of the interviews was to explore responses to the survey, understand the depth and detail of individual school experiences and the challenges facing them in preparing for curriculum reform.
- In July 2022 the Welsh Government published the '[Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales](#)' (Welsh Government, 2022c). The scoping report recommends a comprehensive programme of research and evaluation and the Welsh Government has published a [response](#) to these recommendations (Welsh Government, 2022d).

¹⁰ Tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment is central to the Welsh Government's mission set out in [Our national mission: High standards and aspirations for all](#) (Welsh Government, March 2023)

¹¹ The Welsh Government has published a [Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing](#) (Welsh Government, 2021)

1.10 The Welsh Government considered the specific areas of work recommended in the scoping study and published the [Curriculum for Wales evaluation plan 2023](#), describing the intended approach to evaluating the reforms. Prior to commencing the formal evaluation of the reforms, this initial research was commissioned by the Welsh Government to support an understanding of senior leaders' and learners' experiences during the first years of curriculum implementation.

About the study

1.11 The Welsh Government has commissioned Arad Research, in partnership with The Open University in Wales, to conduct research with senior leaders and learners on early implementation of CfW.

1.12 The aim of this research was to undertake two waves of qualitative research during academic year 2022/23 to understand how the curriculum and assessment reforms were working for practitioners and learners in schools and settings, and the barriers and facilitators to successful implementation. The research aims to inform the support that the Welsh Government and its partners are putting in place to maximise success.

1.13 The first wave of the research (referred to as 'Wave 1') involved interviews with 64 senior leaders in schools and PRUs who were implementing CfW during 2022/23 as well as six focus groups with a total of 30 learners. The second wave of research (referred to as 'Wave 2') involved interviews with:

- 62 senior leaders in schools and settings who were implementing CfW during 2022/23
- 12 interviews with senior leaders who were preparing to implement CfW from September 2023¹²
- nine focus groups with a total of 54 learners.

Wave 1 fieldwork took place between November 2022 and March 2023.¹³ Wave 2 interviews took place between May and July 2023. As many as possible of those who took part in Wave 1 were recruited to take part in Wave 2 (see Sections 2 and 3 for

¹² These senior leaders were only interviewed in Wave 2 and all of the topics listed in Section 1.15 were discussed with them.

¹³ Senior leader interviews were undertaken between November 2022 and January 2023. Focus groups with learners took place in March 2023.

more details on the sample and methodology). In the Wave 2 fieldwork, most Wave 1 topics were revisited with senior leaders and learners, while some new topics were introduced and some Wave 1 topics were not discussed (see Section 1.15 for more detail on the topics discussed).

Wave 1 report

- 1.14 The Wave 1 report – [‘Research with schools and learners on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 1 report’](#) (Welsh Government, 2023) - presented findings of qualitative interviews with 64 senior leaders, carried out between November 2022 and January 2023, in relation to their schools’ and pupil referral units’ (PRUs) early experiences of implementing CfW. The interviewees were recruited from the respondents to the [‘Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms’](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b) who agreed to be re-contacted, as well as additional senior leaders who did not participate in this previous research. A summary of the findings in relation to each of the topics explored during the Wave 1 fieldwork is included at the beginning of each corresponding section of this report.¹⁴

Wave 2 report (this report)

- 1.15 Section 2 of this Wave 2 report presents the methodology for the research. Section 3 provides information on the profile of interviewees. Subsequent sections reflect the main topics used to structure discussions:
- Section 4 presents senior leaders’ views on **progress in implementing the new curriculum** (discussed in both Wave 1 and 2)
 - Section 5 presents findings relating to senior leaders’ views on implementing **Careers and Work-related Experiences** (not included in Wave 1, new topic for Wave 2)

¹⁴ With the exception of topics that were not explored during Wave 1: CWRE, Welsh language and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories.

- Section 6 presents senior leaders' comments on the **Welsh language** (not included in Wave 1, new topic for Wave 2)
- Section 7 presents senior leaders' views on **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories** (not included in Wave 1, new topic for Wave 2)
- Section 8 presents senior leaders' views of on implementing **other elements of the Curriculum for Wales** (Wave 1 only for schools and settings who were implementing CfW during 2022/23):
 - Planning and implementing the curriculum across and within **Areas of Learning and Experience (Areas)**
 - Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)
 - International languages¹⁵
- Section 9 presents senior leaders' comments relating to arrangements for monitoring learner **progression** (discussed in both Wave 1 and 2)
- Section 10 presents senior leaders' views on **assessment** arrangements (discussed in both Wave 1 and 2)
- Section 11 presents senior leaders' experiences of how implementation is supporting **equity and inclusivity** (discussed in both Wave 1 and 2)
- Section 12 presents senior leaders' experiences of **engaging with parents and carers** to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements (discussed in both Wave 1 and 2)
- Section 13 presents the **views of learners** on their experiences of the curriculum.

1.16 In Sections 4-12, a summary of Wave 1 findings (where relevant) is set out in the first sub-section, with general points made by senior leaders in schools and settings that were implementing CfW in 2022/23 then presented. Findings are organised

¹⁵ Senior leaders in schools that were implementing the curriculum during 2022-23 were not asked about these elements of the curriculum during Wave 2 of the research. This was because there was insufficient time to cover these topics during Wave 2 alongside the additional topics being covered (Careers and Work-related Experiences, Welsh Language, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories). However, senior leaders in secondary schools that were preparing to implement the curriculum from September 2023 were asked about these elements.

according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees. Differences in views according to type of school (primary, secondary, special schools and PRUs) and, where relevant, by language (Welsh-medium, English-medium schools) are then presented. The views of secondary schools implementing the CfW from September 2023 are presented at the end of each these sections.

1.17 The findings set out in sections 4-12 of this report refer to various samples of interviewees. The following terminology has been used to describe the research subjects under consideration when findings or points are presented.

Term	Use
'schools' or 'primary schools' or 'secondary schools'	Where findings or points apply specifically to schools only or types of school
'schools and settings'	Where findings or points apply to senior leaders from all types of school (primary, secondary, special) and PRUs interviewed
'PRUs' or 'special schools' / 'Welsh-medium schools' or 'English-medium schools'	Where findings apply to specific types of school or setting in the relevant sub-sections of each section

1.18 Conclusions and issues for consideration are set out in Section 14.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 This section provides detail on the research methodology. This includes detail of the research tool design process, fieldwork conducted, analysis process, challenges encountered and limitations of the methodology.

Rationale for the approach

- 2.2 As noted in 1.13, the study sample included two waves of interviews with senior leaders in schools and settings who were implementing CfW during 2022/23, one wave of interviews with senior leaders in secondary schools who were preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 and two waves of focus groups with learners. The sample of senior leaders was focused mainly on those implementing CfW during 2022/23 in order to gather early insights from these schools and settings about their experiences of implementation to inform the Welsh Government and the wider system. An additional sample of senior leaders in schools preparing to implement the CfW from September 2023 were included to understand how they were progressing, and any differences between these and the schools that were implementing CfW during 2022/23. The sample of learners was designed to include those in Years 4-7 to ensure that it comprised those who were experiencing learning under the CfW and would be of a sufficient age to provide reflections on their experiences of it.
- 2.3 The discussion topics for senior leaders were decided primarily based on the priorities set out in the '[Curriculum for Wales: annual report 2022](#)' (Welsh Government, 2022e), with some key topics covered in both Waves, and others discussed in either Wave 1 or 2. This was to ensure that there was sufficient time to cover the topics discussed without over-burdening research participants.
- 2.4 Discussion topics for learners were selected to complement those discussed with senior leaders, and taking into account the expected outcomes for learners identified in the theory of change for CfW presented in the '[Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales](#)' (Welsh Government, 2022c).

Sampling and recruitment

2.5 The evidence in this report draws on interviews with 74 senior leaders and 54 learners who participated in Wave 2 of this research. Detail on the sample of senior leaders and learners is set out below. The 74 senior leaders comprised:

- 62 senior leaders in schools and settings implementing the CfW during 2022/23
- 12 senior leaders in secondary schools implementing the CfW from September 2023.

Senior leaders in schools and settings implementing the CfW in 2022/23

2.6 The evidence in this report draws on 62 Wave 2 interviews conducted between May and July 2023 with senior leaders in schools and settings implementing the CfW in 2022/23. Of these 62 Wave 2 interviewees:

- 56 had been interviewed in Wave 1 of this research
 - 15 of these had also been interviewed in the [‘Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms’](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b) (See Annex B for more detail on the Wave 1 sample profile)
- 6 additional senior leaders were recruited to replace 6 of the 8 senior leaders who did not participate in Wave 2.¹⁶

2.7 In Wave 2, the research team sought to re-contact as many as possible of the Wave 1 interviewees, with additional interviewees recruited to replace those who were unable to take part. The Wave 2 research therefore built on Wave 1, which had involved the design of a purposive sample of senior leaders and learners to include a spread of schools and settings by language medium and sector. The rationale for this was to obtain a good cross section of views and experiences and take account of the overall population of schools and settings of different types. Targets were set

¹⁶ All senior leaders who participated in Wave 1 had consented to be re-contacted during Wave 2 and were invited to take part in a second interview. However, 8 did not take part in Wave 2 and 6 senior leaders were recruited to replace as many as possible of these.

for the number of senior leaders to be recruited from schools and settings of different types. More detail on the Wave 1 sample is included in Annex B.

- 2.8 In both waves of this research, senior leaders were invited by email to participate in an interview of around 45 to 60 minutes. A total of 157 schools and settings were invited to Wave 1 interviews, with two reminders sent to those who did not respond.¹⁷ The invitation provided an overview of the main discussion points and gave senior leaders the option to invite colleagues who led on relevant aspects of the curriculum to join the discussion. A small number of senior leaders invited colleagues to join the discussion, or parts of it.

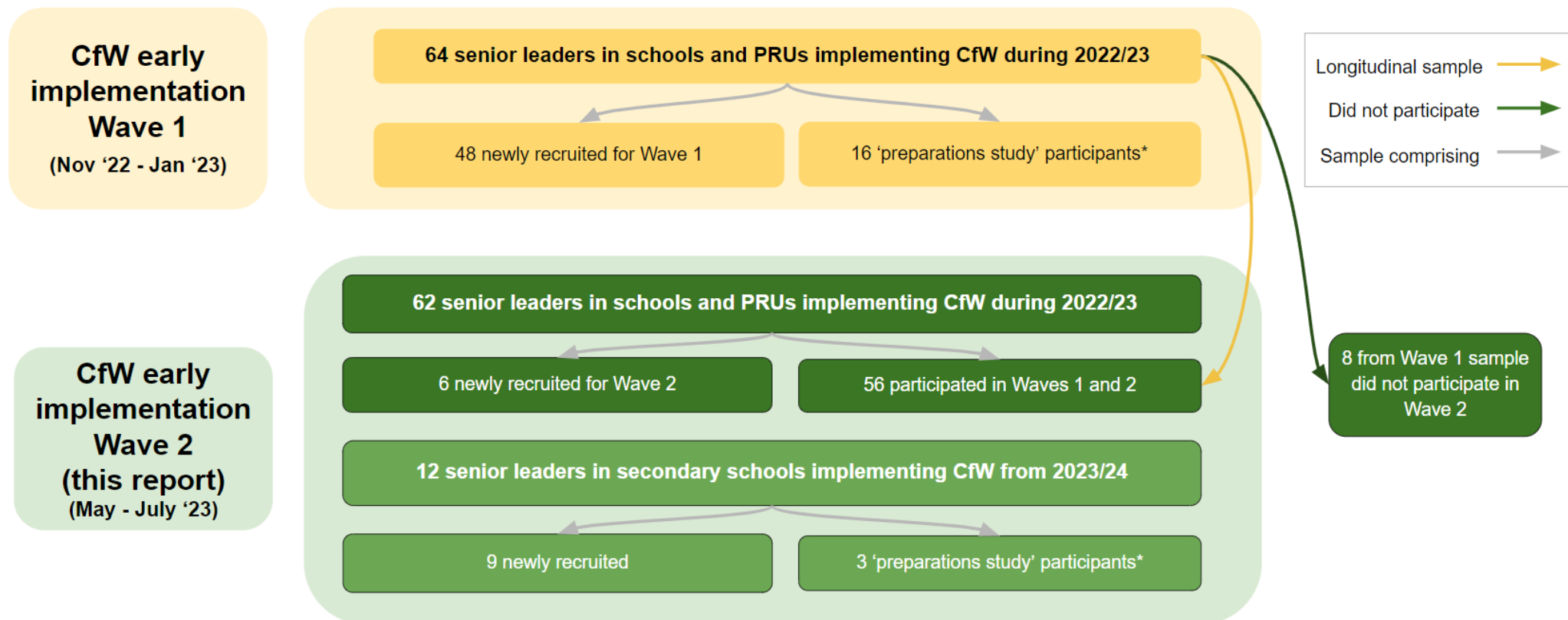
Senior leaders in schools preparing to implement the CfW in 2023/24

- 2.9 The 12 senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement the CfW in 2023/24 were only interviewed in Wave 2 of this research. These 12 senior leaders comprised three who previously took part in the '[Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms](#)' (Welsh Government, 2022b) and nine who were newly recruited for this study.¹⁸ These interviewees participated in one interview only covering all of the topic areas listed in Section 2.13 below. As with other senior leaders, these interviewees were invited by email to participate in an interview of around 45 to 60 minutes with an outline of the topics to be discussed. A total of 18 senior leaders in schools preparing to implement the CfW in 2023/24 were invited to interviews, with two reminders sent to those who did not respond.

¹⁷ Invitations were distributed in batches: 80 schools and settings were initially invited and reminded; responses were monitored, and then additional ones invited instead of any who had not responded. The list of invitees included senior leaders who had taken part in the '[Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms](#)' (Welsh Government, 2022b), with others randomly selected within the variety of categories of school and setting (see Section 3) to reach the recruitment targets.

¹⁸ Seven interviewees in secondary schools preparing to implement the CfW from September 2023, and who took part in the '[Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms](#)' (Welsh Government, 2022b), were invited to participate in the research.

Figure 1. Summary of Wave 1 and 2 samples of senior leaders



*'Preparations study participants' refers to senior leaders interviewed in the ['Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms'](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b) and who agreed to participate in future research on CfW. See Annex B for more details.

Learners

- 2.10 Two waves of focus groups were conducted with a sample of learners from Years 4-7. Wave 1 of the focus groups with learners took place in March 2023 and Wave 2 focus groups took place in June and July 2023. Wave 1 fieldwork with learners was not completed in time to be included in the Wave 1 report, therefore Wave 1 and 2 findings are included in this report.
- 2.11 Senior leaders who participated in interviews were asked whether they would be willing to organise a focus group with four to six learners. Focus groups were conducted face-to-face in schools and each lasted 30-60 minutes. To guide the process of selecting participants, senior leaders were asked to randomly select three learners from a specific year group (4, 5, 6 or 7) or registration class, ensuring a mix of gender representation, and then invite each of the three selected learners to bring a friend with them to the focus group. This meant that half of the participants were randomly sampled and half were friends of those selected who were invited to come along. Schools were asked to distribute a briefing note and privacy notice to parents explaining the purpose of the research, what is involved and the data management arrangements.
- 2.12 The 54 learners who took part in Wave 2 of the research comprised 24 secondary school Year 7 learners and 30 primary school learners in Years 4, 5 and 6. The 24 Year 7 learners were engaged through four focus groups which each included six learners. The 30 primary school learners (Years 4, 5 and 6) were engaged through five focus groups, with six learners participating in each. More detail on the profile of the sample of learners in Waves 1 and 2 is included in Section 3.

Research tool design

- 2.13 The focus of the interviews with senior leaders was on gathering their views on early experiences of implementing their curriculum or, for those implementing from September 2023, experiences of preparing for implementing the curriculum. An interview guide was designed which was focused on senior leaders' views on:
- overall progress in implementing the new curriculum

- arrangements for monitoring learner progression
- assessment arrangements
- how implementation is supporting equity and inclusivity
- engaging with parents and carers to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.
- experiences of curriculum and assessment design in relation to specific elements of the CfW framework¹⁹
 - for senior leaders implementing CfW in 2022/23, three elements were explored in Wave 1 only (although they were briefly revisited in Wave 2 interviews)
 - planning and implementing the curriculum across and within Areas
 - implementing Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)
 - implementing international languages
 - for senior leaders implementing CfW in 2022/23, three elements were explored in Wave 2 only
 - Careers and Work-related Experiences (CWRE)
 - Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories
 - Welsh language.

2.14 The focus of the discussions with learners was on gathering their views on their early experiences of the curriculum. A topic guide was designed focused on learners' views on:

- projects or themes they had worked on recently²⁰
 - involvement in choosing their own themes / projects

¹⁹ Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement the curriculum from September 2023 were only interviewed once and were therefore asked about all six of these aspects in their interview.

²⁰ Senior leaders were asked prior to the discussion to provide an example researchers could refer to.

- whether school helped them see connections between subjects
- the four purposes of the CfW
- whether learners got the help that they needed
- whether they were learning about a wide variety of topics that mattered to them
- whether school was fair for everyone
- whether school helped them communicate well in Welsh and English
- how they knew if they had moved forward or made progress in their learning
- whether they were pushed to work hard and set high ambitions
- whether they felt they were challenged
- whether they talked about, and were supported with, their health and wellbeing.

2.15 The interview discussion guides are included in Annex A.

Qualitative analysis

2.16 A framework approach has been taken to analyse the qualitative interview data. This allows structured analysis of the data as well as enabling the consideration of other issues that emerged during the fieldwork which may not have been previously considered. Evidence was initially reviewed during a briefing session which involved the researchers who conducted the interviews. This enabled the researchers to reach agreement on the key themes emerging from the evidence and informed the subsequent analysis.

Methodological challenges and limitations

2.17 In analysing the findings presented in this report, it is important to bear in mind some of the limitations of the approach.

- 2.18 The purposive sample of senior leaders and learners was designed to include a sufficient spread of schools and settings (by language medium and sector) to obtain a good cross section of views and experiences. The purpose of qualitative research is not to achieve full representation but to allow a broad range of issues to be identified, and deeper discussion to take place. However, the sample does not enable us to report on the statistical significance of the findings or generalise the results to the population.
- 2.19 It is important to acknowledge the risk of selection bias among the sample of schools and settings that engaged with the research. Schools and settings that had progressed further than others in their preparation activities may have been more likely to agree to take part in the interviews.
- 2.20 The nature of qualitative research means that interviewees may interpret questions and discussion themes in a variety of ways which may not align with Welsh Government definitions. During this research, this was particularly the case in relation to equity and inclusivity which was a broad area of discussion. For the purposes of this research, 'equity and inclusivity' included questions on raising expectations for all learners, addressing gaps in attainment and ensuring that schools and settings are inclusive places to learn.
- 2.21 During interviews, some senior leaders expressed a desire for more support and guidance in relation to specific aspects of CfW. In some cases they referred to topics or issues where there is already guidance and support available. It is important to note that interviews did not seek to test levels of awareness of existing guidance and support, and therefore the findings may include examples where senior leaders were unaware of current guidance and support.
- 2.22 It is important to note the differences in methodological approach taken to learner discussions (presented in section 13), compared with interviews with senior leaders. This relates to different levels of awareness of the curriculum reform process: whereas senior leaders were able to reflect on the changes and challenges directly associated with implementing the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) reforms, it was assumed that learners do not have the same understanding or conceptualisation of curriculum reform. Additionally, the researchers considered the differences

between primary and secondary school learners when discussing their experiences in school. Although Year 7 learners may be able to provide a more sophisticated and considered view of their experiences in school over time compared with younger learners, it is important to recognise that every child experiences a particular school year only once: i.e. learners are not in a position to compare any given school year both pre- and post-implementation of CfW.

- 2.23 Therefore, it was agreed that the topic guides developed for learner discussions during waves 1 and 2 of the research would focus on understanding learners' experiences of the curriculum they were experiencing (the Curriculum for Wales), rather than exploring their views on changes between this curriculum and the previous National Curriculum. The topic guide (see Annex A) was developed with reference to the outcomes for learners set out in the ['Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales'](#).

3. Profile of respondents

3.1 This section sets out the profile of the senior leaders and learners who participated in the research. As described in 2.22, the samples were not intended to be representative of the population of schools and settings or learners.

Profile of interviewees

Senior leaders in schools and settings implementing the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) in 2022/23

3.2 A total of 62 senior leaders were interviewed in Wave 2. These comprised:

- 56 senior leaders who were interviewed in both Waves 1 and 2
- 6 senior leaders who were recruited to replace Wave 1 interviewees who did not participate in Wave 2²¹

In terms of language medium, the sample comprised:

- 37 interviewees from English-medium schools
- 18 from Welsh-medium, including dual language, schools²²
- 7 schools and settings not classified as English or Welsh-medium.²³

3.3 The profile of the interview sample by type and language medium (Table 1), and region (Table 2) of school or setting is set out below.

²¹ 8 interviewees did not participate in Wave 2 for various reasons, including having moved roles, a lack of time or they did not respond to interview requests.

²² Welsh-medium schools includes dual language schools. The Welsh Government published *Guidance on 'School categories according to Welsh-medium provision'* in 2021. Dual language schools were previously categorised as dual stream primary and bilingual secondary schools.

²³ Four interviewees were from special schools and three were from PRUs, both of which are settings that are not classified by language.

Table 1. Profile of sample of senior leaders in schools and settings implementing the curriculum during 2022/23 interviewed in Wave 2 by sector and language medium

Sector	Percentage of the sample of 62 interviewees in each category				Number of interviewees			
	Welsh-medium**	English-medium	NLC*	Total	Welsh-medium**	English-medium	NLC*	Total
Primary and nursery	13%	34%	-	47%	8	21	-	29
All-through schools (Middle)	5%	3%	-	8%	3	2	-	5
Secondary	11%	23%	-	34%	7	14	-	21
Special schools	N/A	N/A	6%	6%	N/A	N/A	4	4
PRUs	N/A	N/A	5%	5%	N/A	N/A	3	3
Total	29%	60%	11%	100%	18	37	7	62

*NLC - No language classification.

**Welsh-medium includes dual language schools.

Table 2. Profile of senior leaders in schools and settings implementing the curriculum during 2022/23 interviewed in Wave 2 by region

Geographic region	Number in sample	Percentage in sample
North	13	21%
Central South	18	29%
Mid and West	18	29%
South East	13	21%
Total	62	100%

Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement the CfW in 2023/24

3.4 A total of 12 senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement the CfW in 2023/24 were interviewed. These comprised: 8 in English-medium schools and 4 in Welsh-medium schools (including dual language secondaries). Five of these senior leaders were in secondary schools based in the central south region, with four in the north, two in the mid and west region and one in the south east.

Learners

3.6 In Wave 2 of the research, a total of 54 learners took part in a total of 9 focus groups across eight schools (two groups were conducted in one of the schools). The 8 schools comprised:

- 4 primary and 3 secondary schools as well as one all-through school, of which
 - 3 were in the central south region
 - 2 were in the mid and west region
 - 2 were in the south east
 - 1 was in the north
- 3 English-medium schools and 5 Welsh-medium schools
- 6 schools who participated in Wave 1 and Wave 2
- 2 schools who participated in Wave 2 only.

3.7 The 54 learners in Wave 2 comprised:

- 30 in primary Years 4-6
 - 1 group with Year 4 learners
 - 1 group with Year 5 learners
 - 1 group combining Year 4 and 6 learners
 - 2 groups combining Year 5 and 6 learners
- 24 in secondary school Year 7
 - 4 groups of 6 learners.

6 learners were included in each focus group during Wave 2.

3.8 In Wave 1 of the research, a total of 30 learners took part in a total of 6 focus groups across 6 schools. The 6 schools comprised:

- 3 primary and 2 secondary schools as well as one all-through school, of which:
 - 1 was in the central south region

- 2 were in the mid and west region
- 2 were in the south east
- 1 was in the north
- 3 English-medium schools and 3 Welsh-medium schools

3.9 The 30 learners who took part during in Wave 1 comprised:

- 16 in primary Years 4-6
 - 1 group with Year 5 learners
 - 2 groups combining Year 5 and 6 learners
- 14 in secondary school Year 7
 - 3 groups of learners

4-6 learners took part in each group during Wave 1.

4. Progress in implementing the new curriculum

4.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to overall progress in implementing the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. Interviewees were asked how they would summarise their school or setting's progress in implementing the new curriculum and questions on:

- what had worked well and why
- what had supported their school or setting's progress
- what had worked less well so far
- whether they had experienced any barriers to progress to date.

4.2 The following sections summarise senior leaders' comments on the overall progress made in implementing their school or setting's new curriculum.

Summary of Wave 1 findings (November 2022 – January 2023): progress in implementing the new curriculum

4.3 The Wave 1 research report found that:

- senior leaders reported they were content with the progress they had made to date in designing and implementing their curriculum. Concerns about progress were expressed in a small number of schools and settings but a few senior leaders noted they had previously been concerned about the size of the task ahead of them, but now felt they were making good progress. Senior leaders who reported that they had been planning and developing their curriculum for 3-4 years appeared to be more confident in their approaches than those who reported being at an earlier stage of implementing their curriculum.
- senior leaders reported that practitioners were increasingly taking responsibility and ownership for curriculum implementation. Interviewees reported that there was an increased focus on pedagogy and collaborative activity both within schools and settings and in their clusters. Increasing cluster-level activity facilitated by practitioners was cited as an example of increasing practitioner autonomy and ownership of the curriculum.

- senior leaders reported that developing and implementing their curriculum had created challenges in terms of staff capacity and time, particularly in planning the curriculum and ensuring it covered the required elements set out in the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) framework.

Wave 2 findings (May-July 2023): General points raised by senior leaders in schools and settings implementing CfW during 2022/23

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

- 4.4 **Senior leaders commonly reported continued good progress in implementing the new curriculum.** Developments highlighted during the Wave 1 interviews had advanced in many schools and settings, and senior leaders were generally satisfied with the changes to date since they had begun implementation.

‘We haven’t had huge changes, apart from all the things which were starting to work. These are going really well now’. Senior leader, English-medium primary school

‘We are really pleased, [we’re] far down the line. We’ve continued with the same approach and the outcome of this has been great’. Children are highly engaged.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 4.5 **In a minority of cases senior leaders noted they were struggling to advance, and that progress had been slower than they had expected.** These senior leaders spoke of uncertainty around making changes, feeling that there was a ‘right’ way to proceed which they hadn’t yet uncovered. They reported feeling overwhelmed with the breadth and depth of change required, and the complexity involved. Despite this, senior leaders spoke of continuing to plan and seek out support from others, particularly making use of resources and guidance from local authorities and consortia.

- 4.6 **Senior leaders noted that implementing changes under CfW was an iterative process,** and that continuous monitoring, review, and redesign were required. Some senior leaders appeared to have moved away from an expectation that their curriculum design would be finalised at a given point, and had instead accepted the need to go through several cycles of reviewing and further refining curriculum arrangements.

'We are further along than a lot of schools...it is iterative, [it] never ends. We are doing a lot of self-evaluation and change course during the year if we need to or [we] adapt for the following year. We review at the end of each year always now. This is so important for curriculum development'. Senior leader, English-medium all through school

- 4.7 Since the Wave 1 fieldwork senior leaders reported **feeling more comfortable with overseeing and guiding change in their school or setting, and highlighted that their staff had been through a period of adjustment during this time.** The acceptance of the iterative nature of the process seemed to have cascaded down, with senior leaders reporting there having been 'a shift in the mindset' of their teaching staff. Senior leaders noted teachers had an improved understanding of the process of change, responded more positively to it, and displayed more confidence when it came to designing and implementing the new curriculum. Providing time for teachers to learn, plan and collaborate with others was cited as an important factor in supporting this increased confidence:

'Staff have made the transition from prescriptive curriculum deliverers to designers, questioners, evaluators of learning. Even though it is iterative, we are always moving forward'. Senior leader, English-medium all through school

'We have different working groups, and we are now seeing the links form between the different groups and progression, assessment and the bigger picture. We use staff meetings for this process, [staff] get one day off teaching to do their action plans and a TA then covers the teaching. One year ago, some of our working groups were not as far forward in their thinking; now we've given them the time they have made progress'. Senior leader, special school

- 4.8 **A minority of senior leaders reported that some staff were reluctant to move away from well-established frameworks and systems,** particularly in areas such as assessment. In these cases senior leaders highlighted that more time and support was needed to build the confidence, knowledge and skills of these staff members.
- 4.9 **Senior leaders commonly reported undertaking periodic reviews as part of the iterative cycle of implementing changes.** Auditing processes were in place to review design, planning and content to ensure coverage was effective, appropriate and was meeting the needs of learners. Senior leaders highlighted how their processes of implementation and change were also part of these ongoing reviews,

with pedagogical approaches closely monitored and changes to delivery being made mid-year if deemed necessary. Others senior leaders spoke of reviews being conducted at set periods, such as the end of terms, with a view to making changes that would be implemented during the following academic year.

‘We need a review for Year 7, and can see areas that need to be refined. Those things relate to some subject content and progression steps. In some places it’s to do with pedagogy steps. Generally, we are in a good position, but that’s not to say it’s a finished job. It’s just the beginning’. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 4.10 **Senior leaders reported narrowing their focus and prioritising areas of change, in essence operating a staggered and phased approach to rolling out their new curriculum** within a limited timeframe. They noted the challenges involved when focusing in depth on certain aspects, whilst also ensuring that all mandatory elements of the curriculum were being taken forward. Senior leaders reported this involved balancing priorities and careful change management.

‘We staged this as it was difficult to manage everything at once. We are happy with where we’re at, but time is increasingly a barrier. We don’t have any leeway anywhere else; the one INSET day doesn’t have enough of a benefit for schools planning change of this size’. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 4.11 Senior leaders commonly highlighted being part of **strong clusters with effective working relationships that provided guidance, reassurance and opportunities to work collaboratively**. In the main, cluster relationships appeared to be strong and had evolved since senior leaders were spoken to in Wave 1. There was variance, however, in the nature of cluster-working and the extent to which clusters were integrated and developing common approaches. Some senior leaders reported their involvement in clusters as being focused on sharing good practice and developing agreement in areas (such as a shared understanding amongst the cluster of progression, and the development of a common vocabulary to communicate this) whilst others were working with cluster partners on shared pieces of work.

- 4.12 **Senior leaders described agreeing common approaches to curriculum design within their cluster networks, sometimes developing curriculum content collectively**. Cluster collaboration typically involved numerous staff often grouped

by subject area. Senior leaders spoke of ringfencing INSET days for workshops and had set up cross-cluster working groups to look at different priorities. Activities for these working groups included looking at overarching schemes of work, such as developing shared progression and assessment criteria, as well as developing common subject area content.

‘The cluster plan is still in place - sharing ideas and responses - and we then transfer these plans to year groups in the cluster. [We] work collaboratively in school year groups...it is an organic process, not driven by leadership, we are not being too prescriptive. This has been reassuring and has followed on from post-Covid practices.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

4.13 Clusters were seen as a source of support to senior leaders and their teaching staff, and these networks provided positive benefits to schools and settings during their implementation journeys. Senior leaders spoke of gaining reassurance from their cluster over the uncertain nature of implementing change, but also acknowledged that cluster working did at times present challenges, particularly when trying to reach consensus and incorporate different approaches and modes of delivery:

‘We meet often, and schools share practice, they present what they are doing with the curriculum to other schools. Nobody says if what we are doing is right or wrong, we just have to judge whether it’s good for [our] school. The presentations have reassured us a little bit [with] peace of mind from other schools saying what we are doing is a good idea’. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

‘All is going well at the school level, but less so as a cluster. Our main concern is that secondary schools are sticking to traditional subjects whereas primary schools have changed to AoLEs. Coherence as a cluster is a challenge.’ Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school

4.14 In some cases, cluster activity was reported to be at a relatively early stage of development. In these cases, senior leaders reported being without the close external support and reassurance that other leaders highlighted as one of the main benefits of close cluster working. In a minority of cases, links had been made beyond the geographical cluster, with senior leaders reaching further afield and tapping into wider networks to find support and commonality with other schools or settings. This approach was also evident in a minority of schools and settings which had access to a productive cluster, but were themselves further along with their

implementation journeys than others in the cluster network. Senior leaders felt they did not benefit from cluster working in these instances and reported seeking out others who were at similar stages of development in order to build links and share good practice.

- 4.15 **A minority of senior leaders reported that Estyn inspections had occurred in the intervening period between their Wave 1 and Wave 2 interviews.** There was variation in the experiences reported by senior leaders regarding inspections. Some had received detailed feedback on their approach to CfW and their implementation, whilst others reported little examination of the changes they had made.

'We've had an Estyn inspection. Curriculum for Wales wasn't a massive part of the focus, but it went really well and we had a good report and they endorsed our approach. Know what you're doing, why you're doing it and do it well. We feel validated to continue our approach now.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 4.16 **Senior leaders emphasised the importance of ensuring that inspection arrangements are aligned with new curriculum approaches.** Some expressed apprehension that inspection teams might ask for evidence of learner progress, attainment or standards in teaching and learning that they may not be able to provide. These senior leaders noted that, as curriculum planning changes and as new progression and assessment arrangements are under development, they hoped inspectors would be understanding and that this would be reflected in inspection reports.

Other issues raised by senior leaders

- 4.17 **Senior leaders reported they were concerned about funding levels whilst being required to implement such wide-ranging change under CfW.** Several highlighted that additional funding is needed to provide more teaching assistants, learning resources and out of classroom learning experiences, all of which can give learners richer learning experiences. In addition, the timing of funding allocations was raised as a problem, with budgets and grants not being confirmed until mid-year as noted by one school:

'Funding! Welsh Government needs to understand that schools need more funding and more timely delivery of the funding, not mid-year when we can't plan.'

Budgeting is fine, and we understand how to make cuts. But the impact this has on schools causes huge challenges, especially after Covid, with ALN reforms, and designing a curriculum.' Senior leader, English medium primary.

Variations in views according to type of school or setting

- 4.18 Senior leaders in primary schools were more likely than those in secondaries to report:
- satisfaction and continued good progress with their plans following on from the Wave 1 interview
 - narrowing their focus by using a staggered approach to rolling out curriculum changes
- 4.19 Senior leaders in special schools reported an appreciation of the flexibility the new curriculum afforded them in being responsive to learner needs.
- 4.20 Senior leaders in secondary schools were more likely than those in primaries to report that teachers had attended training, workshops and conferences relating to curriculum design or sharing good practice, which had supported their curriculum implementation.
- 4.21 Senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools were more likely than those in English-medium schools to report that teachers had attended training, workshops and conferences relating to curriculum design or sharing good practice.

Views of secondary senior leaders preparing to implement CfW from September 2023

- 4.22 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 outlined their reasons for not implementing during 2022-23. These were:
- an acknowledgement that they were not yet ready to implement the curriculum, and that the pandemic had delayed or negatively affected some of their preparations

'Progress has been hampered by the fallout of Covid and the gaps in learning that have emerged. For example, over a quarter of our Year 7 pupils have reading ages that are significantly below their age. We have had to bring in a primary teacher to teach phonics.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- a desire to spend another year trialling and refining some aspects of their new curriculum, particularly their approaches to learner progression and assessment

'We've trialled Year 7 for two terms now and are currently reviewing things. We're still at an early stage but we have noticed better attendance and engagement in Year 7, so far, and there is more collaboration across the curriculum than ever before. It wouldn't have suited us to implement from this year, so the staggering has been very helpful. Key to us is working with our cluster to make sure there is consistency and continuity for the learners coming up, and across the sector locally'. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- an expectation that they would be inspected by Estyn during 2022-23, and therefore a desire to focus on preparations by deferring implementation until 2023-24
- a desire to focus on implementing Estyn recommendations, based on inspections in previous years, during 2022-23 before implementing the curriculum
- headteachers and / or senior leaders being recently appointed, and not wanting to implement the new curriculum in their first year.

4.23 Overall, senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 considered they were making good progress with their curriculum, although some reported that they had a significant amount of work left to do. Many senior leaders commented on the iterative nature of curriculum design and an acknowledgement that their curriculum would be continuously reviewed and refined.

'We recognise that we'll need to adapt it as we go. Some staff are excited by this but others are scared of this. It's a very different way of working. We're very used to a prescribed approach. Teachers prefer when someone says 'do this, and here is an example of what someone else has done'. Once you get initial ideas it is easier – starting from scratch is daunting.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

4.24 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported that their school had decided to maintain subject disciplines and encourage a collaborative approach within areas, rather than adopt an area-led approach. Senior leaders emphasised the importance of mapping their curriculum

activity to ensure coverage and progression and to avoid duplicating content across areas or year groups.

‘The cluster mapping has been really important, making sure we’re covering things in a coherent way and that we’re not repeating the same topics at different times.’²⁴ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school.

4.25 The main issues raised by senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 were:

- a need to further refine their approaches to progression and assessment, particularly developing a shared understanding of progression
 - in some schools senior leaders reported that some or all of their Area leads were working with Area leads in cluster primary schools to map progression across all year groups
 - other senior leaders reported that their cluster activity had focused on transition from Year 6 to Year 7, and on developing a shared understanding of progression among Year 6 primary teachers and Area leads in secondary schools

‘Across the county, work has focused recently on progress within Areas across each progression step up to progression step 4. Each term we’ve concentrated on one Area, so Humanities last term, Health and Wellbeing this term, Expressive Arts next term etc’.²⁵ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

- the time to engage with their school cluster

‘Time is the biggest challenge; you lose the thread when you’re trying to grab a few hours here and there to work on it, especially as a cluster. We have specific cluster INSET days, which is great, but just as you get into the mindset you have to get back to the day job and then you can lose the momentum.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- concerns about the future nature of qualifications and their alignment with CfW

²⁴ Original quote in Welsh: ‘Mae’r mapio clwstwr di bod yn bwysig iawn, gwneud yn siŵr ein bod ni’n mynd drwy pethau mewn ffordd sy’n gwneud synnwyr a’n bod ni ddim yn ail-adrodd yr un testunau ar adegau gwahanol.’

²⁵ Original quote in Welsh: ‘Mae gwaith ar draws y Sir wedi digwydd yn ddiweddar yn canolbwyntio ar gynnydd o fewn Meysydd ar draws bob cam cynnydd lan at cam cynnydd 4. Bob tymor ni wedi canolbwyntio ar un Maes, felly Dyniaethau tymor diwethaf, lechyd a lles tymor yma, Celf mynegiannol tymor nesa ayyb’

'We're mindful of changes coming down the line with GCSEs. There might be a bit of a discord between the two [CfW and qualifications]. If a learner doesn't want to study a subject within a particular AoLE [Area] at GCSE level, do they still have to make progress within it from the age of 14 to 16?' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

5. Careers and Work-related Experiences (CWRE)

5.1 The following sections summarise comments from senior leaders on incorporating Careers and Work-related Experiences (CWRE) as part of the new curriculum arrangements. Interviewees were asked about:

- how they had begun to implement CWRE as part of their new curriculum
 - whether arrangements were working effectively to date and whether they had faced any challenges
 - (for senior leaders in primary schools) whether this felt like a relatively new area to them and if so, how were they going about planning for this in a cross-cutting way
- how they were working with other schools or settings in their cluster (or beyond) and other partners (including employers) on this aspect
- what types of experiences do they provide learners (beyond traditional work experience), and what specific support on this would be useful
- was there any specific additional support they required with regard to this aspect of the curriculum.

5.2 The following sections summarise senior leaders' comments on implementing CWRE as part of the new curriculum.

General points raised by senior leaders in schools and settings implementing Curriculum for Wales (CfW) during 2022/23

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

5.3 **Senior leaders highlighted the links their school or setting had made with local employers and organisations to support them in implementing CWRE and providing learners with richer learning experiences.** Senior leaders, including those in both primary and secondary schools, described their efforts to integrate these experiences within their curriculum activity, themes or projects. Examples provided by senior leaders included:

- representatives of employers, charities and other organisations visiting schools and settings to speak with learners about their role and organisation or learners visiting the sites of local employers or organisations.
 - In many cases, senior leaders (including those in primary and secondary schools) described how they were building on their existing engagement with representatives of external organisations to focus increasingly on learners' understanding of the skills required for different job roles and the pathways to these.
- engagement with FE colleges, training providers and/or university representatives
- in-school work experience: work experience in the school reception, school shop
- traditional work experience placements.

5.4 Some senior leaders, particularly those in primary schools, referred to their school or setting's efforts in identifying parents and carers who could speak to learners about their own career, business or area of expertise. In a few schools and settings, senior leaders and practitioners had considered the profile of the local economy (e.g. types of employers and sectors present locally) as they shaped their curriculum content relating to CWRE. This was described by senior leaders as an important part of these schools' and settings' efforts to ensure their curriculum and learners experiences were authentic and reflected their local area.

'We've always had lots of local businesses coming into school on a regular basis - nurses, police, authors, gym instructors, charities. We try to get them to talk about the pathway to that job and we do lots on entrepreneurial skills around this. It can build up from small pupils visiting a local shop or farm to understand the job roles, build to more variety of roles with older pupils.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

'We've had help from Careers Wales to identify good contacts, organisations, and employers who can fill gaps in our [CWRE] offer. We're trying to ensure that partners [we work with] are aligned with sectors that are most relevant to our learners and the local economy.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

'We are doing some work with the local authority to see what the [skills] shortages are....We are trying to map where the gaps are and what qualifications we offer post-16, and then support this with work experience.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 5.5 Senior leaders (including those in both primary and secondary schools) described how they were **identifying opportunities to integrate CWRE within their curriculum**. In some schools and settings, this process had involved practitioners mapping their existing CWRE activities to examine the coverage of areas or subjects and progression across year groups. This had then led to a process of identifying new opportunities to deliver CWRE activities or refining aspects of their current provision. A few senior leaders reported that this approach had been adopted at a cluster level, with senior leaders describing a process of jointly planning CWRE provision so that learners had a more consistent and coherent experience during their curriculum journey.

'We always do a 'junior apprentice week' and do it as a competition but we also now pitch it as an Expressive Arts topic getting the pupils composing jingles, making outfits and there are links across the board with Science and Technology as well, when designing the product and also Maths and Numeracy thinking about finance, loss and profit. We can engage the parents with this as well, so parents will buy the product.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

'We've mapped our CWRE activity across year groups and we're identifying where it can be integrated in a natural way rather than just focused on specific days in a disjointed way. We're trying to create a continuum of activities where themes and topics are revisited at different points over the course of a child's journey from primary through to secondary school.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school²⁶

'We've tried to map out the opportunities for learners to engage with CWRE across our [cluster] curriculum planning. It's really important that we aren't duplicating content with the same learners in different year groups and that learners [across the cluster] reach secondary having had similar experiences and

²⁶ Original quote in Welsh: 'Ni di mapio ein gweithgareddau gyrfaedd [a byd gwaith] ar draws yr oedrannau ac yn adnabod lle ma modd bwydo fe i mewn ffordd naturiol a nid jyst di ffocysu ar ddiwrnodau penodol mewn ffordd sy'n *disjointed*. Ni'n trio creu continwmm o weithgareddau lle ni'n ail-ymweld â themâu a phynciau ar wahanol bwyntiau yn ystod taith y dysgwr o'r cynradd drwodd i'r uwchradd.'

opportunities. It's important for CWRE to be authentic and not bolted-on.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school²⁷

5.6 Some senior leaders indicated that they were at a relatively early stage of implementing CWRE within their curriculum and that this was a fairly new focus for their school or setting. Senior leaders in these schools and settings tended to describe discrete examples of CWRE activities they were providing to learners (e.g. visits from employers, enterprise or business-related activities, activities focused on managing money or finances), but noted that they had not yet mapped or embedded these activities across their whole curriculum. Senior leaders noted that many of their current CWRE activities had traditionally been aimed at specific cohorts, typically older learners within their school or setting, and that developing a continuum of provision including younger learners was now a greater priority for them. Some senior leaders described their intentions to map CWRE provision across their curriculum over the coming year and a few of these schools and settings planned to focus on mapping progression between their CWRE activities.

'This is a totally new area for the school; previously we only paid a bit of lip service to it at the top end of the school. Now we can see the good messages coming in [from parents and employers]. It's a refreshing new element of the curriculum'. Senior leader, English-medium primary school

'This has been developing, we're in early stages. We want to see it embedded in the curriculum but this has always been supplementary to us. It has taken a significant amount of work for us to change approach and embed.' Senior leader, English-medium all-though school

'This is an area of development for us. Traditionally we've done more on this in Years 10 and 11 but we've now started in the lower school. There's some good practice, for example [name of employer] come to the school in Year 7 and 8 and we deliver CWRE as part of Health and Wellbeing but we need to map coverage more comprehensively. Our INSET day in the summer term will be about reviewing things and mapping coverage of cross-cutting elements.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

²⁷ Original quote in Welsh: 'Da ni wedi trio mapio'r cyfleoedd sydd i'r plant i ymwneud â gyrfaoedd [a'r byd gwaith] ar draws ein gwaith cynllunio [clwstwr]. Mae'n bwysig iawn i ni beidio dyblygu gwaith gyda'r un dysgwyr mewn blynyddoedd gwahanol a'n bod ni'n gwneud yn siŵr bod dysgwyr [ar draws y clwstwr] yn cyrraedd yr uwchradd wedi cael cyfleoedd a phrofiadau tebyg. Mae'n bwysig fod gyrfaoedd [a'r byd gwaith] yn *authentic* a ddim yn *bolt-on*.'

5.7 Senior leaders reported that their school or setting had effective working relationships with Careers Wales which were valuable in implementing CWRE.

Senior leaders described different types of support they had accessed through Careers Wales, including:

- accessing online resources
- help identifying external partners to engage with (e.g. employers, organisations)
- accessing careers fairs or external events
- accessing training delivered by Careers Wales.

'We had training from Careers Wales last year. Their website has everything you need, it was excellent. CWRE was a whole school theme for the autumn term [2022/23]. I showed staff all the resources and training that had been shown to me. We focussed on this for the term, we now have a better understanding, and it is now brought into topics.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

5.8 Senior leaders described their approaches to ensuring that practitioners were including CWRE as part of their curriculum planning activities within and across areas of learning and experience. Examples included:

- dedicated CWRE practitioners in schools and settings identifying opportunities or jointly planning provision with subject or Area leads
- schools and settings creating planning templates which encouraged practitioners to plan content that included reference to CWRE provision (e.g. engagement with employers and external organisations, reference to employability skills, identifying CWRE role models within areas or subjects)
- practitioners creating classroom wall displays with a focus on CWRE within their Area or subject which practitioners and learners could refer to during lessons
- setting specific goals for areas or subjects to include CWRE opportunities for learners within a given period (e.g. a focus on CWRE learning at least once a term).

A few senior leaders commented on how these approaches had been successful in their view.

'It's not additional work if you include it as part of your plans from the outset. It's really important to talk about these things jointly and plan jointly so that everybody is involved and is reassured by the collective approach.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school²⁸

'We used to do this ad-hoc but now the whole school has timetabled time for careers, a whole school approach. We have a new lead in place internally.' Senior leader, special school

'CWRE used to be a bolt-on to our curriculum. Now we have a RSE/CWRE Coordinator with dedicated time and have increased the status of this area and given more time to it. We have mapped where there are opportunities in our schemes of work for links to employers, visits, relating a lesson directly to careers and skills sets etc and each subject area needs to identify one instance where they can tie effectively to CWRE.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary

'Each classroom has a CWRE [aspect], for example a display in Expressive Arts that illustrates different careers and a display with the top 10 employability skills in Maths. So teachers in Maths lessons will refer to the work they are doing and how it relates to these during the lesson. This helps the learners see that they are making progress in skills that are relevant to the workplace so can be referenced when praising pupils for their work.' Senior leader, PRU

'We are looking at each Area and asked each year group to identify one careers opportunity per term to build careers work around. This could be a fair or a visiting speaker etc; we have been non-prescriptive, our staff get to choose the task and theme. We try and supplement with in-school experience.' Senior leader, English-medium all-through school

Other issues raised by senior leaders

- 5.9 Senior leaders reported that **other elements of their curriculum had been prioritised over cross cutting themes such as CWRE**. These senior leaders acknowledged the importance of CWRE, and their intention to place greater focus on it, but felt that time pressures meant that other elements needed to be developed

²⁸ Original quote in Welsh: 'Dydy o'm yn waith ychwanegol os chi'n ei gynnwys o'n eich cynlluniau o'r cychwyn. Ma'n bwysig iawn i ni siarad am y pethau 'ma ar y cyd a chynllunio ar y cyd fel bo pawb di cael eu cynnwys ac yn cael sicrwydd am y ffordd da ni di cytuno i wneud pethau'.

first (e.g. planning within and across Areas, developing their approach to progression and assessment).

‘We want to steer teachers towards CWRE after they have had their heads around the areas of learning and experience and see how they can link the two together.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

‘We have a light touch around embedding in a cross-cutting way – we only have a finite amount of resources and time and have had to focus more on other areas. We don’t want this to be tokenistic, we need time given to staff to let them plan, design, explore content etc and build on that with confidence. Given the amount of change we are dealing with, it is difficult. Where something naturally fits with CWRE, then we build it in, but we need to focus on the foundations and core elements first of all. We still have the links that we’ve always had, but this isn’t as strategic yet as we would like.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary

- 5.10 Senior leaders referred to **external resources or frameworks they were using in planning and implementing CWRE** within their curriculum. These included the Welsh Government [CWRE toolkit](#) and the ‘ACRO model’ of entrepreneurship.²⁹ Some senior leaders felt that more support was needed and were not aware of resources, such as the CWRE toolkit, that were available to them.
- 5.11 Senior leaders commented on the **negative impact of the pandemic on the delivery of some CWRE activity**, explaining that engagement with partners had declined because of restrictions on external visitors during this period. Senior leaders felt this had continued to have an impact this year, with some of their relationships with external partners being lost due to inactivity as well as staff or external contacts moving roles in recent years.
- 5.12 Some senior leaders reported that their school or setting required **more support with implementing CWRE**. Examples suggested by senior leaders included case studies of how other schools and settings had implemented CWRE and a directory of potential employers and organisations they could engage with to support them in implementing CWRE. However, other senior leaders felt that they did not require additional support, but needed time to map their CWRE activity, plan how they would implement it and embed it across their curriculum.

²⁹ Attitude, Creativity, Relationships, Organisation. See [Learning and progression in entrepreneurship education](#) (Welsh Government, 2011)

- 5.13 Senior leaders referred to the **challenges of engaging external partners in a timely way which complemented their curriculum delivery**, noting that this required significant planning and was not always possible. Examples included employer representatives not being able to visit the school or setting at the most appropriate times or challenges in arranging visits to coincide with their teaching and learning.
- 5.14 Senior leaders emphasised the **importance of CWRE in increasing their learners' aspirations and expanding their horizons** by enabling them to consider career opportunities which they wouldn't necessarily be aware of. While senior leaders recognised the importance of making links with employers and organisations in their community, a few interviewees felt it was important that learners' CWRE experiences were not solely focused on employers or opportunities available in their local area as this could limit the variety of external organisations it was possible for them to engage with. Senior leaders felt it was important to encourage their learners' aspirations by exposing them to information about a variety of sectors and job opportunities.

Variations in views according to type and language of school or setting

- 5.15 Senior leaders in primary schools were more likely than those in secondaries to report that:
- CWRE was a relatively new area of focus for them or that they were in the early stages of implementing it
 - their school had been able to make good links with local employers and organisations
 - they were focusing on enhancing their learners' engagement with external businesses and organisations by developing complementary content focused on skills, understanding job roles and career pathways.
- 5.16 Senior leaders in secondary schools were more likely than those in primaries to report that:
- their school had good links with Careers Wales

- their school had made few changes to their CWRE offer.

5.17 Senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools reported that there was a lack of Welsh-language resources available relating to CWRE and also felt that there was a lack of vocational courses available through the medium of Welsh.

5.18 Senior leaders in PRUs particularly welcomed the focus on CWRE within the CfW, noting that this aligned well with the four purposes and their main goals for learners. Senior leaders in PRUs reported that the flexibility of the CfW had also enabled them to work more closely with local colleges and training providers to develop more bespoke vocational provision focused on their learners' career aspirations.

'For a PRU the four purposes are a joy because they encapsulate what we are trying to do with these young people when they come to us; to look at things in their community that they can aspire to, to understand the pathways to careers, what college courses they would need to do. We link this [CWRE] to our vocational curriculum offered too with external providers [local colleges and training providers].' Senior leader, PRU

5.19 Senior leaders felt that **engaging suitable employers and organisations could be more challenging in smaller schools and settings as well as those located in areas with a less diverse economy** (e.g. an area with few large employers).

'The size of school influences this because the likelihood of having a parent or family member who is a vet or works at Airbus [aircraft manufacturing company] is smaller in a small school.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

Views of secondary senior leaders preparing to implement CfW from September 2023

5.20 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 were more likely than those already implementing the CfW to report that they were at an early stage of integrating CWRE within their curriculum. The most common preparatory activities reported by senior leaders in these schools were:

- appointing a designated CWRE lead
- mapping their existing discrete CWRE activities across areas or year groups (e.g. enterprise challenges and projects, STEM activities), though this had typically not happened in all areas

'We have mapped [CWRE activities] within Humanities as our AoLE pilot but not yet across other areas. We'll build it in as and when the time is right. Careers is one of those areas where staff are doing things without realising it so we need to emphasise those things and bring them to the fore.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- identifying links between CWRE activities and the integral skills and opportunities for progression over time
- engaging with Careers Wales to identify opportunities and develop new ideas for CWRE learning and teaching
- increasing their engagement with employers and external organisations (e.g. through visits to local businesses or inviting speakers into school)

'We've worked with local employers to develop work units within the Health and Wellbeing area; these are preparing learners for work and building skills for the world of work. We've not yet mapped this across the other Areas, it's on the 'to do list'.³⁰ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

5.21 Other issues mentioned by senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 were:

- that they welcomed that CfW had raised the profile and status of CWRE, with a few noting that the status of careers in school had dropped in the years prior to the introduction of CfW
- that they would welcome additional support to identify employers and organisations that were willing to engage with them to provide their learners with richer experiences, but that time and capacity to plan was more of an issue for them.

'It's a matter of needing time to plan rather than needing specific support' Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school³¹

³⁰ Original quote in Welsh: 'Da ni di gweithio efo cyflogwr lleol i ddatblygu unedau o waith o fewn maes Iechyd a Lles; ma rhain yn paratoi'r disgyblion ar gyfer gwaith ac yn adeiladu sgiliau byd gwaith. 'Da ni heb mapio hwn ar draws meysydd eraill eto, mae hynny ar y 'to do list'.'

³¹ Original quote in Welsh: 'Mater o amser i gynllunio yw o yn hytrach na bod angen cefnogaeth benodol.'

6. Welsh language

6.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to interviewees' experiences of **incorporating the Welsh language within their school or setting's new curriculum arrangements**. Interviewees were asked about:

- how the new curriculum supports and promotes learning and the use of Welsh.
- whether the arrangements had been effective so far
- whether they needed any extra support with this aspect
- whether they faced any challenges in incorporating the Welsh language.

6.2 Questions were tailored according to the language of the school, allowing for Welsh-medium, dual language or English-medium contextualisation.

6.3 The following sections summarise senior leaders' comments on incorporating the Welsh language as part of their school or setting's new curriculum arrangements. Points raised by senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools, including comments by those in dual language schools on their Welsh-medium provision are set out first, and the term 'Welsh-medium schools' is used to refer to these findings. Points raised by senior leaders in English-medium schools and other settings are then presented separately.³² As in previous sections, findings are organised according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees.

General points raised in Welsh-medium and dual language schools implementing Curriculum for Wales (CfW) during 2022/23

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

6.4 Reinforcing views expressed during the Wave 1 interviews, **senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools reported that the pandemic had impacted upon students' confidence and ability to use Welsh**. This was particularly felt to be a challenge for learners who did not speak Welsh at home and in areas where Welsh

³² Special schools and PRUs are not classified by language medium. Comments from these senior leaders are included alongside those from senior leaders in English-medium schools, with any variations identified later in this section.

was not as widely spoken as a community language. Senior leaders felt that learners' confidence had been affected by spending less time in the classroom as well as not having accessed Welsh-medium extra-curricular activities (e.g. residential visits to Urdd camps, events run by Mentrau Iaith) during recent years.³³ Senior leaders reported that they had placed an increased emphasis on Welsh language oracy to address this perceived skills deficit and felt that the CfW offered them the flexibility to adapt their teaching and learning in response to this challenge. This flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances was considered to be a strength of the CfW framework.

'Welsh language skills have suffered during the pandemic, particularly among those who do not speak Welsh at home. After the pandemic, is it reasonable to judge the Welsh skills of those who come from backgrounds where Welsh is not spoken at all at home with those in areas where Welsh is a community language?' Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school

'We are continuing to focus on Welsh language oracy because many of our pupils are low on confidence and are very self-critical in terms of their own skills. The new curriculum enables us to adapt and change focus according to learners needs. We are not always tied to delivering specific content at specific times because we are in control of our own curriculum.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

6.5 Senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools felt the increased emphasis on Cymreictod (Welsh identity) within the CfW was beneficial in promoting the use of Welsh across their curriculum. Senior leaders reported that the flexibility of the CfW framework had enabled them to develop more contemporary and locally-relevant content that was more appealing to their learners. Senior leaders also reported that their parents and carers felt this was an important aspect of the curriculum. Senior leaders provided some examples of how this had influenced their planning, for example arranging educational visits to locations that were relevant to the Welsh language and Welsh history or locations where learners could hear and use the Welsh language.

'The emphasis on Cymreictod, identity and belonging is helpful within the CfW. This can be promoted across all subjects; it helps to place more emphasis on a

³³ A Menter Iaith is a community-based organisation which works to raise the profile and use of the Welsh language in a specific area.

sense of pride and confidence in their [the learners] Welsh language skills.’
Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

‘When we did our parental consultation a few years ago, we got over 400 responses across the cluster and when we put the responses into a Word Cloud the words “Welsh history” were in huge font in the middle, so this has been a big focus for us.’ Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school

Other issues raised by senior leaders

6.6 Senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools also reported that:

- they faced challenges in recruiting and retaining staff who were able to teach through the medium of Welsh.
- Welsh-language immersion provision and capacity was crucial to enable learners to develop their Welsh-language skills prior to entering Welsh-medium schools
- closer collaboration between teachers in English, Welsh and international languages (through the Languages, Literacy and Communication (LLC) area) had led to more links between languages and that this was considered beneficial in changing some learners’ attitudes to using Welsh
- the new curriculum had stimulated enthusiasm among practitioners for developing new, contemporary learning and teaching activities and resources which enabled a focus on Wales-based content as well as using the Welsh language to learn about contemporary international issues.

General points raised in English-medium schools and other settings implementing CfW during 2022/23

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders: English-medium schools and other settings

6.7 **Senior leaders had positive views on the use of incidental Welsh in their school and reported that they were focused on further promoting this in the classroom and wider school environment.** Senior leaders had positive views on the Siarter Iaith (Welsh Language Charter) as a framework for increasing the use of

Welsh in their school or setting; some reported that the increased focus on Welsh in the CfW was a catalyst for them to work towards the next level of Siarter Iaith accreditation. Some senior leaders had positive views on the support they had received from external partners, such as regional consortia, to promote the use of Welsh among their learners.

‘Childrens’ perspective of Welsh language is key, so we get them to engage in Welsh culture. Incidental Welsh language is sewn into the substance of the school. This is important and kids are used to greeting in Welsh etc.’ Senior Leader, English-medium secondary

- 6.8 Senior leaders reported difficulties in filling vacancies both for Welsh-speaking staff and those qualified to teach Welsh as a subject.** Senior leaders felt there was a shortage of Welsh-speaking staff and perceived that they were often competing with other schools for these teachers.

‘You cannot get Welsh teachers. It took us three rounds of advertising the post, competing with other local schools. Other schools are offering incentives and extra pay to attract Welsh teachers. We are fearful of our Welsh [speaking] staff leaving.’ Senior Leader, English-medium secondary school

- 6.9 Senior leaders in schools or settings who had accessed the Welsh Government’s Welsh language Sabbatical Scheme had positive views on its impact on their workforce.**³⁴ Some senior leaders reported that several members of their staff had accessed the scheme. Other senior leaders expressed a desire to take advantage of the scheme despite some reporting difficulties in releasing staff and the associated loss of expertise associated with teachers being on sabbatical for an extended period.

‘The sabbatical scheme has been a big change for us [with] the greatest impact – three of our staff have been on it and we’ve really invested in this. The scheme is a meaningful way to embed these language skills, compared to ongoing piecemeal training.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 6.10 Some senior leaders indicated that the shortage of staff with Welsh language skills meant they faced challenges in meeting the high expectations of CfW relating to the teaching and learning of Welsh.** Senior leaders reported that staff

³⁴ See [Welsh language professional learning - Hwb](#)

confidence to teach Welsh was lower than their confidence to introduce incidental Welsh. In a similar vein to cross-curricular skills and cross-cutting themes, senior leaders reported that they had prioritised other elements of their curriculum over the teaching and learning of Welsh. These senior leaders acknowledged the importance of Welsh, and expressed a desire to place greater focus on it, but felt that time pressures coupled with a lack of capacity and skills to teach Welsh, meant that other elements needed to be prioritised (e.g. planning within and across Areas, developing their approach to progression and assessment). A few senior leaders reported that they wished also to prioritise home languages spoken by their learners.

6.11 Senior leaders in English-medium schools reported a growing sense of affinity with Welsh culture across their school and a feeling of belonging, alongside the use of the Welsh language being woven into other subjects.

Some mentioned an increased focus on Welsh history and culture as part of their curriculum, including English-medium texts focused on Welsh culture. Some commented on the value of using Welsh songs to increase engagement with the Welsh language and its culture, and felt that more resources relating to Welsh language music would be beneficial to support this approach. A few senior leaders reported that their school or setting had held a school Eisteddfod for the first time this year.

'We're looking at Welsh texts in English so the myths and legends of Wales, like Eloise Williams' 'The Mab' [bilingual retelling of the Mabinogi]. It's important to celebrate Welsh identities.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary

'We need more Welsh reading materials and resources. We are doing a lot of Welsh songs and music and could use support with this. We haven't done this with Welsh before, the learners find this more meaningful and we are teaching them through song and dance: it appeals to them.' English-medium primary school

6.12 Senior leaders in English-medium schools had positive views on other support they had accessed from their regional consortium and others relating to the teaching of Welsh (e.g. 3-day intensive training, talks, videos and slide decks). However, senior leaders also expressed a desire for more resources and training. For example, some reported a need for Welsh language audio resources to

accompany texts and others requested short 'refresher' training sessions for staff who had previously accessed the sabbaticals scheme but may not have used their skills since.

'There are resources out there for Welsh but not always with the audio to go with the resources, which staff need to model to themselves and to the children. This is more apparent at Progression Step 3 when the Welsh does become more difficult, the staff need more confidence when teaching the children.' Senior leader, English-medium primary

Other issues raised by senior leaders in English-medium schools

6.13 Senior leaders in English-medium schools provided a range of other comments relating to the Welsh language including:

- that their cluster had worked together to develop resources for supporting the teaching, learning and use of Welsh.
- that Welsh was one of the priorities in their school development plan
- that the focus on international languages and Welsh in the CfW were complementary
- that not much had changed in teaching and learning Welsh or the use of Welsh in their school or setting.

Variations in views according to type of school or setting

6.14 Senior leaders in Welsh-medium secondary schools were more likely than those in Welsh-medium primaries to report that the pandemic had impacted upon students' confidence and ability to use Welsh. Senior leaders in secondary schools also reported that the CfW framework had enabled their Welsh language departments to develop more contemporary and locally-relevant content that was more appealing to their learners whilst also enabling other departments to focus on more Wales-based content, which offers learners a context for learning the Welsh language.

6.15 Senior leaders in English-medium secondary schools were more likely than those in English-medium primary schools to note that:

- they had experienced difficulties in recruiting Welsh-speaking practitioners and those qualified to teach Welsh as a subject
- their workforce did not have sufficient Welsh language skills

6.16 Senior leaders in English-medium primary schools were more likely than those in English-medium secondaries schools to note that:

- they had accessed or considered accessing the [Welsh language Sabbatical Scheme](#)
- they were working towards [Siarter Iaith](#) accreditation

6.17 Senior leaders in special schools and PRUs reported challenges in recruiting Welsh-speaking staff – particularly TAs – who could work with learners with ALN. Nevertheless, incidental Welsh is used, yet developing further Welsh language staff capacity (such as accessing the Sabbatical scheme) is a challenge due to the underlying staffing challenges in these schools and settings.

Views of secondary senior leaders preparing to implement CfW from September 2023

Issues raised by senior leaders in English-medium schools preparing to implement from September 2023

6.18 Senior leaders in English-medium schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported a number of activities they were undertaking to incorporate the teaching, learning and use of Welsh in their school:

- appointing Welsh or bilingualism coordinators
- working towards Siarter Iaith (Language Charter) awards
- re-designing their curriculum and developing new ways of engaging learners and generating enthusiasm for Welsh

‘This is probably the department that has benefitted the most [from CfW]. The curriculum hadn’t changed for a long time and this has reinvigorated them [staff] and has helped throw the shackles off. We’re now running a Welsh language version of ‘I’m a celebrity’ [reality TV show] and talking about celebrity Welsh language learners. Lots of competitions and games to encourage them to

connect with the language which give us different ways of promoting it'. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

'Our [non-Welsh speaking] Year 7 learners now study a Welsh language novel which is aimed at Welsh speakers with a reading age of Year 5 or 6. We've had the author in to do workshops and at the same time have been learning about animals and adjectives in authentic contexts.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- focusing more on culture as well as the value of learning the language

'We've had a big push on Welsh ethos, language and culture. It's [Welsh] not spoken in corridors but pupils now receive more information on the value of Welsh..' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

6.19 Senior leaders in English-medium schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported some challenges they were facing in incorporating the teaching, learning and use of Welsh in their school:

- recruiting teachers able to speak Welsh or teach through the medium of Welsh
- being able to release staff to participate in the Welsh language Sabbaticals Scheme because of a perceived impact on continuity of teaching and loss of staff expertise during the sabbatical period.

Issues raised by senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023

6.20 Senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported that:

- they were focusing more on Welsh history and culture across the curriculum than previously
- that increased collaboration within the LLC Area was beneficial, with Welsh, English and international languages staff increasingly sharing expertise and good practice and developing more consistent approaches to developing skills

- they were working with external partners such as the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to improve learners' and parents' perceptions of the value of Welsh by providing information on career pathways where Welsh language skills were valued.

6.21 Senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported several issues they were facing:

- an observed decline in the use of the Welsh language by learners since the pandemic, particularly among learners who do not speak Welsh at home
- challenges in encouraging learners to speak Welsh outside the classroom
- in dual language secondary schools, increasing the percentage of learners choosing to follow certain GCSE qualifications, particularly Science and Maths, through the medium of Welsh was a priority, and required activity to change learners' and parental perceptions of Welsh.

7. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories

7.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to interviewees' experiences of **implementing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories within their school or setting's new curriculum arrangements**. Interviewees were asked about:

- how schools and settings had begun to incorporate Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories as part of their new curriculum
- whether arrangements were working effectively or as anticipated
- whether schools and settings faced any challenges to date
- how schools and settings were planning for this in a cross-cutting way
- whether any specific additional support was required to implement this aspect of the curriculum.

7.2 The following sections summarise senior leaders' comments on implementing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories as part of their school or setting's new curriculum arrangements.

Wave 2 findings (May-July 2023): General points raised by senior leaders in schools and settings implementing Curriculum for Wales (CfW) during 2022/23

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

7.3 **There was variance from senior leaders when describing progress in beginning to incorporate Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories as part of their new curriculum:** some reported their implementation was at an 'early days' phase, while others stated this was not a new area for them.

7.4 Senior leaders in the early phase had undertaken initial planning and delivery but felt **the development of this particular aspect of the curriculum needed more attention and investment**. Some senior leaders identified concerns around wanting to get this aspect of the curriculum 'right', citing that building knowledge within the workforce was an important consideration.

'We still don't have sufficient knowledge and awareness to know how to cover this element, we have a training need in this area and are at the early stages.'
Senior leader, English-medium primary school

7.5 **Senior leaders spoke of the need to engage meaningfully with this aspect of the new curriculum** and acknowledged that, in order to avoid a tokenistic approach, finding suitable resources and developing teacher knowledge and confidence were time-consuming tasks:

'We are looking at our ethos in the school. This is crucial in better understanding how best we can approach this area of CfW. It's a quick fix to only look at resources and content – we are doing this, but it needs to go further. We need to invest in CPD in order [for teachers] to make sound decisions over elements like auditing the curriculum - should some texts be removed? Our teachers need to have confidence when making this decision.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

7.6 **Senior leaders who did not feel this aspect of the curriculum was new to them were often located in more diverse areas and had a history of exploring diversity within the curriculum that pre-dated CfW.** These leaders reported this area as being a strength of theirs and important to the school's ethos and culture. Some also had strong ties to the parent and carer community and involved them in aspects of delivery:

'[Diversity] is a natural part, not a bolt-on. Parents come in for various festivals like Eid and they talk about how celebrations are at home, showing artefacts and things from the community. It is more meaningful and authentic coming from them than from teachers.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

7.7 Senior leaders who had reported a pre-existing focus on diversity were **still keen to progress and improve their Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories content.** They reported that additional training, resources, and guidance would be of benefit to the teaching staff, many of whom had developed this aspect of the curriculum in response to learner needs but not necessarily with the benefit of formal training or support:

'Any training opportunities or resources would be great as it's a priority area for us. Staff haven't had training on this area, we are mindful of this and want to be well prepared for our SDP [School Development Plan]. We want it to be meaningful for the children and need resources and networks to tap into.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school.

- 7.8 **Auditing the curriculum was a priority for many senior leaders**, with several reporting that emphasis had been placed on identifying opportunities for cross-curricular links, noting gaps in provision, and highlighting where improvement to existing content was needed.
- 7.9 **Senior leaders reported the auditing process was circular and actively fed into curriculum planning and design, and that it was an important aspect of developing this area of the curriculum.** In addition, auditing was used to identify gaps in knowledge and understanding which could subsequently inform the targeted procurement of resources, support and guidance.

‘We have allowed planning time, to make sure that diversity is woven into the curriculum. Our planning tools capture whether diversity is built into our curriculum. We have teachers who have skills sets and knowledge specifically in this area but resourcing it is really difficult.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 7.10 **A minority of senior leaders reported involving learners in their curriculum audits**, either through student council bodies or via surveys. These consultations tended to incorporate other equalities areas alongside Minority Ethnic Histories, such as gender, LGBTQ+ and disability:

‘The school council have led audits looking for evidence of equity, equality and diversity, gender bias in class resources.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 7.11 Senior leaders spoke of **the importance of auditing the curriculum to ensure it was reflective of the diversity of their learners. These leaders had approached auditing with a view to ensuring the curriculum was representative and therefore more appropriate for their school or setting.** In addition, through curriculum audits, a minority of schools reported their existing content needed improvement: most notably there was a lack of positive histories and portrayals about Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities within the existing curriculum content, which these senior leaders were keen to redress:

‘Our curriculum was too white in humanities, outside traditional History [and] Religion. We had to take a step back and ask if this met the needs and diversity of our school make up. The answer was ‘no.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

'We look at messaging – our diverse content had negative messages and stereotyping [like] slavery and victimhood. We realised we were sending out poor messages about Black communities, there was unconscious bias in our choices. Our workforce is not very diverse and this was being reflected in our curriculum. It isn't enough to diversify what is being taught, [you] need to look at what impression it is giving. We want more positive messages.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 7.12 **Senior leaders commonly reported using resources to inform their planning and design of Minority Ethnic Histories content.** Resources were described as being directly linked to delivery and content. These included activities in some subject areas, books on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and role models, and worksheets and classroom activities available from third party platforms.
- 7.13 Some schools and settings had obtained resources themselves, others had utilised resources available from their Consortium or were working collaboratively to develop them, and in a minority of cases senior leaders reported having their own internal expertise which they were using to develop resources.
- 7.14 Senior leaders highlighted that **obtaining resources was a challenge in some cases due to the time, effort and cost involved in locating them.** They cited the importance of aligning resources with the needs of the learners, and the teaching staff's confidence, knowledge and ability to deliver them:
- 'There are lots of resources available for this area, it is a little bit overwhelming for schools. The main barrier for schools is a lack of time to research and explore which resources would be most useful for their school.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school
- 'The English department made a huge effort to diversify, we don't think it is hard to find varied resources – we have looked at other areas of inclusion too like LGBT+. We have put money into buying new resources and books.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school
- 7.15 **Senior leaders requested more external resources. This was the case for those in the early stages of development in this area of the curriculum, as well as those more advanced in their journeys.** Senior leaders highlighted how more resources would give their staff a wider range of material to draw from. Commonly, senior leaders spoke of using external resources, whether free or purchased, as a

starting point for their own planning and highlighted how they adapted them for their own use. Designing bespoke resources was outlined as a way to ensure this area of the curriculum was tailored and deliverable:

‘There are many private companies offering off-the-shelf resources for schools which are currently filling a gap in the market for many schools. It is more beneficial for schools to go through the process of developing their own resources in partnership with stakeholders so that these resources are tailored to learners’ needs.’ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

‘Anecdotal case studies might be helpful to see how other schools are bringing things to life.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

7.16 A number of senior leaders highlighted low staff knowledge and confidence in this area of the curriculum, especially in schools and settings where there were low levels of diversity amongst the learners and / or the teaching staff.

Several senior leaders had engaged with external specialists such as DARPL³⁵ and Show Racism the Red Card³⁶ in order to develop the capabilities of their workforce. Some spoke of utilising these organisations to train and develop their staff members, whilst others had tapped into the expertise and resources these external providers offered.

‘We engaged with DARPL: very helpful when you don’t have that lived experience.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

‘Our diversity leads have done the DARPL training – [it was] very good and resources are on Hwb. We’re now doing staff-wide training and workshops with them.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

7.17 Senior leaders in some cases had identified training and resourcing gaps, but highlighted challenges in being able to access suitable resources to meet needs.

‘We are a predominantly white school, we have found it challenging to engage providers, there are very few, it is expensive. We want to do this, but how can we bring the support in when we can’t afford it?’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

³⁵ [DARPL - Diversity and Anti-Racism Professional Learning](#)

³⁶ [Home - Show Racism the Red Card](#)

7.18 **There was variation in the breadth of delivery of Minority Ethnic Histories across the curriculum.** Some senior leaders reported discrete activities, usually aligned with key dates in the calendar such as Black History Month or religious celebrations, whilst others delivered Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories throughout the year. **Overall, there appeared to be a desire amongst senior leaders to move away from discrete activities towards embedding provision year-round.** Several commented that whilst discrete activities were useful hooks to build delivery around, they were concerned this might appear to be tokenistic. These senior leaders were exploring ways to focus on Minority Ethnic Histories as an ongoing aspect of the curriculum, not ringfenced to special events only.

‘We use occasions in the community – Black History Month, Ramadan - and bring these in [to our] calendar of themes throughout the year. The History team has been inputting into this so it can be used in other areas.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

‘We have a real focus in the autumn term during Black History Month. But it feels an example of ticking a box...we want to try and see how Black history topics link throughout all topics not just during Black History Month.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

7.19 Some senior leaders reported focussing on delivering Minority Ethnic Histories within the subject areas of History and Humanities, whereas **others were approaching this aspect of the curriculum in a more contemporary way, linking to current notable people, events and issues, and embedding across different subjects.** Some schools and settings appeared to be in the early stages of this development, noting further auditing needed to take place in order to progress. Others were further along and already making these cross-curricular links: in these cases it was noted that cross-curricular connections appeared easier to identify in some areas than others:

‘When we map, we make sure there is representation. If English pick up a text, then Religion can follow this up, then History covers what was happening at the time. It works. But when you try and bring in wider subjects like Tech and Science it’s about making it fit, and it doesn’t always.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

‘Initially we looked at a Black history project but found this was not current enough for learners. It was too focused on history and [wasn’t] contemporary.’

Instead, we're studying a film and books that look at prejudice generally and use it to develop content. It makes it more relevant to learners.' Senior leader, PRU

'Children are really interested. [They're] growing, looking for opportunities. History have adapted their programme and talk about 'taking the knee'³⁷ and are looking at contemporary issues to inform the curriculum.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

7.20 The inclusion of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories in CfW, and the ability to tailor curriculum content to the needs of learners, parents, and the wider community, was welcomed amongst senior leaders, particularly those with a higher proportion of learners from Minority Ethnic backgrounds. These reported being able to be more responsive and inclusive in their curriculum design since CfW, and better able to reflect the communities they serve.

'We have a balance of diversity in the school which we take for granted. Curriculum for Wales has made a difference in having more opportunity to focus on diversity; we always had more provision with this naturally. However [now] we have the opportunity to strengthen this.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

'The most important aspect for us is identity – a learner's own identity, valuing the individual. It has led to broader discussions about equality and is related back to each pupil. This is a thread which goes through the whole school and helps to welcome any new BAME [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic] pupils. We feel being responsive to our learners and making this aspect relevant to each child, personal to them, has worked well for us.' Senior leader, English-medium all through school

7.21 This new aspect of the curriculum was also welcomed in some schools and settings that did not have a high proportion of Minority Ethnic pupils, with senior leaders citing that the requirement to be more inclusive provided them the chance to teach their learners about diversity in Wales and further afield:

'We don't have a lot of racial diversity here and are trying to connect with wider-Wales more, [to] show our learners and parents that other areas are more diverse.' Senior leader, special school

7.22 Commonly, senior leaders highlighted how this new aspect of the curriculum had led to a greater focus on other areas of equality, such as gender, disability

³⁷ 'Taking the knee' is a contemporary gesture against racism which features in sporting events worldwide.

and LGBTQ+. When auditing the curriculum or designing content, senior leader reported noticing opportunities to broaden the diversity of examples, topics, and role models to encompass other minority characteristics.

‘We explore different elements – science topics feature scientists from different backgrounds like female scientists. Our focus on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories has helped us to think of other equality areas, [and] getting rid of gender and LGBTQ+ stereotypes. Curriculum for Wales allows us to make these links and build them into the content. It’s more fluid and this is better for the children.’
Senior leader, English-medium primary school

Other issues raised by senior leaders

7.23 Some senior leaders **reported that Minority Ethnic Histories was often delivered within the Area of Health and Well-being or as a cross-cutting theme** alongside RSE. This alignment appeared to allow them to cohere planning and activities around these new elements of the curriculum.

‘We have appointed a member of staff with responsibility for the cross-cutting themes. They have done similar things with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories as CWRE and work these into pastoral and registration lessons.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

7.24 **In a minority of schools and settings, notably those without a high proportion of Minority Ethnic learners, senior leaders highlighted difficulties with progressing Minority Ethnic Histories.** Senior leaders spoke of challenges in their school or setting owing to the lack of diversity and had found it difficult to raise the profile of this aspect of the new curriculum amongst staff. Some highlighted high proportions of white Minority Ethnic learners in their school or setting, but noted that staff did not feel this part of the curriculum was intended for those learners. In response, these senior leaders were exploring training options and had developed links with external specialists to improve their teachers’ knowledge, understanding and capability to plan and deliver this aspect of the curriculum:

‘[We] understand how its important culturally and socially...but [in the school’s location] there are a lot of [white minority ethnic people], so that might be more relevant to the children.’ Senior leader, special school

Variations in views according to type and language of setting

7.25 Senior leaders in English-medium secondary schools were more likely than those in English-medium primaries schools to note:

- they were aligning Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories with RSE and Health and Well-being.
- they were keen to embed Minority Ethnic Histories across the wider-curriculum and were at different stages in their progress with this

7.26 Senior leaders in English-medium primary schools were more likely than those in English-medium secondaries schools to note:

- they were delivering Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories in a cross-curricular way, embedded in subjects other than just history
- focusing on Minority Ethnic Histories led to greater attention being given to other areas of equalities such as gender, disability and LGBTQ+.

Views of secondary senior leaders preparing to implement CfW from September 2023

7.27 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 described how they were incorporating Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories within their curriculum. Overall, senior leaders reported that they were making good progress in implementing this aspect of the curriculum, although some reported that progress was varied across subjects and Areas. The most common preparatory activities reported by senior leaders in these schools were:

- senior leaders and / or practitioners participating in professional learning activity relating to Minority Ethnic Histories
 - DARPL training and conferences were the most mentioned professional learning activity
- staff attending working groups facilitated at cluster, local authority or regional consortium level to develop shared resources or approaches to incorporate Minority Ethnic Histories within their curriculum

- using curriculum planning templates to encourage teachers to incorporate Minority Ethnic Histories within their curriculum
- teachers in one Area (most often Humanities) leading on identifying content and ideas relating to Minority Ethnic Histories and then advising teachers in other Areas on the most appropriate ways to embed these within their subjects and Areas and across year groups, for example identifying:
 - prominent Science role models from Minority Ethnic backgrounds
 - Minority Ethnic role models from Wales or their local area
 - texts or novels exploring issues relating to Minority Ethnic Histories.

‘The focus on this aspect of the curriculum has been really positive. In our mapping and planning, we’ve weaved Minority Ethnic Histories and content across the curriculum. We’ve also been able to develop a curriculum that better reflects our children and community.’³⁸ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

7.28 In a few of the schools preparing to implement from September 2023, senior leaders recognised that their efforts to embed Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories within their curriculum were part of an iterative process which required a mindset shift among their staff to become more reflective and aware of good practice in this area. In these schools, senior leaders highlighted the importance of embedding Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories to make their school more inclusive for all their learners.

7.29 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 described issues relating to incorporating Minority Ethnic Histories within their curriculum. The most common issues reported by senior leaders in these schools were:

- a need to spread and embed good practice across all subjects and Areas within their school
- a need for more training to be available to practitioners

³⁸ Original quote in Welsh: ‘Mae’r ffocws ar yr agwedd hon wedi bod yn bositif iawn. Yn ein mapio a chynllunio, ni di plethu i fewn hanes a chynnwys yn ymwneud a lleiafrifoedd ethnig ar draws y cwricwlwm. Ni hefyd di gallu datblygu cwricwlwm sy’n adlewyrchu cefndiroedd ein plant a’n cymuned ni yn well’.

- a need to raise awareness and visibility of resources and good practice.

8. Other elements of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) framework

8.1 During Wave 1 of this research, senior leaders were asked about three other elements of the CfW framework:

- Planning and implementing the curriculum across and within areas of learning and experience (Areas).
- Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)
- International languages

8.2 Senior leaders in schools and settings that were implementing the curriculum during 2022-23 were not asked about these elements during Wave 2 of the research. However, senior leaders in secondary schools that were preparing to implement the curriculum from September 2023 were asked about these elements.

8.3 This section sets out a summary of the Wave 1 report findings in relation to each of the above, and then presents the views of senior leaders in secondary schools that were preparing to implement the curriculum from September 2023 in relation to each element.

Planning and implementing the curriculum across and within areas of learning and experience

8.4 Interviewees were asked about:

- whether arrangements were working effectively or as anticipated
- whether they had faced any challenges
- whether additional support was required with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. professional learning, guidance, resources, support to enhance leadership or professional practice).

Summary of Wave 1 findings (November 2022 – January 2023): schools and settings implementing the curriculum during 2022-23

8.5 In the Wave 1 report, the findings showed that:

- schools and settings were mapping elements of the CfW framework against each of the Areas to ensure adequate ‘coverage’ and to avoid repetition where possible
- schools and settings were adopting various approaches to planning their curricula and ensuring links between subjects and Areas
 - Mapping progression within Areas was a focus in many schools and settings, with senior leaders describing how cluster activity was playing a key role in developing a shared understanding of progression.
 - Increased collaboration between subject disciplines within schools and settings was reported by senior leaders.
- there were variations in terms of which Areas senior leaders considered were progressing well in their curriculum design and implementation.
- senior leaders referred to challenges they were facing in terms of ensuring staff capacity to participate in joint planning sessions and cluster activity.

Views of senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement the curriculum from September 2023

8.6 Senior leaders reported that they had mapped curriculum content across areas. In some cases they had done this as a cluster, to try and ensure coherence and a more consistent experience for all learners.

‘The mapping was beneficial because it helped us [to] see across the cluster that some kids were studying the Tudors for the fourth time in Year 8 while others hadn’t done it at all. Mapping as a cluster helped us make things more consistent for the pupils and the teachers.’³⁹ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary

8.7 In some schools, senior leaders had developed whole-school themes for year groups. There were mixed views on how well this worked, with some senior leaders reporting that they had moved away from this approach, while others had found it to

³⁹ Original quote in Welsh: ‘Roedd y mapio’n fuddiol achos nath o helpu ni i weld ar draws y clwstwr bod rhai plant yn astudio’r Tuduriaid am y pedwerydd gwaith ym Mlwyddyn 8 tra bod rhai heb neud e o gwbl. Nath mapio fel clwstwr helpu ni i gysoni pethau i’r disgyblion ac athrawon’

be beneficial. A few senior leaders explained that these themes were not mandatory for all Areas, because some found it difficult to adapt their work to fit some themes.

'We've developed three thematic Year 7 units covering multiple AoLEs. These help us find natural links across AoLEs and we've mapped coverage of different elements of CfW against these units. We've been able to develop authentic learning experiences and tasks across different subjects and areas which are all linked to these units'. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

'We've developed whole-school themes in Year 7 which involve a 'Big Question' that drives learning in different Areas for 8 weeks'⁴⁰ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

'Cross-Area working hasn't developed as we'd hoped but we haven't forced it because [we] don't want it done begrudgingly. So the links are being forged within, but not between, Areas.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

8.8 Senior leaders reported that some Areas had developed a more coherent curriculum than others. This appeared to be influenced by several factors including:

- whether schools had piloted their curriculum in particular Areas, and therefore had more time to trial and refine approaches
- whether the size of the school and timetabling arrangements enabled them to maintain consistency of teacher across Areas (e.g. in some schools, one teacher was teaching Humanities to each group of Year 7 learners)
- relationships between staff in different departments within an Area.

8.9 In terms of progress within specific Areas, senior leaders reported that:

- **Humanities, Health and Wellbeing** and **Expressive arts** were generally developing well
 - Several schools reported that they had piloted their new curriculum approaches in one or more of these Areas.
- **Mathematics and Numeracy** had developed well as an Area, although some senior leaders reported that it was difficult to include this Area in whole-school themes

⁴⁰ Original quote in Welsh: 'Ni di datblygu themâu traws ysgol ym mlwyddyn 7 sydd di seilio ar un 'Cwestiwn mawr' sy'n gyrru'r dysgu mewn sawl Maes am 8 wythnos'

- experiences of **LLC** were more varied:
 - Some schools were encouraging collaboration and a consistent focus on particular skills across subjects (e.g. synthesis skills or extended writing in Welsh and English) while others were developing themes for Welsh, English and International Languages
 - Some senior leaders reported that teachers were responding well to the increased collaboration between LLC subjects
 - A few schools reported that their LLC departments had found it difficult to develop links between subjects
- **Science and Technology** had been a more challenging Area for practitioners to collaborate in, with a few senior leaders reporting that they had appointed new staff or allocated senior leadership capacity to develop the curriculum in this Area.

8.10 Senior leaders reported that their schools had appointed 'Area leads' with overall responsibility for some Areas, but had adopted a more collaborative model in others, with departmental leads coming together to share practice and develop more consistent approaches. In a few schools, Area leads had not been appointed but schools felt that this had led to a lack of momentum for taking the curriculum forward and they were now reconsidering their approach.

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)

8.11 Interviewees were asked about:

- how they have started to implement RSE
- whether arrangements were working effectively or as anticipated
- whether they have faced any challenges to date
- whether any additional support was required to implement this aspect of the curriculum.

Summary of Wave 1 findings (November 2022 – January 2023): RSE

8.12 In the Wave 1 report, the findings showed that:

- Many schools and settings did not report concerns regarding RSE from their parents and carers, sometimes despite having anticipated that there might be issues.
- Many schools and settings reported using externally sourced materials to inform and guide RSE design, planning and delivery.
- Some schools and settings had experienced negative responses from parents regarding the RSE aspect of the curriculum.
- Senior leaders reported that practitioners had adapted externally sourced materials to ensure developmental-appropriateness:
- Others expressed the need for more centralised support for RSE curriculum design and concerns were raised about the ability of schools and settings to deliver this aspect of the curriculum without financial outlay.
- Several senior leaders reported they had allocated responsibility for RSE to a specific staff member, such as appointing a Head of Wellbeing.
- Senior leaders reported that RSE leads worked with other Area leads to incorporate RSE-related topics across the curriculum.

Views of senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement the curriculum from September 2023

- 8.13 Senior leaders in secondary schools that were preparing to implement the curriculum from September 2023 did not report concerns being raised by parents about RSE. Senior leaders reported being aware of some of the media coverage around this element of CfW, and the potential that parents and carers may raise questions about their approach. However, they felt confident that they would be able to explain their approach to RSE to parents should any questions be raised.

‘There is a of tension due to the external media focus and legal challenges but we have never been questioned on our material before and it fits really well with the new RSE curriculum. We don’t expect any complaints or issues with our delivery therefore.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 8.14 Some schools had appointed designated RSE lead practitioners and had mapped their current provision across subjects and Areas. RSE leads were also providing

advice and ideas to Area and subject leads on how to embed RSE content within their curriculum. Senior leaders reported that RSE content was being covered in various subjects and Areas, primarily in Health and Wellbeing, Science and Humanities. Senior leaders reported that they were encouraging all Areas to include some elements of RSE within their curriculum but that this was not prescribed so that these links would be more 'natural' (e.g. a focus on period poverty in Science lessons, relationships between characters in English lessons).

'We did an audit on what we currently deliver – we realised what we already deliver is cross-curricular and matched with the new RSE [provision] We have good coverage and have a new member of staff joining who can bring a fresh perspective. There is room for improvement, we need to look at the age brackets more and see if things are fitting in the right place.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 8.15 Some senior leaders felt they would like more specific guidance on what to teach learners at different points of their curriculum journey, and the age-appropriateness of specific topics (e.g. sexually transmitted infections, revenge porn, upskirting). A few senior leaders reported that their staff had attended good professional learning through their regional consortium. Others noted that, while they would have liked more guidance, they felt confident in their staff's ability to develop their own approach to RSE.

International languages

- 8.16 Interviewees were asked about:
- how teaching international languages has been implemented in schools
 - the steps schools are taking to integrate international languages as a part of the curriculum.

Summary of Wave 1 findings (November 2022 – January 2023): international languages

- 8.17 In the Wave 1 report, the findings showed that:
- In primary schools, senior leaders reported that they were in the early stages of implementing the teaching of international languages in their schools.

- Senior leaders in primaries noted that their work in developing international languages within their curriculum was dependent upon collaboration.
- Senior leaders in a number of primary schools, both Welsh and English-medium, referred to the importance of balancing the development of Welsh language skills with the introduction of international languages.
- A number of primary schools were implementing or considering the implementation of BSL as their chosen international language.
- In secondary schools, senior leaders reported a continuation in their international languages provision developed as part of their curriculum delivery.
 - Senior leaders in secondary schools noted they were working closely with their feeder primary schools to develop international languages provision in their cluster.
 - Senior leaders referred to the need to meet their pupils' needs in schools where high numbers of learners speak languages other than English or Welsh.

Views of senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement the curriculum from September 2023

8.18 Senior leaders reported an increase in collaboration between primary and secondary schools. Examples of activities mentioned by senior leaders included secondary international languages teachers:

- working with primaries to create a progression continuum for International languages and to create greater coherence in the offer within the cluster
- teaching short sessions introducing international languages in primary schools
- secondary teachers helping train or create international language resources for primary staff

- 8.19 Senior leaders felt that CfW had increased the prominence of, and enthusiasm for, international languages and that they felt practitioners welcomed the flexibility to focus on culture as well as the teaching of languages. A few senior leaders felt this enabled their international languages staff to adapt content to fit with contemporary news (e.g. one school had developed a project based on a news item about how the baguette became a protected UNESCO food).
- 8.20 Some senior leaders felt that the national guidance on international languages should be more prescriptive in ensuring that international languages could only be offered in primary schools if provision could be continued in secondary school.⁴¹ Some questioned whether there was sufficient capacity for schools to be able to offer a continuum of BSL provision.
- 8.21 A few senior leaders reported that their international language curriculum had not developed as well as they had hoped. These senior leaders indicated that their LLC departments were finding it difficult to collaborate effectively. Some senior leaders referred to a lack of capacity and skills in their cluster primaries limiting the amount of provision that could be delivered.

'The biggest issue is not for us, but the primary schools not having the capacity to deliver international languages.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

⁴¹ The Welsh Government [guidance relating to Languages, Literacy and Communication](#) notes that 'Settings and schools may wish to collaborate with others, for example to offer continuity in the language offered from one progression step to the next or so that learners have more choice of international languages.'

9. Progression

9.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to **how schools and settings are working internally, and with other schools and settings, to develop a shared understanding of learner progression**. Interviewees were asked about:

- whether they had worked with schools and settings within and outside their cluster
- how their school or setting was sharing information about learners' progress with parents, and what the response has been from parents
- how manageable is it for schools and settings to report to parents each term on learners' progress and how much of a burden does this create
- how schools and settings are ensuring that the curriculum challenges all learners appropriately and sets high expectations for learner attainment.

9.2 The following sections summarise senior leaders' comments on progression as part of the new curriculum arrangements in their school or setting.

Summary of Wave 1 findings (November 2022 – January 2023): progression

9.3 Senior leaders interviewed during Wave 1 of the research reported that schools and settings had developed progression plans (often called 'progression maps') across Areas, with comments indicating that the principles of progression were being incorporated into curriculum design. These senior leaders were working internally and in clusters to develop a shared understanding of progression.

9.4 Primary and secondary school senior leaders reported that they were placing a greater emphasis on understanding the progress of individual learners when developing progression plans and reporting on progress. Schools presented examples of progression models and approaches they had developed and were trialling. Senior leaders noted that new approaches to progression being adopted require a change in practitioner mindset, which is likely to take some time to embed.

- 9.5 Senior leaders expressed concerns or noted challenges linked to progression, notably a perceived risk of divergence as schools, settings and clusters adopt different approaches to recording and reporting progression.
- 9.6 Senior leaders described changes in their approaches for reporting to parents and carers, including the format used as well as the nature of the information included in progress reports.

Wave 2 findings (May-July 2023): General points raised by senior leaders in schools and settings implementing Curriculum for Wales (CfW) during 2022/23

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

- 9.7 Interviews with senior leaders revealed that **some are continuing to develop their approaches to progression, with many placing a greater focus on this aspect of their curriculum planning over the course of the academic year.** The themes raised most frequently during the recent wave of interviews echoed many of the comments made during the first phase of the research; senior leaders referred to the work carried out by clusters to develop collective approaches to progression; in addition, senior leaders explained that progression was embedded as part of their curriculum planning more broadly, informed by principles of progression.
- 9.8 **Senior leaders are continuing to work in clusters to develop and further refine their approaches to supporting learner progression.** Senior leaders reported a range of ways in which joint working on progression was being taken forward. This includes whole-cluster working groups (including senior leaders and/or AoLE-based groups) who meet regularly to develop a shared understanding of progression and devise progression plans. This activity takes various forms, including groups of senior leaders, AoLE-based groups or year groups.
- ‘The cluster year groups are now looking at progression – this work was very provision-driven initially with lots of sharing of knowledge and approaches. We have been building up [progression] through the last year and we look to the cluster for moderation support.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school
- 9.9 Senior leaders noted that cluster-working linked to the new curriculum had led to more meaningful professional discussions about how to evidence and support learner progression.

'We're getting to a common understanding of progression in the cluster. The local authority tried to coordinate this but we stepped outside of this and did our own thing. We agreed priorities as a cluster for each AoLE, setting out what progression would look like. We are looking to build on this year-on-year. This approach is better than what we had before which was just moderating and deciding levels.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

9.10 Senior leaders reported that teachers had attended cluster meetings (often attended by Area leads) to take part in joint moderation sessions to examine examples of work and benchmark or discuss where a particular piece of work is in relation to progression steps. These types of sessions were reported to have been beneficial in supporting a shared understanding of progression across clusters.

9.11 Some clusters are reported to be taking a phased approach, focusing on specific Areas or aspects of the curriculum to develop an approach that can inform an approach taken forward by other groups. This included cluster working between secondary schools and feeder primary schools, with some focusing on particular topics.

'Cluster work on progression has gone really well. Lots of staff from all [cluster] schools have come together. They and the cluster focused on learner progression in writing in September – they created a pathway for what progression looks like in writing. All schools have used this from nursery up to age 16.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

9.12 Other senior leaders reported that they are working as individual schools and settings to develop their own 'bespoke' approaches, but that they are sharing information about their models with others in the cluster in the interests of 'shared learning', rather than in order to develop uniform approaches. Primary and secondary school senior leaders noted that they had benefitted from hearing about approaches to reporting learner progress in other schools.

9.13 Senior leaders described progression models that were organised around key aspects of the CfW framework. Progression steps provided a broad framework for planning progression in many schools and settings, with models also often organised around Statements of What Matters, and linked to descriptions of learning. In many cases, schools and settings were putting their own stamp or interpretation on some aspects. A number of secondary schools emphasised that, in

their cluster work, they were making a conscious effort to avoid being seen to be leading the process.

‘We use the framework of progression steps and the statements of what matters - we are redefining [the WMS] in ways that are more meaningful for our teachers and learners. This shared understanding and working has been really beneficial. In the cluster there can be a sense that it is top-down from secondary to primaries. But we have reversed this – we have had collaborative meetings between teachers from Years 6 and 7, working in conjunction to come up with a progression plan, with the primary schools leading’. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 9.14 Several senior leaders noted that they had decided, through their cluster work, to use the Literacy and Numeracy Framework to guide their approach to progression. These senior leaders suggested that it would be useful to have similar frameworks across other Areas.

‘It’s much easier to assess progress in Literacy and Numeracy, we find it much more difficult to do anything other than give the professional judgement of the teacher in other Areas. Whether a child has made progress is measurable, but measuring attainment is more difficult because the progression steps are so wide and it’s difficult to say where a child is within a progression step.’ Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school

- 9.15 Some senior leaders noted that cluster-based work on progression, while helpful in ensuring primary and secondary schools were aware of each other’s plans, had also revealed aspects of curriculum reform where further work was needed. Some secondary schools noted that primary schools in their cluster had drawn on specialist subject teachers’ knowledge to support their progression plans. Conversely, secondary schools reported that their curriculum planning lacked the ‘horizontal coherence...that primary schools were comfortable with’ (Senior leader, English-medium secondary school). Senior leaders were encouraged that they were able to draw on the strengths of schools and settings across their clusters to support their approaches to progression and curriculum reform more generally.

- 9.16 **Echoing comments made during Wave 1 of the research, senior leaders noted that progression in learning is embedded as part of curriculum design.** The idea of planning a curriculum that has progression in learning at its heart was expressed more frequently by senior leaders during the second phase of research, perhaps reflecting the fact that curriculum plans and thinking about progression had

developed over the course of the academic year. A number of senior leaders noted that progression is ‘built in at the design stage’, and is informed by the principles of progression. Senior leaders noted that curriculum content has become narrower in some Areas, with an emphasis on developing deeper knowledge (and retention of knowledge) and the application of learning and skills over time and in different contexts.

- 9.17 Several senior leaders made the link between pedagogy and progression. In one example a senior leader in a secondary school noted that the focus of their curriculum delivery is on ‘learn, retain, apply’. In each lesson (across all subjects) teachers are asked to include time to see how much learners have retained – or can retrieve – from the previous lesson or an earlier class.

‘If learners are able to retain what they have learned, and can see its relevance and put that knowledge or skill into practice in another lesson, then we can be confident that they are making progress. We don’t know the impact of this approach as yet, but we have our vision and plan and we are carrying on with it.’
Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 9.18 As well as being embedded in curriculum design, senior leaders interviewed noted that learner progress also influences curriculum delivery and how teachers support learning on a continuous basis. Senior leaders noted that teachers’ observations on the progress made by learners are used to plan next steps. These senior leaders underlined the importance of teachers’ professional judgment in understanding the progress made by learners and adapting or differentiating their teaching to enable learners to make appropriate progress.

- 9.19 **Senior leaders provided examples of how approaches to reporting on progress to parents and carers have changed to reflect the new curriculum arrangements.** Examples included:

- ‘The approach is now more holistic, narrative-based and focuses on evidence of an individual learner’s skills.’ Senior leader, 3-16 school
- ‘Reports provide a qualitative assessment, shaped by descriptions of learning. Moving away from levels has enabled a more balanced view of the learner.’ Senior leader, primary school

- ‘We arrange two parents’ meetings during the year – we keep these short and they focus mainly on well-being as well as literacy and numeracy. The end of year written reports are focused on progress across each AoLE with targets for literacy and numeracy. Wellbeing focus is still key. Reports are much more qualitative – we draw out pupil experiences, how they have coped, the level of work they are producing.’ Senior leader, primary school

9.20 The shift towards more personalised and qualitative reporting on progress appeared to coincide with a number of senior leaders noting that they were moving away from using software programmes (e.g. Taith 360) which they had previously used to help track learner progress. As was the case during wave 1 of the research, several senior leaders noted that their progress reports include comments on learners attitude to learning, alongside progress in knowledge and skills.

9.21 In a small number of cases, senior leaders noted that they had started to include comments in reports with suggestions of how parents could contribute to learners’ progress, or their well-being more generally. One innovative approach to progress reporting adopted by a primary school included commitments by the learner, the school and the parent/carer.

‘The pupil is encouraged to attend the first parents’ evening, where that learner’s progress and well-being are discussed. At the meeting all three parties sign up to a commitment, e.g. ‘I [the learner] will continue to develop my independence as a learner and concentrate fully on tasks’; ‘We as a school will focus on [learner’s] literacy, ensure they have opportunities to discuss their interests and concerns. We will ensure they are challenged appropriately.’; ‘I as a parent will ensure that [learner] has a balanced diet, and I will promote their general fitness.’ This is a way of conveying the message that everyone has a part to play in supporting that learner’s progress in school. The commitments are tailored to the individual. They are also longer term and apply across a longer period of time, rather than task or skill-specific issues.’ Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school

9.22 **In a number of cases, senior leaders outlined examples of models and descriptors they had developed to help understand learners’ progress in particular areas or skills.** These mirrored other examples provided during the first wave of the research, e.g.,

- a learner is 'secure', 'developing' or 'emerging/needs further support' in relation to a particular area of work or skill (equivalent or comparable examples used in primary and secondary schools)
- a learner is 'above expected', 'as expected', 'below expected'.

9.23 Senior leaders noted that these matrices or frameworks were being used alongside more qualitative approaches to reporting on progress. Some senior leaders expressed doubt about employing this type of approach:

'We are not sure if this is still too close to the old system, whether we... ought to be removing any sense of 'levels' at all.' – Senior leader, English-medium primary school

9.24 **Primary and secondary school senior leaders noted that approaches to progression were more learner-focused and involved encouraging learners to reflect on their progress in new ways.** Echoing comments from the first wave of interviews, senior leaders noted that schools are tuned into the individual progress of each learner:

- Learners attend progress meetings / parents' meetings with teachers, and are encouraged to talk about their learning and their progress.
- More regular discussions with learners about their progress, including progress in relation to individual learning objectives set at the beginning of a term or school year.

'Pit-stops for Progress' [is] inspired by an approach in the secondary school. Children meet with their class teacher to talk about progress regularly. We want to do more of these spot-checks.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- Learners are being encouraged to think about the progress they are making and 'to articulate it'. Senior leaders noted that teachers ask their learners: 'How do you know you've made progress? Can you point to examples of your work that shows you have made progress?' These sorts of questions are intended to encourage learners to think positively about the skills and knowledge they are developing.

- Schools and settings (and in some cases clusters) are developing learner portfolios or e-portfolios. These are at early stages of development and will provide examples of the individual learner's work over time. Some e-portfolios will enable learners to add work in a range of formats (written, audio, video, photographs). Senior leaders noted that portfolios will include a learner's thoughts on progress in relation to the four purposes, their personal aims and goals for the future (or for secondary school). Some schools plan to share Year 6 portfolios with Year 7 teachers so that secondary schools can see where learners have reached and understand that learner's perspective, interests and goals prior to transition.

9.25 **One primary school noted that teachers had been asked to think differently about planning their lessons and programmes of work, placing an emphasis on ensuring learners understand tasks, and why they are completing a particular task.** The aim, it was said, is to support learners to be more independent.

'We differentiate in terms of the tasks set, with three tiers of work or achievement criteria: 1) can, 2) should, 3) could. The first, everyone can do; the second, most should be able to do; the third some could do. This has helped motivate and enthuse learners – some have surprised us in terms of their ability and what they are able to cope with.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

9.26 Senior leaders reported that new approaches – including differentiated teaching and learning – have improved teachers' understanding of how individual learners progress. It was noted that these approaches are helping to identify particular skills or aspects of learning where some learners require further support. Senior leaders in primary schools noted that their work on progression is leading to more purposeful planning of teaching and learning.

9.27 **Senior leaders reported that they had valued the external support provided to help shape their approaches to progression.** This includes involvement in national projects (e.g. the Welsh Government's Camau project), support from experts and consultants (e.g. Understanding by Design training), and also support from local authorities and regional consortia. Several senior leaders who had been feeling apprehensive about their approach to reporting on progress (moving away

from data-focused approaches to using more tailored, narrative-based approaches) were reassured by local authority officers who endorsed and supported their work.

9.28 Senior leaders noted some concerns or challenges as they continue to develop their approaches to progression. Primary school senior leaders raised a number of issues, including:

- that **different interpretations of progression steps**, between schools but also across Wales, may result in a lack of coherence across the wider system
- that a **lack of quantitative data is making it difficult to understand progress**, particularly where teachers are feeling uncertain or are lacking in confidence
- **that schools have jumped to an operational phase in relation to progression without having engaged fully in strategic planning and thinking at a whole-school level**. This was especially the case in primary schools who reported that they hadn't worked closely with their cluster secondary school

'We are a small cluster and the high school was leading on some things. We have struggled to find time and money to meet again. We still don't know what the high school wants and expects of Year 6 pupils coming into Year 7. As a school we have our progression maps in place but it has felt too late in the day, we needed these much earlier in the timeframe – we've got them in place after the horse has bolted.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- that the time involved in developing and reviewing approaches to progression have increased the pressure on staff.

9.29 Secondary school senior leaders noted that there was variable support from regional consortia and local authorities. Senior leaders explained that they had received good support and guidance from the region in relation to some Areas (e.g. Maths), but that little had been offered to support progression in other areas of the curriculum.

Variations in views according to type and language of school or setting

- 9.30 **Some secondary school senior leaders noted that there was apprehension among teachers (and some parents) about moving away from levels to an approach that doesn't give a clear indication of attainment, or the standard of learners' work relative to expected GCSE grades, for example.** Senior leaders noted that parents and carers were broadly supportive of the more holistic and qualitative approach to reporting progress but that feedback often involved parents asking whether their child was 'on track'.

'We shared new Year 7 reports at a parent's forum recently [with a] generally positive response but some [parents] wanted levels and couldn't see the world without levels. There is a worry that by reporting more qualitatively and focusing on attitudes to learning in Years 7-9 some parents will find themselves shocked to see a Grade E next to their child's name in Year 10 and 11 – this could cause problems without careful discussions with parents.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 9.31 One senior leader summarised the views of a number of secondary school interviewees, underlining the need to consider a different approach to reporting as learners approach GCSEs.

'Where I know I'm feeling uncomfortable is [that] at some point these kids have to do a GCSE. Probably around Year 9 [we] will have to start putting a value/grade/level and note whether it's appropriate for them to follow specific GCSEs. What I've been saying to parents who are worried about not getting a grade in Years 7 and 8 is 'if you want to know where your kid is open their book, read their report come and speak to their teacher' but as they head to Year 9 they will want to know what does this look like at GCSE. I'd hoped Welsh Government would give some direction on what we do in Year 9 during next year [in terms of reporting]. We're ok with no grades and targets in Years 7 and 8 but we need convincing about Year 9. My instinct is to give more quantitative data in Year 9.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 9.32 In response to this, some secondary schools have plans to include 'projected journeys' or 'trajectories' in reports. Senior leaders hope that this approach will help parents understand their child's progress and help manage expectations.

'These are in their infancy but broadly set out the typical trajectory for a pupil that is progressing as your child is now. [For example] a pupil who is progressing like your child is likely to achieve an A*, or C, or F or whatever it may be at GCSE.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

9.33 Senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools were more likely than those in English-medium schools to report:

- challenges in developing and adapting to new models of progression, particularly in supporting an understanding of learner attainment outside literacy and numeracy
- concerns about consistency in approaches across different clusters, across local authorities and nationally.

Views of secondary senior leaders preparing to implement CfW from September 2023

9.34 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported that:

- they were working closely with primary schools to develop a shared understanding of progression within each Area

‘There is a very tangible joined-up approach looking at a continuum for 3-16 all the way through. Previously we started fresh with our learners at Year 7; now we are looking at what they come with and making it a continuous pathway. The curriculum has brought together the cluster which was previously quite segregated. Hopefully this will be sustainable and is now an established dialogue rather than two monologues which we had before.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- they had taken a phased approach, focusing on specific Areas or Progression Steps first before reviewing their approach and moving on to others
 - Some felt that developing a shared understanding of progression in literacy and numeracy was more straightforward because the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) provided more guidance, and that progression was more subjective in other Areas
- there had been a shift from quantitative approaches of reporting on learner progress towards more qualitative approaches, for example by removing levels from annual reports

- they were not yet at a stage where they were receiving feedback from parents on their approaches to reporting on learner progress.

'We have created a continuum of progression based around the Descriptions of Learning and have unpacked the What Matters statements to highlight and summarise the key concepts and ideas. We've used these alongside the learning descriptors to map out how learners can progress from Progression Step 3 to 4. These are not seen as tick boxes but are developed over time through a variety of experiences and learning.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

9.35 Senior leaders in a few schools reported that they were still at an early stage of planning their approach to progression and were unsure of their approach. These schools reported that they were focusing on developing a shared understanding of progression for learners making the transition from Year 6 to 7 before moving on to examine other age groups.

9.36 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 described the activities they were undertaking to develop a shared understanding of progression across their cluster. These included:

- joint book scrutiny, joint moderation sessions and lesson observations between primary and secondary teachers

'We've worked with the [cluster] primaries, observing lessons in primaries and vice versa. It's mainly been Year 6 and 7, with some work around Year 5 and transition. We set them [primary learners] tasks and these come back to us for marking. It helps us get a better feel for standards in primary'. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- creating e-portfolios for learners and teachers to upload examples of work demonstrating what they considered to be good progress in different Areas as well as the integral skills
 - These were being used with learners making the transition from Year 6 to Year 7, but senior leaders intended to roll these out to other year groups as well
- a website for teachers across the cluster which included examples of jointly moderated work within each progression step.

9.37 Other issues mentioned by senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 were:

- that they were considering how to ensure an appropriate balance between reporting on progress and including some measure of attainment to parents
 - some senior leaders were concerned about ensuring parents had realistic expectations of their children's likely future attainment

'I'm worried that we'll report to parents that their child is making progress as expected and is on track to reach their potential but then they might get a D or an E at GCSE and [parents] ask why they didn't know that earlier. There's a risk of raising expectations of some parents if they are not clear on their [child's] expected grade.'⁴² Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

'Our curriculum leads' feedback shows they've struggled to move away from levels. Initially we encouraged teachers to work from Year 7 and not refer to GCSEs or levels at all, but this was a struggle for many. So we've now tried to say what does that progress [emerging, developing, mastering] mean in terms of a 'flight path' towards a GCSE grade. This moves us slightly away from our initial intention of moving away from levels entirely. But it gives teachers something they understand and can work backwards from Year 11. The shift in mindset has been difficult for many teachers.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- that they felt the guidance and professional learning relating to progression had been too generic
- developing a consistent approach across the cluster was a challenge for some schools
 - this was particularly noted in some rural areas, particularly where schools were working with a high number of primary schools, and where many primaries were feeder schools for multiple secondary schools across more than one local authority.

⁴² Original quote in Welsh: 'Dwi'n poeni byddant yn adrodd i rieni eu bod wedi gwneud cynnydd disgwylidig, ac ar drac i gyrraedd eu potensial ond wedyn yn cael D neu E TGAU a wedyn yn cwestiynu pam nad oeddent yn gwybod hynny yn gynharach. Mae risg o godi disgwylidau rhai rhieni os nad yn glir ar eu gradd disgwylidig.'

10. Assessment

- 10.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to how schools and settings are working internally, and with others, to design approaches to assessment under the new curriculum arrangements. Interviewees were asked:
- what had changed in terms of their approach to assessment
 - were arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date
 - whether they had faced any challenges
 - was there any specific additional support they required with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. professional learning, guidance, resources or support to enhance leadership or professional practice).
- 10.2 The following sections summarise senior leaders' comments on assessment arrangements in their school or setting
- Summary of Wave 1 findings (November 2022 – January 2023): assessment**
- 10.3 Senior leaders interviewed during Wave 1 reported progress in developing new approaches to assessment, with an increased focus on formative, day-to-day assessment. Senior leaders reported using formative assessment to inform planning and differentiated approaches to teaching that respond to the needs of individual learners. Senior leaders commented on the change in mindset and attitude required to realise the ambition for a new approach to assessment.
- 10.4 Many senior leaders reported a reduction in the overall volume of formal assessment during the school year; however they continued to use the mandatory national personalised assessments to gauge learners' progress in reading and numeracy.
- 10.5 For many senior leaders, significant questions remain in relation to assessment: they report being unclear and concerned about the assessment data they will be required to provide as part of accountability arrangements. In a number of cases, senior leaders are continuing to use external assessment tools alongside the new assessment methods being developed.

Wave 2 findings (May-July 2023): General points raised by senior leaders in schools and settings implementing Curriculum for Wales (CfW) during 2022/23

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders in relation to assessment

- 10.6 **Senior leaders continued to report progress in developing their approaches to assessment, with an increased focus on formative assessment.** Senior leaders in both primary and secondary schools reported that assessment takes place through assignments and coursework on a continuous basis. They also noted that teachers are engaging in more professional discussions (as Area teams or in other groups) about what the outcomes from formative assessments tell them about the progress learners are making. As a result, senior leaders in primary and secondary reported that amount of formal assessment through tests or exams ‘has been reduced’ or ‘is kept to a minimum’ compared with previous arrangements.
- 10.7 Senior leaders reported thinking about assessment in new ways and that this is part of the process of planning units of work and individual tasks.
- ‘We invest a lot of time thinking about what a task should look like and also what the most appropriate underpinning assessment should be to support the pupil’s learning. We think about the type of feedback that can support their learning and how self-assessment and peer assessment can also form part of this.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school
- 10.8 Primary school senior leaders provided examples of planning and assessment templates for individual units of work that incorporated elements of the CfW framework and incorporated assessment strategies. Typically, units of work in primary schools were organised around statements of what matters and set out the descriptions of learning relevant to particular WMSs. One school had devised a planning template that included ‘steps to progress’ or ‘learning objectives’ to help understand progression. Specific activities were designed to enable learners to develop and demonstrate their skills and knowledge, specifying assessment criteria and methods to be used to understand progress at the individual level and at a whole-class level. In this example, a whole-class assessment template was completed for each activity, noting:

- whether each learner was ‘secure’, ‘developing’ or ‘emerging/needs further support’ in a particular activity or skills
- next steps for learners in each of the above categories
- common basic skills errors to be addressed across the class
- observations on high quality work to be shared across the class
- the teacher’s appraisal of whether the class was ready to move on or whether further work was needed to improve or deepen learning.

10.9 Senior leaders noted that there was a recognition that ‘testing doesn’t tell us everything we need to know’ and that there was a shift towards assessment to inform teachers about the progress being made, to understand what further support is needed but also to celebrate learners’ continuous progress. Approaches being adopted – especially in primary schools – focus on ‘live marking’ to identify where skills are developing (or slipping) to inform pedagogy and support.

10.10 As was noted during Wave 1, **Senior leaders commented on the change in mindset and attitude required to design and implement new approaches to assessment.** Senior leaders reported that they had continued to observe increased confidence among teachers in the use of formative assessment; this was being supported through internal professional learning sessions; through the support of external experts and consultants; and also by sharing methods and teaching practices informally day-to-day. Several senior leaders referred to the value of support provided through the ‘Understanding by Design’ programme of workshops.⁴³ This was reported to have helped ensure that assessment design is aligned with wider goals to support learner progress and transition.

10.11 Senior leaders in some secondary schools reported that teachers were exercising more autonomy and professional judgement in deciding on approaches to assessment that are appropriate to their subjects. Recognising that there is an additional time commitment involved in developing and implementing new

⁴³ Understanding by Design is a framework for teaching to achieve understanding, through a backward design approach, involving the practice of looking at outcomes first. Understanding by Design was created by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins and published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in 1998.

assessment methods, some senior leaders have been able to plan additional time for this.

‘We have given more time and money to subject leads and heads of year. They now have more autonomy and more catch-ups (quality assurance, book looks, meetings). Each individual subject is different so we can’t have the same assessments in Drama as in Maths. By end of June [the] assessment data needs to be inputted into our central system, but we don’t specify what form the assessments should take. We ask that assessments are cumulative and take a variety of forms. This bespoke approach is completely different to previous approaches which was sit in a hall and do an exam. It is much more dynamic.’
Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

10.12 However, other secondary senior leaders noted that there was a long way to go to develop assessment arrangements and that further support was needed.

‘Some departments are still marking out of 10 and haven’t yet put new thinking into practice. It would be good to draw on expert support as people are still struggling in some cases to understand what really good assessment of learning and assessment for learning looks like.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

10.13 **Senior leaders noted that they are exploring ways of involving learners as part of assessment activity.** Examples of ways in which schools and settings have involved learners in new approaches to assessment include:

- providing learners with example pieces of work and asking them to provide feedback or grade them; one senior leader noted that the purpose of this was to make learners aware of the standards they should be working towards (secondary school)
- assessing learner attitude on a continuous basis and having regular discussions with learners about behaviour, effort and how this links to their progress.

‘We have managed to open up frank discussions about the importance of attitude and putting in effort – with learners and parents. Parents understand and respond to this more than they would to levels.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

10.14 **Schools and settings continue to use external tools to support assessment and their understanding of where a particular cohort is, often alongside in-**

school formative assessment methods. Senior leaders referred to various initiatives and programmes they use, often explaining the specific purpose of particular forms of assessment. Special schools referred to using B-squared, a commercial package that enables teachers to assess and track learner progress in a tailored way.⁴⁴ One special school senior leader noted that they bought in this package to address a perceived gap in national Curriculum for Wales guidance – ‘B-squared includes mini-levels to support learners to make progress from Routes for Learning to Progression Step 1, and includes packages of work to support learners with PMLD’.

10.15 Other tests senior leaders reported were used to support assessment were: Taith360; Cognitive Abilities Tests (CAT4 tests, GL Assessments); Accelerated Reading and Accelerated Maths/STAR Maths (Renaissance Learning); SHRN data and PASS tests (to explore social and emotional wellbeing).

‘We use GL Assessment tests from Year 2 to assess literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Staff feel more confident having this type of assessment alongside their own teacher assessments.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

10.16 **Senior leaders also raised ongoing challenges and concerns in relation to assessment arrangements.**

- Reflecting views expressed during wave 1 of the research, senior leaders reiterated the point that there was **still considerable time and work needed to refine and further develop their assessment arrangements**. Many interviewees noted that they felt they were still trialling new approaches and that they remain unsure of their fitness for purpose.
- There remains uncertainty among some senior leaders about how to assess certain aspects of the CfW framework.

‘We want them to be resilient, to be able to think creatively and critically but it’s hard to know how to assess this and to know that we’re assessing these things well.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- **Differences in approach** taken by schools and settings within the same cluster, with collaborative working on assessment being less well developed

⁴⁴ See [B Squared Assessment Software](#)

than other aspects of curriculum reform; some senior leaders during the second wave of the research reported that this is partly linked to challenges in finding time to release staff to convene with colleagues from the cluster.

- A lack of certainty about how new approaches to assessment would align with GCSE examinations.⁴⁵ Some secondary schools emphasised the importance of retaining summative assessments ‘as this will still be what happens at GCSE’. The need for alignment and coherence system-wide was flagged up by secondary and primary senior leaders.

‘The next worry is how is this going to tie in with new GCSE? WG want to use [the] same approach, but [we’re] not sure how this will work with new CfW. We want some more information about how they will tie together.’ English-medium secondary school

- Some senior leaders continued to voice concern about whether the changes to assessment approaches would be well received as part of future inspections. Some felt that there were gaps in terms of evidence and data collected to demonstrate attainment.
- A small number of senior leaders speculated that, although they have been given the freedom to develop bespoke approaches to assessing learner progress, there may come a point where Welsh Government requires a change of direction and a more standardised approach in response to political pressure or other external factors.

‘The worry is that someone will turn around and say we all need to do [assessment] another way. A poor set of PISA results could come out and then someone comes with a big stick and says we all have to assess the same way and here are a set of targets’. Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

Variations in views according to type of school or setting

- 10.17 Some secondary schools reported that, as they implement new approaches to assessment in Year 7, parents with children in older year groups are confused. New

⁴⁵ Decisions on the suite of new GCSEs were published by Qualifications Wales on 28 June (towards the end of the fieldwork period). See [Made-for-Wales GCSEs | Qualifications Wales](#)

systems of assessment – often where previously used grades have been dropped – have led to questions from parents.

‘We think we are explaining changes well to our parents but it is difficult. We sent home guidance videos to try and explain our reports. The questions and misunderstandings are lessening over time but until there is only one system, we will keep facing this.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

10.18 Secondary school senior leaders reported that assessment planning has been more difficult in some Areas. In Maths, for example, it was noted that cumulative assessments make more sense, ‘as there is a finite number of skills that permeate across the subject’ (secondary school senior leader). In Humanities it was said to be more challenging because different units of work require different skills, so planning assessments that are appropriate for a range of skills and types of knowledge is more complex. Senior leaders noted that teachers are being encouraged to use their expertise and professional judgement to identify appropriate and purposeful methods to assess learner progress continuously. The research heard examples of assessment being embedded into day-to-day practices through refresh and retrieval tasks to explore how much learning from previous lessons was retained as a basis from which to develop and deepen knowledge.

10.19 Secondary school senior leaders were more likely than their primary counterparts to note that the shift in approaches to assessment was happening slowly. Some secondary schools noted that this represented a ‘significant culture change’ for schools and planning new approaches involved a considerable time commitment.

‘Assessment is something we really focus on in Year 8. [Arrangements] are not as aligned and cohered as they need to be at the moment. It’s a big ask for the teachers to develop this - a heavy and serious task to undertake. The main issue is the time.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

Views of secondary senior leaders preparing to implement CfW from September 2023

10.20 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported that:

- they were now undertaking more formative assessment for learning

'Now more 'live' feedback is provided through formative assessment, co-constructed success criteria with learners.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- in some schools, they were undertaking fewer assessments, but were focusing more on the quality of assessment

'We piloted a new approach to assessment in Humanities. We used to have six assessments a term in Humanities; one per half term for each of the three subjects. Now we have changed to one combined Humanities assessment at the end of each term. This assessment is based on a bigger piece of work that is reviewed several times during a term. Teachers and learners have found this more meaningful and beneficial. They are able to get more out of one assessed task across 70+ lessons across all the three subjects, as opposed to an assessment after 12 lessons in Geography, History or RE each half term. It's more interactive, and gives more opportunities to bring in cross-cutting skills, do a practical visit, bring in speakers from outside.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- they were piloting new approaches to assessment in one or more Areas and then reviewing this approach before developing assessments in other Areas
- they were involving learners in the process of developing new approaches to assessment
- they were continuing to use standardised assessments such as CAT4 tests (GL Assessments).

10.21 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 commented on the challenges they were facing in terms of developing their approach to assessment. These were:

- that some teachers were concerned about moving away from standardised, national approaches to assessment until they had more reassurance about school accountability measures

'There is a lot of fear about assessment. We have heads of faculties saying unless you tell me what the new assessments look like then I'm not changing, you can understand why, as that's all they have to guide them. It is a massive issue, there is so much trepidation about assessment and it is divorced from the excitement of the new curriculum.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

'12-18 months ago we would have been very critical of assessment/progression guidance. Then we realised [we] needed to change mindset. It's still a concern – at some point we're worried that accountability measures will potentially derail things they have agreed in terms of assessment.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- they felt confident in assessing progress at an individual level through more holistic methods but that tracking and monitoring this over time, and reporting on whole cohorts of learners was more challenging.

11. Equity and inclusivity

11.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to senior leaders' experiences of how the new curriculum arrangements are supporting **equity and inclusivity**. Interviewees were asked about a number of issues relating to this. These included questions on:

- how curriculum implementation to date is helping to raise expectations for all learners and address gaps in attainment
- the steps schools and settings are taking to ensure that they are inclusive places for learning

Summary of Wave 1 findings (November 2022 – January 2023): equity and inclusivity

11.2 The Wave 1 research report found that:

- senior leaders emphasised that equity had always been an important focus in their school or setting, but they were now more learner-centred in their approach to curriculum design, with the flexibility to tailor support accordingly
- an increased focus on learner voice was reported to be contributing to curriculum development that is learner-centred and inclusive
- senior leaders referred to more individualised approaches to monitoring learner progress, commenting that there is an emphasis on each learner making appropriate progress for their own individual learning and development
- senior leaders referred to the importance of always being inclusive and meeting the requirements set out in the ALN Code, commenting that the CfW is allowing them to promote and focus on inclusivity
- changing their curriculum content to be more diverse and a better reflection of society was considered by senior leaders to be a positive change
- senior leaders mentioned a range of resources and training opportunities for staff that they access to support equity in their school or setting.

Wave 2 findings (May-July 2023): General points raised by senior leaders in schools and settings implementing Curriculum for Wales (CfW) during 2022/23

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

- 11.3 **Senior leaders re-emphasised points raised during the Wave 1 interviews regarding the importance of their approach being ‘learner-centred’.** This included an ongoing learner voice input, with several senior leaders commenting on the strength of this in their school or setting. Involving learners in activities such as department reviews was reported to contribute to ensuring ‘representation’ and that pupils are ‘listened to’. Being able to respond to the learner voice was welcomed in the opportunities afforded by the curriculum to include content directed by the learners. The focus on the individual learner is reinforced further in the following general point raised frequently by senior leaders regarding the use of data.

‘Pupil Voice has been a big part of our approach; we have asked them to feedback on assessment and reporting to parents.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

‘[The] new curriculum gives more opportunity to meet needs of individuals; it is more adaptive, we don’t have to race through it. [It] gives confidence to go off on a tangent depending on what learners want to do, [we are] able to be more responsive to learner voice’. Senior leader, English-medium primary school

‘Before it was just about frantically filling gaps for the sake of the assessment. Now staff are taking a more careful pupil-centred approach. People are not panicking about it, and it gives space for kids to grow.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

‘As opposed to fitting children into a curriculum we now build the curriculum around the learner. It’s a game changer as far as I’m concerned.’ Senior leader, PRU

- 11.4 **In a similar vein to the Wave 1 interviews, senior leaders echoed the comments on the importance of profiling all learners.** However, it was also recognised that this can take a lot of resources and time to do. Although senior leaders commented on the use of ‘progress trackers’, meetings with teachers, ‘progress reviews’, and monitoring using a breadth of data (e.g. attendance, assessments) there was concern raised regarding how this data is used, and that

the 'sheer amount of data is constantly changing' (senior leader, English-medium secondary school). Nevertheless, the use of such data is ensuring staff know their learners, and the removal of the monitoring of levels was positively reported. Other sources of information such as parents reporting children's talents and 'identity days' for learners to share information about themselves with their teachers now take place to contribute further to strengthening the profiling data and teachers' understanding of individual learners.

'[There is] some anxiety around what data we should be using, tests are more diagnostic. What have we got to compare? Things are a bit vague.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

'CfW is fairer in terms of the emphasis on pedagogy and progression. We wouldn't want to go back to the old system. Removing the monitoring of levels is positive in terms of focusing on individualised learning rather than hitting arbitrary targets.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school

- 11.5 **Senior leaders referred to a range of specific initiatives delivered in schools and settings to support their equitable offer.** In some instances, these activities require much resourcing, such as additional staffing to support a 'nurture' group, reading interventions, and more help with homework for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, whereas other initiatives do not require such levels of funding, e.g. homework policy. Several senior leaders commented on the structure of the classes in their school; mixed ability or setting. One senior leader reflected that their mixed ability approach appeared to be progressing well. Yet as noted below, it is proposed that there may be a training gap for teachers if they are to be able to deliver mixed ability teaching effectively.

'We stand by our homework policy – revise what you have been taught in class, no extra tasks to access'. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 11.6 **As was noted during the first wave of interviews, senior leaders referred to a range of available resources and training opportunities to support equity in their school or setting.** Some of the available resources included the use of the Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards (RRRS) grant; funds available from Local Authorities, SEREN network to be available for all in future, introducing specific programmes to target aspects such as writing, confidence, the application of RADY

(Raising the Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters), Regional Education Consortia training to support vulnerable learners, and funding to support the cost of school trips and musical instruments. In other instances, alterations as to how the staff resource is deployed within individual classes was reported; for example directing teachers to work with learners who need support, maximising the allocation of Teaching Assistant support within Years 7 to 9, and undertaking a research project to establish the most effective way to support learners with ALN and signposting teaching staff to each learner's preferred teaching approach.

'[We have] changed how we use/deploy staff: in classes where we have teachers and support staff, we use class teachers with weaker learners and LSAs then work with the stronger groups who need less support. Curriculum delivery is fairer by virtue of the way in which teachers' time is used and deployed. So this isn't about curriculum content but the way in which teachers are encouraged to focus their support.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school

11.7 Senior school leaders also reinforced comments made during their Wave 1 interviews reiterating that equity has always been a priority for their school.

Comments regarding the flexibility of the curriculum helping schools and settings to be equitable and be able to support all learners were repeated. It was felt the flexibility of CfW permits more creativity in the learning offer and positively impacts learner experience of assessment too.

'I don't see CfW as significant in discussions on reducing inequality, we were already an inclusive school.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

'Equity and inclusivity have always been priorities. Now [we] have greater flexibility to ensure that [our] learners [...] are reflected in the school's curriculum. This helps with inclusivity.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

'CfW gives us the flexibility to be learner-focused, staff have the ability now to be more creative. Moving away from tests works for learners who aren't suited to this as [the] assessment method.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

'I'm not sure a curriculum can address gaps in attainment, but the flexibility helps in the sense that it enables you to go into greater depth on a topic than you might have planned if you feel the children are enjoying it and [are] keen to learn more. You don't feel as constrained and that you have to move on to cover something else.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

'[I] think the good thing is the language used in the CfW – flexibility. It is driven by flexibility and context. As a reflective practitioner, you think about this anyway, but working with a curriculum model that promotes this is great.' Senior leader, Special school

- 11.8 **Wellbeing was frequently referred to during the Wave 2 interviews.** Senior leaders reported that the greater prominence of health and wellbeing in the curriculum meant that they were more able to look at what a child needs as an individual; it is 'okay to look at mindfulness rather than jump straight into phonics or maths'. The importance of learner health and wellbeing was emphasised as schools and settings support all aspects of a learner to ensure that they are able to engage in their learning. The importance of wellbeing was reported to have increased, including looking at the importance of a healthy home life to support learning.

'Health and wellbeing focuses attention on life at home and on what can be done at home to help. If the children are not healthy and ready to learn, they won't be able to engage with the work. Health and wellbeing affect what happens in the classroom. [It is] not easy, but it's more important now than ever.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary school

- 11.9 **Funding pressures were mentioned by senior leaders as causing them concern.** There was a particular concern regarding the staffing of classes to ensure an equitable learning offer. The importance of an equitable learning offer was also directed towards being able to challenge the most able pupils and being able to support the expectations for the ALN reform. Although there has always been a push from the Welsh Government to address all learners' needs this is very dependent on the resources available to schools and settings. Concerns regarding funding pressures were not solely raised in relation to school funding, but also in relation to other services that support children and young people. It was felt that, particularly following the pandemic, there were now more children who required extra support. This applies to not only those learners with ALN but an increase in socio-disadvantaged learners too. Alongside this there is limited time and staff capacity in which to trial and implement some initiatives.

'[...] even if we have new children with ALN needs we cannot apply for help for these children and have to make the ALN funding stretch more. This is really difficult; we have children on reduced hours as I don't have the resources and funding to help these children. In terms of providing equity for children with ALN,

we cannot adequately support them. This is causing a lot of stress for staff and means that some of our ALN learners will not get the help they need, but we don't have the capacity to put things in place to help these learners achieve. [...] We are firefighting and [this] means other learners in the school have to go without.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

Other issues raised by senior leaders

- 11.10 During the Wave 2 interviews a few senior leaders discussed they were still concerned about ensuring equity in their school or setting. The poor quality of school buildings and the environment, with a lack of outdoor space, was commented on by one PRU senior leader. Another English-medium primary senior leader reflected on their concerns about 'the disparity between schools', particularly smaller schools and settings.

'[The] quality of buildings and learning environment is a factor that impacts on equity. [We] don't have an outdoor area here, so our learners don't have the same access.' Senior leader, PRU

- 11.11 A few Wave 2 interviewees reported an increase in the number of socio-economically disadvantaged learners. Negative impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of children and young people and increasing exclusion rates were cited. An increased proportion of learners now accessing free school meals compared to a few years ago was also reported. At the time of the interviews free school meals for all primary-aged children in Wales were yet to be fully rolled out. Associated with this issue was parents being unable to support schools and settings in the way they used to; one school leader commented that a decrease in parent helpers has resulted in the cancellation of school trips. Engaging parents in their child's learning was also reported to be more difficult now by a small number of senior leaders e.g. to support reading at home. One senior leader raised the issue of ensuring that the context of all assessments was applicable to all learner backgrounds and not related to those from a 'middle-class upbringing'.

'We are having to look at equity differently now [...], the pool of [socio-economically] disadvantaged children has increased massively and what used to be a niche element of our work [...] has now become core and brings a lot of challenges with it.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 11.12 A few senior school leaders reflected mixed views on the progress and impact of the ALN reform for the implementation of CfW. The high percentage of ALN learners had been ‘massively challenging’ for some. Parental expectations regarding what a school can provide in ALN care was reported as being adrift from what school could actually offer. Whereas for others, although it was reported to be challenging, the ‘roll out is working well’ and there is a drive to reduce the amount of time that some children were ‘out of class’. There is a desire for children to remain in mainstream as opposed to going to special school, particularly if they have managed well throughout their primary education.
- 11.13 A few senior leaders referred to the importance of ensuring that staff have time for professional learning and are adequately trained to deliver aspects such as ‘mixed ability teaching’. Alongside this, a few senior leaders commented on the ‘turnaround’ observed in the attitude of some of their staff. For example, one English-medium primary senior leader commented on the excellent exemplars of differentiated work observed in the school. The importance of authentic experiences for learners was also raised by a small number of senior leaders with examples such as children growing vegetables and selling them, taking a train trip.

Variations in views according to type of school or setting

- 11.14 Although senior leaders reported a greater emphasis on mixed ability teaching, one special school senior leader commented that they were reverting to the model of setting by ability for numeracy and literacy; the more able would be challenged and the less able receive the support needed. In addition, one English-medium secondary school senior leader also commented they had reverted to ‘setting children instead of putting them in mixed ability classes’. Secondary schools were more likely to refer to training needs than primary schools.
- 11.15 Senior leaders in the primary sector were more likely than others to emphasise that equity has always been a priority for them. It was suggested by one primary school senior leader that taking individual learner experiences into account is easier in the primary sector, particularly as it is ‘easier to get to know all the children in the primary’ sector.

11.16 Senior leaders in primary schools were more likely than others to highlight the challenges of the impact of funding pressures.

Views of secondary senior leaders preparing to implement CfW from September 2023

11.17 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 had mixed views on whether the curriculum would improve equity and inclusivity and help to address gaps in attainment. Some felt that the increased focus on pedagogy would improve the quality of teaching and learner support which could subsequently improve outcomes for learners. However, others felt this was already a focus for schools and that other factors, particularly school funding and the cost-of-living crisis, were likely to have a greater influence. The main points raised by senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 were that:

- equity and inclusivity were already important areas of focus in their school and that CfW reinforced this, particularly through an increased focus on pedagogy
- CfW had led to an increased emphasis on wellbeing and support for learners, for example through professional learning for practitioners that focused on supporting learners
- that more individualised approaches to progression and assessment were potentially beneficial for tailoring support to learners who were not progressing as expected

‘Our assessment has switched to be more formative. Looking at the progress in five aspects among the ones who’ve fallen behind, we’ve identified interventions and these seem to be working. It’s the first year for many parents but we’ve had positive feedback so far.’⁴⁶ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

- that CfW could encourage some schools to shift to mixed-ability groupings in Year 7.

⁴⁶ Original quote in Welsh: ‘Ma’n asesu ni di ‘switsho’ i fod yn fwy ffurfiannol. Os ni’n edrych ar gynnydd yn y pump peth ymysg y rhai sydd wedi cwmpo y tu ôl, ni di rhoi ymyraethau mewn lle ac ma’n ymddangos fel ei fod yn gweithio. Hwn yw’r flwyddyn gyntaf i lawer o rieni ond ni di cal ymateb cadarnhaol gan rieni hyd yma’.

11.18 Other issues mentioned by senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 were:

- that they had observed an increase in the range of cross-curricular skills learners had following the pandemic, which they attributed to variations in the support parents and carers could offer learners
 - that they had had to adapt their curriculum content to try and address this perceived gap in the last two years

'We welcome the focus on equity but it's a difficult time to launch [the CfW] because so many pupils need extra help post-Covid and this affects our time to trial things [...] and this has knock-on effects in how we differentiate and stretch learners.'⁴⁷

- that the ability of parents and carers to contribute financially towards school trips had been negatively affected by the cost-of-living crisis, and that this had subsequently affected some schools' ability to offer learners rich experiences
 - that this could disproportionately affect learners in areas of higher socio-economic deprivation, those from lower-income households and those eligible for free school meals
- that senior leaders had observed an increase in the number of learners with social and emotional issues and exhibiting challenging behaviour
- that there were timetabling challenges in maintaining some pathways for some learners (e.g. early entry for GCSE Maths).

⁴⁷ Original quote in Welsh 'Ma'r cwricwlwm wedi lansio yn ystod amser caled achos ma gymaint sydd angen cymorth ychwanegol ar ôl Cofid felly mae'r amser i dreialu ayyb ac ma na sgil effaith o ran faint allwn ni wahaniaethu a herio plant.'

12. Parent and carer engagement

12.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to senior leaders' experiences of **engaging with parents and carers to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements**. Interviewees were asked about:

- how schools and settings are communicating information about the curriculum to parents and carers
- whether parent/carers engagement activity has added to the demands on staff capacity in the school
- whether parents and carers being encouraged to contribute to curriculum design
- whether additional support is needed for schools and settings to engage parents and their local community in curriculum design.

12.2 A summary of the Wave 1 findings relating to parent and carer engagement is set out below. The following sections summarise senior leaders' comments on parent and carer engagement.

Summary of Wave 1 findings (November 2022 – January 2023): Parent and carer engagement

12.3 The Wave 1 research report found that:

- schools and settings were utilising a variety of approaches to disseminate information on the curriculum to parents. Some expressed caution in communicating Curriculum for Wales (CfW) changes to parents and highlighted a range of methods used to 'drip-feed' updates in an effort to avoid overwhelming parents with too much information. Senior leaders reported using their mandatory curriculum summaries to share information with parents about the reforms, setting out how the new curriculum is organised and an overview of approaches to learner progression
- some senior leaders mentioned that CfW-specific events for parents and carers, such as workshops about the changes, were poorly attended. Senior leaders reported they found there was better engagement with parents and

carers when putting on events which embedded CfW information, such as via presentations, celebration events and assemblies that the children also participated in. Several senior leaders reported that they had started to include 'learning days' as a new means of reporting, inviting parents in to view and discuss their child's work.

- senior leaders described a variety of attempts to involve parents and carers in curriculum design. However, senior leaders tended to report limited responses from parents to methods such as surveys or meetings. There were reports of schools and settings limiting their consultation with parents and carers until they had spent more time designing their curriculum and felt more confident in their approaches.

Wave 2 findings (May-July 2023): General points raised by senior leaders in schools and settings implementing CfW during 2022/23

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

- 12.4 **Compared with Wave 1, senior leaders in Wave 2 described a greater range of approaches of engagement with parents and carers** and an increase in using electronic means in addition to traditional face-to-face approaches (e.g. sharing examples of work and videos on classroom apps such as Dojo, Seesaw and Google Classroom).
- 12.5 **Senior leaders continued to report challenges in engaging parents and carers in events or activities that were specifically related to the CfW (e.g. electronic surveys or meetings, curriculum summary documents).** Senior leaders increasingly reported adopting more innovative and informal approaches to engage with parents and carers through inviting them to events such as learner 'showcases' or performances relating to particular themes or projects. Senior leaders reported that parents and carers were more likely to engage with these less formal, face-to-face opportunities.

'We have been doing different types of face-to-face meetings with parents. We have formal parents' evenings, we also have open days with children present and we look at the learning environment together, we do social meetings with tea and coffee and children can take their parents around the classroom and show books. We have realised different parents want to be communicated with in different

ways – some want face-to-face, some want formal chats with teachers, some want open days, some want assessment/progress, some want daily contact or social situations. We are trying to cover all types’. Senior Leader, English-medium primary

- 12.6 **Senior leaders continued to report good engagement with parents and carers through events which the children also attended such as presentation events or learner showcases where students were actively involved in sharing their work.** Senior leaders described how they were using these events as opportunities to invite parents to view and discuss their child’s work with the learner and / or teacher. Senior leaders also considered these events as opportunities for teachers to describe the class-based learning which had led up to the performance or showcase and how this formed part of their curriculum.

‘We have turned a corner on this. Learner showcases have increased engagement massively – we have a community officer tracking attendance at these. 90-95% of families are coming in for the learner showcases’. Senior Leader, English-medium primary

- 12.7 **Senior leaders indicated that sharing information with carers and parents was often focussed on progression rather than attainment.** Once again, learners were included in showing how they’d made progress in their work, which work demonstrated this and how they could overcome problems.

‘We used to report in terms of levels. We have moved away from this, parents did not understand it. We now report in terms of “to know” [and] “to be able to”. Teachers give a mark 1,2,3 ranking across a series of statements. Parents have sight of this detail also. This also becomes the progression mark sheet. Some of these statements are skills-based, and others knowledge. Levels did not allow this kind of nuance, this is a dramatic change for us’. Senior Leader, English-medium secondary

- 12.8 **Senior leaders reported that parents had provided positive feedback on the increase in experiential learning opportunities their child was accessing.** This was particularly mentioned in the context of their efforts to get parents and carers in to discuss their own experiences (e.g. in relation to CWRE or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories).

‘We’ve had very positive feedback from parents about the increase in the number of visitors to school, many of whom are parents. There’s enthusiasm from

parents and more offers from other parents to come in.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary

‘We need to engage the parents in the curriculum in a different way, focus more on community involvement. If we do an enterprise event, parents don’t realise that they are involved in a workshop that is to do with the CfW. Also during heritage week, the children were encouraged to look into parents’ backgrounds, parents really got involved and 60 of them turned up’. Senior leader, English-medium primary

Other issues raised by senior leaders

12.9 In a development from Wave 1, no senior leaders in Wave 2 reported that they were concerned about informing parents of changes to their curriculum.

Senior leaders appeared to be more confident to share information about their curriculum with parents, with fewer referring to a need to ‘drip feed’ information. Senior leaders’ main concern relating to parental engagement appeared to be how parents would respond to changes in the information they shared on their child’s progression in end of year reports (See Section 9).

12.10 Senior leaders continued to report a lack of parental understanding with regard to the changes to the curriculum, and expressed a desire for familiar terminology, for example a desire to know their child’s attainment with regard to ‘levels’.

‘There is so much information out there and it is hard to break this down for parents. Parents don’t always get it, it’s hard to get understanding from them. At some point we will have parents with the old mindset who don’t understand the new CfW – they won’t understand changes to assessment etc which their children are doing...There needs to be something though from Welsh Government, more communications which can help parents get up to speed with changes’. Senior Leader, Welsh-medium primary school

12.11 A few senior leaders expressed a desire for having Welsh Government videos relating to the CfW available in languages other than Welsh or English. These senior leaders reported that these would be helpful to them when disseminating information to parents whose first language was not Welsh nor English.

12.12 A few senior leaders reported that they had appointed a family liaison officer to focus on increasing parental engagement and that this had been positive.

Variations in views according to type of school or setting

- 12.13 Senior leaders in primary schools were more likely than those in secondary schools to report that:
- they were using learner-led events such as showcases or presentations to engage parents and carers
 - they were using electronic based communications such as classroom apps or platforms (e.g. Seesaw) to share information with parents
 - parents and carers had provided positive feedback on experiential learning opportunities offered to their child (e.g. visits).
- 12.14 Senior leaders in secondary schools were more likely than those in primaries to report that they were concerned about how parents and carers would respond to changes in how they report on learner progression.

Views of secondary senior leaders preparing to implement CfW from September 2023

- 12.15 Senior leaders in schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported several activities they were undertaking to engage parents and carers and inform them about their new curriculum. These were similar approaches to those reported by schools and settings who were already implementing the curriculum and included:
- conducting e-surveys to consult parents and carers on curriculum content
 - distributing a curriculum summary to parents and carers via their website
 - some schools were still in the process of developing their curriculum summary
 - developing 'bite-size' summary information on specific aspects of the curriculum
 - changing how they reported to parents on progression.
- 12.16 Senior leaders in schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported some challenges they were facing in engaging and involving parents and carers. These were:

- low levels of response to curriculum consultation e-surveys
- difficulties in explaining changes to progression and assessment arrangements to parents when these were in the process of being developed.

13. Views of learners

13.1 This section sets out the findings of focus groups undertaken with nine groups of learners, five in primary schools and four in secondary schools. Learners were asked to share their views on:

- projects or themes they had worked on recently⁴⁸
 - involvement in choosing their own themes / projects
- whether school helped them see connections between subjects
- the four purposes of Curriculum for Wales (CfW)
- whether learners got the help that they needed
- whether they were learning about a wide variety of topics that mattered to them
- whether school was fair for everyone
- whether school helped them communicate well in Welsh and English
- how they knew if they had moved forward or made progress in their learning
- whether they were pushed to work hard and set high ambitions
- whether they felt they were challenged
- whether they talked about, and were supported with, their health and wellbeing.

13.2 This chapter presents findings in two parts. Firstly, key issues raised by primary school learners (learners in Years 4, 5 and 6); secondly, a summary of points raised in group discussions with Year 7 learners. It sets out findings in relation to the points raised most frequently by learners, drawn from the list of topics above. Information on how learners were recruited to take part in groups is set out in the methodology section (see section 2), along with methodological considerations.

⁴⁸ Senior leaders were asked prior to the discussion to provide an example researchers could refer to.

- 13.3 This chapter presents the findings of research with learners in both Waves 1 and 2. During the second wave of groups discussions, which took place in June and July 2023, learners were able to reflect more meaningfully on the progress in their learning over the course of the school year compared with the initial round of discussions earlier in the year.

Learners in primary schools

Topic-based work

- 13.4 Learners in primary schools were asked about particular topics or areas of work they had focused on during recent months. In some cases, these topics had been mentioned by senior leaders during prior interviews. Learners provided a range of examples of topics, including 'great inventions', 'citizens of the world', 'water', 'our local area', and 'Wales and the world'. In several cases there was an emphasis on incorporating an idea of 'cynefin' as part of the topics chosen, supporting a sense of individual identity and connections between a school's local area and the wider world. Learners reported that they enjoy learning through topics and projects, which provide opportunities to explore ideas and subjects in depth. Learners noted that topic-based work included tasks that spanned a range of subjects and helps see how subjects are linked.

Learner A: 'In the water theme we did work on Maths, Geography, and Health and Well-being. So, we did graphs as part of Maths...'

Learner B: '...and we looked at where water comes from, where it ends up. And we looked at why water is important for our bodies.' Learners, Welsh-medium primary school

- 13.5 Topics and project-based work therefore appears to be provide a way of facilitating cross-curricular connections that senior leaders reported they were seeking to incorporate as part of their implementation of the new curriculum arrangements.

Learners' involvement in decision-making about their learning

- 13.6 Primary school learners were asked whether they were involved in decisions about the topics that were covered in school. Learners reported that they were consulted, describing different ways in which they were able to influence decisions. In some cases, they were asked to provide examples of topics, which were sometimes put to a vote in class. More frequently, they were presented with topics and asked about the types of activity, experiences or tasks they thought could be included as part of that area of work. In some cases, school councils or class councils were used as decision-making forums. Learners noted that it is important to be able to decide on topics as this can help motivate them and can ensure that 'we're learning about things that are important to us' (learner, primary school).
- 13.7 There were several examples, therefore, illustrating that learners' input is sought and that they are given opportunities to direct their learning, including being involved in decisions about what and how they learn.
- 13.8 In addition to being asked their views on what they were interested in learning, learners also provided examples of being given responsibility, particularly Year 6 learners. This echoed comments by senior leaders in those schools who talked about empowering pupils (see below also in section 13.19). Learners reported that they enjoyed being given responsibility, noting examples such as:
- being charged with planning an itinerary and booking tickets to events for a three-day residential trip
 - helping to write the script for a short dramatic performance in the Urdd Eisteddfod
 - planning a timetable for an excursion and writing a letter to parents to set out information on the visit
 - being consulted on, and contributing ideas towards, the design of a new school building – leading to one learner developing an interest in becoming an architect in the future.

Experiences

- 13.9 Learners were asked if they have opportunities to learn about things that matter to them from the world outside school. Those who contributed to focus groups were enthusiastic about the visits, performances, guest speakers and opportunities to work with external organisations. A range of examples were provided, including:
- day trips to local towns and cities
 - residential visits in school groups and with other schools in their cluster
 - expressive arts-related projects and workshops led by organisations
 - visits to country parks and historic sites, often linked to specific topics being studied.
- 13.10 Learners across all groups felt that experiences supported their learning and helped make school more ‘interesting’ and ‘exciting’.
- ‘Experiences help us remember things more. Facts are easier to remember if you see things in the real world.’ Learner, Welsh-medium primary school

Progress

- 13.11 The research was keen to collect insights into the question of learner progression from the perspective of pupils. This was approached by asking participants:
- how they knew if they had moved forward in their learning
 - how they find out what they need to do to move forward or improve
 - how they talk about progress with their teachers
 - whether they talk with their teachers about pushing themselves to work hard or setting high ambitions.
- 13.12 Primary school learners generally felt that they had made progress over the course of the year. These learners reported discussing learning objectives at the beginning of the school year (or term) and that these were often recorded in their books. Learners in all groups reported that teachers talk with them about how they are moving forward in their work. They reported that they had improved in their spelling,

‘treigladau’ (grammatical mutations in Welsh), Maths (by progressing along ‘Clics’). Learners felt that they had improved their handwriting and they had noticed that there were fewer comments from the teacher in their books as the school year had progressed. In one school, learners are given the result of assessments at the beginning and the end of the year, so they are able to see if they have improved.

- 13.13 A recurring theme during discussions (both in primary and secondary school groups) was that learners were encouraged by teachers to talk about their own progress more frequently. Learners noted that teachers encouraged them to review their progress and think about how they can improve continuously. This echoed comments by senior leaders about the importance of learners understanding where they are in their learning and what they need to do to progress. Teachers emphasised the importance of self-assessment and self-improvement.

‘Sometimes teachers ask us to look at each other’s books and talk to people on our table about what we’ve done really well and how we can do better’. Learner, English-medium primary school

- 13.14 Learners reported that they take pride in wanting to improve and feel they are supported through the feedback teachers provide.

‘It’s a nice feeling to know that you have worked hard and that you’ve done good work.’⁴⁹ Learner, Welsh-medium primary school

‘The teacher’s feedback has helped me improve my handwriting. Miss [...] is always telling me to concentrate and take my time. This has helped me.’

- 13.15 In all groups there was one or more learners who reported they had been given additional tasks to challenge them. These learners reported that being given additional challenges or further tasks gave them a sense of pride. These learners said they enjoyed being ‘stretched’ and encouraged by teachers to push themselves.

‘We get extra tasks to challenge us (‘cwestiynau her’). Not everybody is given these – you get the extra task if you’ve finished and checked the main work.’

⁴⁹ Translation. Original quote in Welsh: ‘Mae’n deimlad braf i wybod dy fod yn gweithio’n galed ac yn gwneud gwaith da.’

'You feel like you've achieved something if you've done the challenge.'

Importance of safe and supportive learning environments

- 13.16 One group of learners had moved from an old school building into a new building during the course of the school year. This was reported to have made a big difference to their learning experiences and how they feel about school. They reported feeling safer, more comfortable – which learners said made a difference to their concentration in class.
- 13.17 Other learner groups (primary and secondary) also talked about the importance of the class environment to their learning experience. Disruptive classroom environments – linked to poor behaviour by some learners – were reported by learners to have a significant impact on learners' enjoyment in school and their ability to learn effectively.

Progress reports and parents' evenings

- 13.18 Senior leaders reflected on changes being introduced to parents' evenings in response to the new curriculum arrangements. Some learners commented on the new approaches being taken. In one school, learners attend parents' evenings along with their parents/carers. These have been re-named as 'Ni Sydd â'r Pwer' / 'We Have the Power' where the emphasis is on empowering learners to take responsibility. Learners said that they like the fact that, at these meetings, teachers asked them questions such as 'What do you think about what we've been learning this term? How do you think you can improve your work next year?'

'We didn't use to go to parents' evenings – we would be playing outside while the parents spoke with the teachers. Now we are there – we're part of the meeting. We talk a lot about success – we discuss the things we do well and what we need to carry on improving. It's better this way.'⁵⁰ Learner, Welsh-medium primary school

⁵⁰ Translation. Original in Welsh: 'Doedden ni ddim arfer mynd i'r nosweithiau rhieni – byddwn ni tu allan yn chwarae tra bod y rhieni'n siarad gyda'r athrawon. Nawr 'da ni yna – yn rhan o'r cyfarfod. Rydym yn siarad lot

Learners in secondary schools

Learners' involvement in decisions about their learning

- 13.19 Compared to their primary school counterparts, secondary school learners tended to report they had less of a say in decisions about their learning. Nonetheless, Year 7 learners who took part in focus groups did note that they were asked to provide feedback to teachers on lessons and themes they had studied. They reported that they did feel that they were able to influence and help shape aspects of their learning. In one example, secondary learners noted that they were asked how they thought a task should be organised in class – they decided to complete a task in small groups, which the teacher agreed with.

Views on curriculum content

- 13.20 In some cases secondary school learners noted that they recognised links between Areas or subjects they were studying. Some learners observed that teachers in one subject seemed to be aware of what we were covering in other subjects and would point out overlaps. This was not the case in most groups however.
- 13.21 One group of secondary learners recalled designing a car (in DT), studying aerodynamics (Science) and inventors in other subjects, recognising that this had been planned. Another could describe links between PE and cookery lessons they had on the same day as part of healthy living theme. Others noted that teachers had planned related tasks between expressive arts, English and Welsh. One learner talked about analysing data they had collected as part of a science experiment data in a Maths lesson.
- 13.22 Learners noted that they saw links between international languages and Welsh (in an English-medium school). One participant noted:

‘In Spanish I can translate words and make sentences. If I go on holiday now to Spain I can translate for my family. It makes me feel more confident in languages and it rubs off in Welsh – I am more confident now. Both teachers use Mats

am lwyddiant – trafod y pethau ni'n gwneud yn dda a'r pethau 'da ni angen cario mlaen i wella. Mae'n well fel hyn nawr.’

(sentence builder resources) so there are links in how we learn the two languages.' Learner, English-medium secondary school

- 13.23 Learners were asked if they talk about the four purposes in school. Year 7 learners noted that the four purposes were not referenced as much in secondary school as they had been in primary school, where there was more ongoing reference to skills associated with the four purposes.

Progress

- 13.24 Secondary school learners who took part in discussions noted that feedback was important in supporting their progress in learning. They also said that teachers discussed their attitudes to learning, encouraging them to take responsibility for the quality of their work.

- 13.25 Secondary school learners noted that they were given reflection time to review and comment on their books.

'If I get things wrong then I can learn from my mistake to get it right. The teacher repeats things in lessons for any work we need help on.' Learner, English-medium secondary school

- 13.26 Learners said that they had noticed that teachers had adapted their teaching after pupils had found some aspects (of English) difficult to understand.

'[After finding something difficult]...my English teacher says they will teach things in a different way next time. We give whole-class feedback to them.; Learner, English-medium secondary school

'In Maths in Year 6 I couldn't divide. Now I can, the support from my teacher helped. She encouraged me to keep going, when we got things wrong in the quizzes we got to try again. The teacher gives us different methods to try to see which ones work best for us. In Science we get to do things in different ways to see what we prefer, it is better than in primary school.'

- 13.27 Learners in one school, where retrieval and recall tasks are an important part of curriculum delivery, commented on the value of this approach:

'Each lesson we start it by going over what we did last time. This helps us to remember stuff. It can be hard and I think we should also have retrieval

[sessions] at the end of each lesson – so we go over what we just learned.’
Learner, English-medium secondary school

- 13.28 In one group learners reflected on the colour-coded system used in their school to report on progress in individual subjects (red, orange, green). Differing views were expressed in this group about the value of the model used. Some participants felt that the system was clear and helped motivate them.

‘I set myself targets for any orange areas I have in my report. It was clear to me where I needed to improve. The subjects are broken down into sections in the report and it is clear what areas you need to concentrate on... the reports colours can be boosting.’ Learner, English-medium secondary school

‘In the first term I was in set three. They told me I wasn’t improving but I knew I could do better. Then I got all greens and I could see I had improved a lot. I got better because I did the starter tasks set out at the beginning of lessons - and it helped a lot.’ Learner, English-medium secondary school

- 13.29 Not all participants were clear about what their teachers are looking for to make progress and achieve a ‘green’ score in various subjects:

‘Teachers need to be clearer about the tasks and skills. At the start of the term they should tell us what we need to get a green. We just get our reports and scores and we don’t know why we got those scores. We don’t get told what we need to do to get a green, we have to work it out. On our two short reports we don’t get ‘Next Steps’ – that would help.’ Learner, English-medium secondary school

14. Conclusions and issues for consideration

Overarching conclusions

- 14.1 Schools have continued to make steady progress in implementing their new curriculum arrangements during the academic year. Over the two waves of the research (Wave 1: November 2022-March 2023 and Wave 2: May-July 2023) schools demonstrated an ongoing commitment to the vision and goals of Curriculum for Wales (CfW). However, new arrangements continue to be rolled out incrementally, and senior leaders emphasised that it will take several years for these to be fully embedded. This view was also shared by senior leaders in schools and settings that had begun to trial and implement new arrangements during previous years.
- 14.2 While the overall picture is therefore encouraging, interviews with senior leaders over the two phases of the research underlined the variations across the school system during this first year of formal roll-out. These variations come in a number of forms: differences in overall progress (with some schools and settings appearing to be further along in their curriculum planning and implementation than others); varying levels of attention given to some aspects of the curriculum (some Areas or aspects being prioritised initially as part of a phased implementation); differences in levels of engagement with reform among teachers; and differences in how clusters are working together and varying levels of strategic and purposeful collaboration.
- 14.3 One observation to emerge was that, although the curriculum is operational, the reforms are not fully underpinned by prior strategic planning and engagement activity⁵¹ in all schools and settings. Senior leaders reported that engagement activity, sense-making and work to develop understanding of the conceptual model of the curriculum with teachers is taking place in parallel with early implementation. Some leaders noted that operational delivery is taking place without time (and resources) to be able to engage in the more strategic and philosophical thinking about the necessary changes to teaching and learning.

⁵¹ As outlined in 'Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum roll-out' guidance ([Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum roll-out - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/guidance/curriculum-for-wales-the-journey-to-curriculum-roll-out)), schools should develop understanding of the conceptual model of the curriculum. This involves engaging and sense-making with materials and literature and developing or updating their vision.

14.4 Three other recurring issues emerged – particularly during the second wave of interviews – that are reportedly impacting on schools and settings’ planning and implementation of the new curriculum arrangements: school budgets, the ALN transformation and pupil attendance. Senior leaders reported that pressures on school budgets mean that schools and settings cannot devote the resources they would like to free up middle leaders and teachers to carry out the planning and developmental work they would ideally like to. Linked to this, some senior leaders reported that other ongoing reforms – particularly the transformation of the ALN system – are impacting on the time available to commit to aspects of curriculum reform. Thirdly, senior leaders noted that attendance levels have not recovered since the pandemic and continue to be a concern. Senior leaders felt that continued low attendance risks impacting negatively on learner progression and, if not addressed, on the longer-term outcomes and ambitions of CfW.

Overall progress

14.5 **Overall, senior leaders in the 62 schools and settings implementing CfW during 2022/23 and interviewed during the second wave of the research reported that their new curriculum arrangements were advancing well.** Senior leaders noted that they accepted that they were engaged in a long-term reform process and that it would be a number of years before new arrangements were embedded. Senior leaders are aware of the need for the new curriculum to be developed iteratively, and informed by ongoing review, evaluation and refinement. The effectiveness and rigour of internal review processes at school level will therefore be extremely important to the success of curriculum implementation over the medium and longer term.

14.6 **The first wave of the research concluded that the outlook and confidence of senior leaders appeared to influence their school or setting’s progress and approach to curriculum implementation.** While many senior leaders in Wave 2 reported feeling increasingly comfortable in managing the reform process, a minority continued to express uncertainty and feeling overwhelmed by the scale of the changes involved. It is important that middle-tier partners are able to identify and

engage with senior leaders who feel that they are struggling to manage the process and are able to direct them to appropriate support.

- 14.7 **The research indicates that there are also variations in levels of confidence and engagement across middle leaders and teachers.** Many teachers were reported to be taking ownership of curriculum planning and delivery, embracing the autonomy and the opportunities presented. Allowing these teachers time to learn, research, plan and collaborate was viewed by senior leaders as being important in fostering these attitudes and behaviours among staff. In other cases, the research heard of a reluctance among teachers to move away from established practices and approaches, particularly in relation to assessment. In these cases senior leaders highlighted that more time and support was needed to build the confidence, knowledge and skills of these staff members.
- 14.8 **Collaboration and cluster activity has played an important role in helping to ensure shared understanding of key concepts and in developing joint approaches to planning and learner progression.** Most senior leaders noted that their cluster working was well-established and had evolved over time to focus on specific aspects of the curriculum. Cluster collaboration typically involved numerous staff from across schools or settings, often grouped by subject area or theme. In both phases of the research, cluster working had helped allay some of the uncertainty felt by leaders and practitioners.
- 14.9 In some cases, cluster activity was reported to be at a relatively early stage of development. In these cases, senior leaders reported being without the close external support and reassurance that other leaders highlighted as one of the main benefits of close cluster working.
- 14.10 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 had decided not to do so during 2022-23 because they wanted to spend another year trialling and refining some aspects of their new curriculum. Some referred to factors such as the impact of the pandemic, school inspections and recent changes to school leadership as having influenced their decision. Most considered they were making good progress with their curriculum and recognised that it would need to be continuously reviewed and refined. Senior leaders had decided

to maintain subject disciplines and encourage a collaborative approach within areas, rather than adopt an area-led approach. They emphasised the importance of mapping their curriculum activity to ensure coverage and progression and to avoid duplicating content across areas or year groups. These schools were also working to develop a shared understanding of progression, with some focusing on transition from Year 6 to Year 7 and others mapping progression across all age groups. As was the case with schools and settings that were already implementing CfW, senior leaders in schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported that allocating sufficient time to refine their approaches was an issue as well as concerns about the future nature of qualifications and their alignment with CfW.

Specific curriculum elements

- 14.11 **Most schools and settings implementing CfW during 2022/23 are gradually integrating careers and work-related experiences as a cross-cutting element of the curriculum.** Schools and settings are building on, or seeking to re-establish, relationships with local employers and organisations to support CWRE and help enrich learners' experiences. Primary school senior leaders were more likely to indicate that they were at a relatively early stage of implementing CWRE within their curriculum and that this was a fairly new focus for them. Some senior leaders referred to making use of resources that are available to support their planning, delivery and self-evaluation of CWRE. However, some felt that more support was needed and were not aware of the resources that were available to them. Senior leaders in schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 reported undertaking similar CWRE activities to those already implementing CfW, but were more likely to report being at an early stage of integrating it across the curriculum. **Senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools, both those implementing CfW in 2022/23 and those preparing to implement the curriculum, reported that the pandemic had impacted negatively upon learners' confidence and use of Welsh,** particularly among learners who did not speak Welsh at home and in areas where Welsh was not as widely spoken as a community language. Schools and settings are placing an emphasis on oracy in Welsh to address this perceived skills deficit. Senior leaders noted that CfW offered them the flexibility to adapt their

teaching and learning in response to this challenge, which is likely to remain in coming years.

- 14.12 **Senior leaders in English-medium schools and settings reported that they were focused on promoting Welsh language skills and the use of incidental Welsh in classrooms and the wider school environment.** Senior leaders reported that the ‘Cymraeg Campus/Siarter Iaith’ programme provides a useful framework and incentive for supporting this work. Senior leaders in schools and settings implementing CfW in 2022/23 and those preparing to implement the curriculum reported difficulties in filling vacancies both for Welsh-speaking staff and those qualified to teach Welsh as a subject. In some cases, there was a view that the shortage of staff with Welsh language skills meant they faced challenges in meeting the expectations relating to the teaching and learning of Welsh in the CfW guidance. In schools preparing to implement from September 2023, senior leaders reported an increased focus on Welsh history and culture across the curriculum than previously as well as a focus on improving learners’ and parents’ perceptions of the value of Welsh.
- 14.13 **There was considerable variation in the progress described by senior leaders in relation to incorporating Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories as part of their new curriculum.** Schools and settings that did not feel this aspect of the curriculum was new to them were often located in more diverse areas and had a history of exploring diversity within the curriculum that pre-dated CfW. A number of senior leaders highlighted low staff knowledge and confidence in this area of the curriculum, especially in schools or settings where there were low levels of diversity amongst the learners and/or the teaching staff. Several senior leaders had engaged with external specialists (notably DARPL) to support their knowledge and planning. In secondary schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023, senior leaders reported that they were making good progress in implementing this aspect of the curriculum, although some reported that progress was varied across subjects and Areas. Senior leaders in these schools reported similar issues and concerns to those already implementing CfW, with some expressing a desire for more training and examples of good practice.

Progression

- 14.14 **Senior leaders reported that they are continuing to develop their approaches to progression, with many placing a greater focus on this aspect of their curriculum planning over the course of the academic year. Schools and settings are continuing to work in clusters to develop and further refine their approaches to supporting learner progression, developing a shared understanding of progression.** Progression steps provide a broad framework for planning progression in many schools and settings, with models also often informed by statements of what matters, and linked to descriptions of learning.
- 14.15 **Echoing comments made during Wave 1 of the research, senior leaders noted that progression in learning is embedded as part of curriculum design.** The idea of planning a curriculum that has progression in learning as its heart was expressed more frequently by senior leaders during the second phase of research, perhaps reflecting the fact that curriculum plans and thinking about progression had developed since earlier in the academic year.
- 14.16 Many schools and settings have devised progression models and descriptors to help benchmark learners' progress in particular Areas, skills or in their attitude to learning.
- 14.17 Primary and secondary school senior leaders noted that approaches to progression were more learner-focused and **involved encouraging learners to reflect on their progress in new ways.** Schools and settings are also moving towards more personalised and qualitative reporting on progress.
- 14.18 Reflecting views expressed during the first phase of the research, senior leaders continued to voice **concern about divergence and variations in approaches to progression as schools, settings and clusters develop their own individual approaches to progression.**
- 14.19 **Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 reported that they were developing their approaches to learner progression, but a few were at an early stage of planning and were unsure of their approach.** Some senior leaders reported that they were focusing

on developing a shared understanding of progression for learners making the transition from Year 6 to 7 before moving on to examine other age groups, while others were developing approaches in one Area before moving on to others. Schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 were not yet at a stage where they were receiving feedback from parents on their approaches to reporting on learner progress. Senior leaders were considering how to ensure an appropriate balance between reporting on progress to parents and also including some measure of their children's likely future attainment.

Assessment

- 14.20 **Schools and settings are continuing to make changes to assessment arrangements, with an increased focus on formative assessment.** Senior leaders reported that teachers are engaging more frequently in professional discussions (as Area teams or in other groups) about what the outcomes from formative assessments tell them about the progress learners are making, and how this can inform curriculum planning and delivery.
- 14.21 As was noted during Wave 1, Senior leaders commented on the change in mindset and attitude required to design and implement new approaches to assessment.
- 14.22 Senior leaders reported that they had continued to observe increased confidence among teachers in the use of formative assessment, supported by professional learning during INSET, external experts and consultants, and through greater co-design of approaches with colleagues.
- 14.23 **Assessment arrangements remain a concern for a number of senior leaders.** The concerns raised during the first wave of the study were repeated, namely: that the reforms will result in there being gaps in assessment data or evidence which schools and settings will ultimately be asked to provide; the work still required to further develop assessment arrangements (particularly in Years 8 and 9 in secondary schools to ensure learners are suitably prepared for GCSE exams); variations in approaches taken by schools within the same cluster.
- 14.24 **Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported that they were now undertaking more formative assessment for**

learning, piloting new approaches in one or more Areas and involving learners in the assessment process. Senior leaders welcomed the shift towards more formative, individualised approaches to assessing progress but felt that tracking and monitoring progress over time, and reporting on whole cohorts of learners was more challenging. Some senior leaders were hesitant to move away from standardised, national approaches to assessment until they had more reassurance about school accountability measures.

Equity and inclusivity

- 14.25 **Senior leaders re-emphasised points raised during the Wave 1 interviews regarding equity and the importance of their school or setting's approach being 'learner-centred'.** Schools and settings welcomed the opportunities afforded by the curriculum to be responsive and flexible, and able to include content directed by the learners.
- 14.26 **Funding pressures were mentioned by senior leaders as a cause of concern, undermining the ability of schools and settings to ensure an equitable learning offer for pupils of all abilities.** Senior leaders highlighted difficulties in providing adequate staffing levels to meet learner needs, not only with regards to learners who require more targeted support, but also in being able to challenge the most able pupils. Senior leaders noted these challenges were against the backdrop of also supporting expectations for the ALN reform. The focus on improving for equity through CfW, whilst supported and prioritised by senior leaders, is undoubtedly a challenge that is dependent on the resources available to schools and settings.
- 14.27 Senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023 reported that CfW had reinforced equity and inclusivity as priorities, particularly through an increased focus on pedagogy, wellbeing and individualised approaches to progression and assessment. Senior leaders were unsure whether CfW would improve equity and inclusivity and address gaps in attainment, given that this was already an important focus for them. Some felt that the increased focus on pedagogy would improve the quality of teaching and learner support but senior leaders also felt that other factors, particularly school funding and the cost-of-

living crisis, were likely to have a greater influence. Senior leaders reported that they had observed an increase in the gap between learners' cross-curricular skills following the pandemic and an increase in the number of learners with social, emotional and behavioural issues.

Parent and carer engagement

- 14.28 **Compared with Wave 1, senior leaders in schools and settings who were already implementing CfW reported a greater range of approaches to engaging parents and carers during Wave 2.** While challenges in engaging parents in 'curriculum-specific' events persisted, senior leaders reported some success in adopting more innovative and informal approaches to engage with parents and carers. These included presentation events or showcases where learners were actively involved in sharing their work as well as more electronic communication via classroom apps or e-learning platforms. In contrast to Wave 1, senior leaders in Wave 2 were not concerned about reporting on their curriculum content and were now more focused on reporting to parents on learner progression. Senior leaders reported that some parents and carers had positive views on the increase in experiential learning opportunities their child was accessing.
- 14.29 **Senior leaders in schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported similar approaches to those reported by schools and settings who were already implementing the curriculum in terms of informing and engaging parents and carers in their new curriculum.** These included consultations on curriculum content, developing curriculum summaries and 'bite-size' information on specific elements. As was the case in schools and settings implementing the curriculum, senior leaders in schools preparing to implement from September 2023 reported challenges in engaging parents and eliciting a response to CfW-related activity.

Learner experiences

- 14.30 Learners in primary schools reported that they enjoyed learning through topics and projects, which provides opportunities to explore subjects in depth and also helps demonstrate how areas of learning are connected.

- 14.31 Primary school learners reported that they were often involved in decisions about their learning, contributing to choosing topics, tasks or learning activities. Learners noted that they value being involved in decisions, noting that it helps motivate and enthuse them. These learners also felt that the range of experiences they enjoyed through school – whether visits, performances, practical exercises and opportunities to work with partners from outside school – helped enrich their learning.
- 14.32 Primary school learners reported that teachers set out specific learning objectives and regularly talk with them about their progress. Learners also noted that they are encouraged by teachers to review their own work, discuss their work with peers and think about how they can continue to improve.
- 14.33 Secondary school learners generally reported having less of an influence on their learning than was reported by those in primary schools. They also felt that there were fewer clear links between Areas or subjects they were studying, albeit that learners in some focus groups did provide examples of links between subjects that had been planned by teachers.
- 14.34 Secondary school learners felt that teachers placed an emphasis on providing feedback to support their progress in learning. One clear message that came through was that schools were promoting positive attitudes to learning and reported on this as part of progress reports, alongside progress in skills. Some learners felt that teachers placed an emphasis on getting learners to review their own work and to also look to improve the quality of their work.
- 14.35 In both primary and secondary schools, learners underlined the importance of a good classroom environment to their learning experiences. Disruptive classroom environments were reported by learners to have a significant impact on their enjoyment of school and their ability to learn effectively.
- 14.36 Although learners were not asked directly about the implementation of CfW, many of their observations reveal that their experiences of the curriculum indicate that schools are taking new approaches to planning, teaching and learning and new ways of thinking about progression. The impacts of these new approaches on learner outcomes and attainment will become clearer over time.

Issues for consideration

- 14.37 The following issues for consideration draw on the findings of both the Wave 1 and Wave 2 reports. This preliminary research on the early implementation of CfW aimed to provide early insights into a broad range of issues. Future evaluation activity, as proposed in the '[Curriculum for Wales evaluation plan 2023](#)', will provide opportunities to examine some of these points, and related actions, in greater detail. Notably, future evaluation activity could consider these issues in the context of the theory of change for the reforms, as set out in the '[Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales](#)' (Welsh Government, 2022c).
- i. The Welsh Government should continue to encourage collaboration between schools and settings, focusing on supporting joint working among Area leads as part of curriculum planning, and evaluation. This should include collaboration between primary and secondary schools.
 - ii. The Welsh Government should continue to promote the CWRE guidance and resources that are available and encourage schools and settings to embed CWRE across all Areas and connect learning to real world contexts. This includes promoting the [CWRE toolkit](#) and toolbox and the work of key partners, including Careers Wales.
 - iii. The Welsh Government should continue to encourage and support schools and settings to embed Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Histories across all Areas. Welsh Government and stakeholders should consider how they can facilitate schools and settings in accessing high quality and appropriate guidance and support to inform their planning, delivery and self-evaluation.
 - iv. There is recognition of the need to increase the number of teachers and support workers able to work through the medium of Welsh and teach Welsh in order to support the aims of CfW. As part of processes to monitor the delivery of the '[Welsh in education workforce plan](#)', the Welsh Government and stakeholders should identify any aspects of curriculum delivery across Wales which require additional focus or support.

- v. The Welsh Government should continue to monitor how schools and settings are promoting Welsh language oracy through their new curriculum arrangements and disseminate good practice where it is identified.
- vi. The Welsh Government should consider whether there is a case for the development of additional resources to support RSE provision, particularly in primary and special schools.
- vii. The Welsh Government, working with regional partners, should ensure that international languages are promoted and delivered as an integral part of the new curriculum arrangements in all schools and settings.
- viii. The Welsh Government should continue to encourage schools, settings and clusters to collaborate in developing joint approaches to learner progression based on a shared understanding.
- ix. The Welsh Government should continue to monitor the potential implications of divergence in schools', settings' and clusters' approaches to monitoring progression, particularly in considering how to monitor progress at a national level.
- x. Senior leaders frequently referred to a desire for reassurance that the approaches they are taking to curriculum planning, progression and, particularly, assessment were appropriate (and 'on the right track'). While collaborative working between schools goes some way to providing reassurance, Welsh Government should consider whether there is a need for a role that provides external constructive challenge to schools (particularly around progression and assessment) during these early years of implementation.
- xi. The Welsh Government should continue to monitor how schools and settings report to parents and carers on learner progression. This should include the approaches being taken in some secondary schools to provide parents with reports that include learners' 'projected journeys' or 'trajectories' relating to their expected achievement of qualifications.

- xii. Senior leaders highlighted the financial challenges facing schools and settings as they work towards implementing a curriculum that supports equity and inclusivity for all. They noted that there are costs associated with providing appropriate challenge and support to enable all learners to realise their full potential. The Welsh Government should consider whether there are opportunities to provide more targeted funding to schools and settings to address some of these challenges.

Annex A: Discussion guides used during the research

Wave 2 guide for senior leaders implementing the curriculum in 2022/23

OVERALL PROGRESS

- 1. When we spoke with you [specify date of first interview], you said that [summarise key points in relation to overall progress]. Before we go into detail on particular aspects, how would you summarise overall progress since then?**
 - What is working well? Are there any barriers to progress you're experiencing?

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

- 2. We are keen to hear schools' experiences of curriculum and assessment design in relation to particular elements of the CfW framework.**

CWRE

2a) How have you begun to implement CWRE as part of your school's new curriculum?

- Prompts: Are arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date? Have you faced any challenges?
- (For primaries) Does this feel like a relatively new area and if so, how are you going about planning for this in a cross-cutting way?
- How are you working with other schools in your cluster (or beyond) on this aspect?
- How are you working with partners on this aspect of the curriculum?
 - How do you engage with employers at present – local businesses, SMEs, larger orgs, alumni, local entrepreneurs? Are there particular sectors you try to engage with?
- What types of experiences do you provide (beyond traditional work experience), and what specific support on this would be useful?
- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

WELSH LANGUAGE

2b) How is the new curriculum supporting and promoting learning Welsh and the use of Welsh?

- Prompts: Are arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date? Have you faced any challenges?
- [For Welsh-medium schools and provision in dual language schools] How are you promoting the use of the Welsh language socially / outside the classroom?

- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

BLACK ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC HISTORIES

2c) How have you begun to incorporate Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories as part of your new curriculum?

- Prompts: Are arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date? Have you faced any challenges?
- How are you going about planning for this in a cross-cutting way?
- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

PROGRESSION

3. We talked about progression during our last interview. Have you reviewed or made any changes to your approach to progression since we last spoke?

- If so, why – what prompted you to make any changes?
- What has the approach been to developing a shared understanding of progression (SUP) as a school and within your cluster?
 - The guidance issued by WG on SUP suggested using existing groups in schools and clusters. How has this worked on a practical level?
 - Or have you had to develop additional discussion groups for this?
- **Have you adapted or further developed the way you share information with parents about learner progress?**
 - What has the response been like from parents?
- How are you ensuring that the curriculum challenges all learners appropriately and sets high expectations for learner attainment?

ASSESSMENT

4. Have you reviewed or made changes to approaches to assessment in your school during the course of the year?

- If so, why – what prompted you to make any changes?
- Any new challenges faced as the year has progressed?
- How has assessment informed your curriculum planning?
- Are arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date? Have you faced any challenges?
- **Have you adapted or further developed the way you share information with parents about assessment?**

- What has the response been like from parents?
- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

EQUITY

5. Curriculum for Wales guidance sets the expectation that the curriculum will support equity and inclusivity for all. How is your curriculum implementation to date helping to raise expectations for all learners and address gaps in attainment?

- Prompts: What steps are you taking to ensure that the school is an inclusive place to learn?
- How are you changing your thinking or the curriculum itself to ensure equity, e.g. to address the attainment gap?
 - Any examples of changes? If no change, what are the reasons for this?
 - What outcomes would you expect to see that demonstrate greater equity and inclusivity over time?
- What response has there been from learners and from parents to any new approaches taken as part of the new curriculum?

PARENT AND CARER ENGAGEMENT

6. How have approaches to engaging with parents and carers changed or been further developed during the course of the year?

- How have you communicated information about the curriculum to parents and carers?
 - Are doing anything different / innovative to engage with parents in relation to curriculum reform? E.g. learner-led events / video case studies?
- How are you using curriculum summaries as part of your communication with parents/carers?
 - Do you have any thoughts on how these summaries could better meet the needs of parents?
 - Would further guidance on the content and use of curriculum summaries be useful?
- Are parents and carers being encouraged to contribute to curriculum design?
- Is additional support needed for schools to engage parents and their local community in curriculum design?

ANY OTHER COMMENTS

7. Are there any other comments you wish to share on the implementation of the new curriculum in your school or on the reforms more broadly?

Topic guide for secondary senior leaders preparing to implement the curriculum in 2023/24

OVERALL PROGRESS

1. How would you summarise your school's progress in preparing for implementing the new curriculum [since we last spoke, if applicable]?

- What has worked well and why? What has supported your school's progress?
- What has worked less well so far? Have you experienced any barriers to progress to date?
- Looking back, what were the main reasons you decided in [school name] to implement from September 2023 onwards (rather than from September 2022)?

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND PREPARATIONS

2. We are keen to hear schools' experiences of curriculum and assessment design in relation to specific elements of the CfW framework.

WORKING ACROSS AoLEs

2a) Firstly, what are your reflections on the process of planning and preparing for implementing your curriculum across and within areas of learning and experience?

- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

RSE

2b) How are you preparing to implement RSE within your school's new curriculum arrangements?

- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES

2c) How is your curriculum design shaping and/or impacting the promotion and teaching of international languages?

- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

BLACK ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC HISTORIES

2d) How are you preparing to incorporate Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories as part of your new curriculum?

- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

WELSH LANGUAGE

2e) How will your new curriculum support and promote learning and using Welsh?

- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

CWRE

2f) How are you preparing to implement CWRE as part of your school's new curriculum?

- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

PROGRESSION

3. How is your school working internally, and with other schools, to develop a shared understanding of learner progression in preparation for curriculum roll-out?

- Prompts: Have you worked with schools within your cluster?
- Have you worked with schools who have started implementing the curriculum from September 2022?
- What are your thoughts on how your school will share information about learners' progress with parents under the new arrangements?

ASSESSMENT

4. How is your school working internally, and with other schools, to design approaches to assessment in preparation for curriculum roll-out next year?

- Prompts: What is changing in terms of your approach to assessment?
- Have you started to incorporate any changes to assessment in preparation for next year? If so, what changes?
- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

EQUITY

5. Curriculum for Wales guidance sets the expectation that the curriculum will support equity and inclusivity for all – this includes learners from all socio-economic backgrounds, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic learners and learners with additional learning needs. How will your curriculum help to raise expectations for all learners and address gaps in attainment?

- Prompts: What steps are you taking to ensure that the school is an inclusive place to learn?

PARENT AND CARER ENGAGEMENT

6. How is your school engaging with parents and carers to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements?

- How have you communicated information about the curriculum to parents and carers?
- To what extent has parent/carer engagement activity added to the workload of staff in the school? How have practitioners responded to these additional activities? What response has there been from parents and carers?
- Are parents and carers being encouraged to contribute to curriculum design?
- Is additional support needed for schools to engage parents and their local community in curriculum design?

ANY OTHER COMMENTS

7. Are there any other comments you wish to share on preparing to implement the new curriculum in your school or on the reforms more broadly?

Topic guide for learners

Questions.	Wave 1, Wave 2 or both
<p>[Note to researcher: Refer to a project/theme that they have been working on recently. Confirm project/theme with senior leader in advance]</p> <p>1. We have heard that you've been working on [project/theme]. Are you enjoying the work you've been doing on _____?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do/Did you find it exciting learning about _____? <p>2. Do you find school enjoyable and exciting? Why/why not?</p>	1
<p>3. Were you involved in choosing the theme/project you've been working on?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do your teachers listen to your ideas about what you want to learn? • Do you like being asked what you'd like to learn about? Why? Why not? What difference does it make to you? 	1
<p>4. Do you think school helps you see how different subjects are connected? How? [Probe for examples from the work they've been doing]</p> <p>The new curriculum aims to help learners to become:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'ambitious and capable; enterprising, creative; ethical and informed; healthy and confident'. These are referred to as the four purposes. <p>5. Do you talk about the four purposes in school? What do you think about them?</p>	1
<p>6. Do you and your friends in school get the help that you need?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you think of any examples/times where either you or somebody else in your class has needed extra help? Did you/they get the help needed? 	2
<p>7. Do you think you learn enough about things that matter to you from the world outside school?</p> <p>8. Do you think you learn about a wide variety of things in school?</p> <p>9. Do you think school is fair for everyone?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does everybody have the same opportunity to take part in things? 	1
<p>10. Do you think that school helps you learn to communicate well in English and Welsh?</p>	1
<p>11. How do you know if you've done well or moved forward when you're learning in school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you find out what you need to do next to move forward or improve? <p>12. How do you talk about this with your teacher? [Probe for how they talk about this with teachers e.g. responding to feedback, What went well...]</p>	2

<p>13. Do you talk with your teachers about pushing yourself to work hard or setting yourself high ambitions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, how often do you have these discussions or feedback? <p>14. Do you think school pushes you to work hard? Probe for examples from the work they've been doing...]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of things do teachers say to you (or write in your books) to encourage you to do your best / to keep working hard? 	2
<p>15. Does the work you're asked to do stretch and challenge you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, can you provide any examples? • Do you feel 'stretched' / 'challenged' in some subjects more than others? 	1 & 2
<p>16. Do you talk about health and wellbeing in your class?</p> <p>17. Do you feel there is support available to you to help you with your physical and mental wellbeing?</p>	2

Annex B: Wave 1 sample profile

A total of 64 senior leaders were interviewed in Wave 1 of this research. In Wave 1, a central element of the approach involved building on – and enhancing – the sample of schools and settings represented in the [‘Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms’](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b). A sampling framework was agreed with the Welsh Government, based on recruiting 64 senior leaders, to include as many as possible from this previous qualitative research and supplemented with additional senior leaders. A total of 16 senior leaders who had taken part in the [‘Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms’](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b) were interviewed during Wave 1, with an additional 48 senior leaders newly also recruited.

A total of 35 senior leaders were interviewed in the previous qualitative research (Welsh Government, 2022b) and had consented to being recontacted. Of these, 28 were in schools and settings that were implementing CfW from September 2022. These 28 senior leaders were invited to participate in the Wave 1 interviews, and 16 of them were interviewed (in a few cases, interviews with a different senior leader in the same school or setting were arranged). An additional 48 senior leaders were recruited to take part in Wave 1 of the research.

The sample of 64 senior leaders comprised 42 interviewees from English-medium schools and 14 from Welsh-medium schools.⁵² The profile of the sample by type and medium (Table 3), and region (Table 4) of school or setting is set out below.

⁵² Including dual language schools. Four interviewees were from special schools and four from PRUs, both of which are schools and settings that are not classified by language.

Table 3. Profile of sample of interviewees by sector and language medium

Sector	Percentage of the sample of 64 interviewees in each category				Number of interviewees			
	Welsh-medium**	English-medium	NLC*	Total	Welsh-medium**	English-medium	NLC*	Total
Primary and nursery	8%	38%	0%	45%	5	24		29
All-through schools (Middle)	3%	3%	0%	6%	2	2		4
Secondary	11%	25%	0%	36%	7	16		23
Special schools	N/A	N/A	6%	6%	N/A	N/A	4	4
PRUs	N/A	N/A	6%	6%	N/A	N/A	4	4
Total	22%	66%	13%	100%	14	42	8	64

*NLC - No language classification.

**Welsh-medium includes dual language schools.

Table 4. Profile of interview sample by region

Geographic region	Number in sample	Percentage in sample
North	14	22%
Central South	16	25%
Mid and West	17	27%
South East	17	27%
Total	64	100%