Realising the Curriculum for Wales in Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision including Pupil Referral Units (PRU): a qualitative study

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Glossary

ALN

Additional Learning Needs

Area(s)

Area(s) of Learning and Experience

CAMHS

Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services

CWRE

Careers and Work-Related Experience

ELSA

Emotional Literacy Support Assistant

EOTAS

Education other than at school - references to EOTAS/EOTAS provision in this report refer to both PRU and non-PRU EOTAS provision

IDP

Individual Development Plan

Non-PRU EOTAS provision

This may include individual tuition at home or in hospital, work-related education, provision by third sector organisations, and other bespoke provision by a combination of providers

PCP

Person-Centred Planning

Practitioners

Those working in EOTAS to deliver provision to learners

PRU

Pupil Referral Unit

Representatives

Those in local authorities who are responsible for overseeing or commissioning EOTAS provision

RSE

Relationship and Sexuality Education

SEMH

Social, Emotional, and Mental Health

ToA

Theory of Action

ToC

Theory of Change

VCSE

Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education

Executive summary

1. This report forms part of the formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales. As part of the evaluation, topic-based qualitative studies were carried out, examining specific elements of Curriculum for Wales.

2. The report presents the findings of qualitative research into the realisation of Curriculum for Wales in pupil referral units (PRUs) and other education other than at school (EOTAS) provision, led by the University of Bangor in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University. The research sought to address two central aims in relation to EOTAS provision. These were:

   - to understand how Curriculum for Wales guidance is being implemented in practice

   - to explore how providers of EOTAS are supported to enact Curriculum for Wales

Methodology

3. The methodology, which is set out in Chapter 2 of this report, included:

   - recruitment of individuals in a range of roles related to EOTAS provision across Wales to take part in the study. These included practitioners who design the curriculum and teach in PRUs and non-PRU EOTAS and representatives from local authorities such as inclusion officers and those involved with referral, commissioning, and securing the curriculum

   - a total of 36 individuals participated in the study including representatives from nine PRUs, nine local authorities and 10 non-PRU EOTAS providers from across Wales. All regions of Wales (North, Mid and West, Central South and South East) were represented in the sample, including settings in urban and rural locations

   - a desk-based review, including a review of policy and guidance documentation relating to EOTAS provision, and a workshop with Welsh Government policy officials to identify lines of enquiry that were used as part of qualitative discussions

- analysis was undertaken in stages and involved: a review of discussion transcripts; the production of written summaries of each discussion; open coding of transcripts to identify recurring themes

4. The report highlights limitations associated with this study, notably:

- the small and self-selecting nature of the sample, meaning that findings are not generalisable

- the discussions carried out provided a snapshot of a moment in time limiting the ability to explore PRUs' and non-PRU EOTAS' Curriculum for Wales 'journey' and progress over a longer period

- due to the limitations on time available during discussions, it was not always possible to get a full sense of what planning had been undertaken and the level of detail that was involved

- all PRUs and local authority representatives in the sample were asked to share a copy of their curriculum summary, where one was available (due to having access to only three summaries a decision was taken not to analyse these)

- it was not possible to represent all types of EOTAS provision within this study, due to the wide range of provision across Wales

- beyond the participant groups recruited, there are other stakeholders that play a key role in the development of EOTAS curriculum such as parents/carers, learners and practitioners in mainstream schools, who were not included in the sample

- participants may have been inclined to provide responses they felt were expected or aligned with policy norms; to mitigate this risk of social desirability bias, researchers emphasised how honest feedback could positively influence improvements to policy and practice, while assuring complete anonymity in the final report

- there is also a risk of researchers' own bias; researchers kept a reflexivity journal to reflect on their personal experiences, thoughts and interactions throughout to reduce risk of bias or reflect on its potential impact

Findings

5. The research team developed a list of key research questions that guided the data collection for this study and provided the structure for this report.

   ## Research Question 1: In what ways are EOTAS providers supporting learners to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework?

6. It was a common view amongst EOTAS practitioners that some of the benefits of implementing Curriculum for Wales included increased learner engagement, improved motivation, and greater focus on learner needs, aspirations and progression. Some practitioners also highlighted improved behaviour from learners through a more holistic approach to learning that valued wellbeing and personal development.

7. Most EOTAS practitioners highlighted the benefits of Curriculum for Wales' flexibility and felt its ethos aligned well with the provision and supportive learning environment they already provided. For these practitioners, Curriculum for Wales allowed further opportunities to design bespoke curricula to cater to the diverse needs, abilities and interests of individual learners, whilst reflecting the nurturing environment and learner-centred approaches of their existing EOTAS provision.

8. The flexibility of Curriculum for Wales was perceived by most local authority representatives to support practitioner agency and ownership to develop the curriculum in line with their local context and learner needs. These representatives felt this was a beneficial way to provide a wide range of authentic learning opportunities to learners as well as develop links to local community groups.

9. Health and wellbeing were emphasised as a priority for learners across all EOTAS provision and were highlighted by the majority of participants as a core aspect of their curriculum provision. Activities included working collaboratively with external agencies such as Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and social services to deliver holistic and individualised support to learners. Curriculum for Wales realisation had encouraged practitioners to consider how health and wellbeing could be integrated in a more cross-curricular context.

10. Most EOTAS practitioners and local authority representatives highlighted that this integration alongside more flexible approaches to learning environments was

particularly beneficial for learners, for example, through outdoor learning and pursuits, community engagement, music therapy, and mindfulness.

11. Within EOTAS provision, most practitioners used learner voice to incorporate learner interests and preferences into curriculum design. This included hosting feedback sessions and debates and incorporating learner voice into individual development plan (IDP) development. They believed that this approach was creating more engaging learning experiences.

12. Nearly half of non-PRU EOTAS practitioners perceived Curriculum for Wales to have little relevance to their own provision. Reasons for this included having different non-academic learning priorities and a focus on vocational and employability needs. This related to learners who were dual-registered and therefore also attending mainstream schools. As such, these practitioners did not feel that the introduction of Curriculum for Wales had led to changes in their own provision or practice.

Research Question 2: To what extent and in what ways have Curriculum for Wales curriculum and assessment arrangements enabled EOTAS providers to support their learners? (Where arrangements encapsulate planning and designing; teaching and learning; reviewing curriculum; and assessment)

13. Almost all practitioners reported focusing on the individual progress of learners, rather than fixed attainment targets. The introduction of Curriculum for Wales was considered by the majority to support a positive shift towards the acceptance of more holistic and qualitative approaches to assessment in EOTAS provision.

14. Some EOTAS practitioners reported positive developments in how Curriculum for Wales assessment arrangements had helped learners understand their own progress. They outlined a shift towards more formative approaches that supported learner self-awareness and engagement with their educational journey. Some practitioners highlighted the celebration of learners' development in areas that mainstream schools may overlook (for example attendance, behaviour, and attitudes towards learning), which helped change learners' perspectives about what success can look like.

15. More than half of EOTAS practitioners commented that wellbeing and personal development was as important as academic progress. This has resulted in the

Health and Wellbeing Area being at the centre of their EOTAS provision, with assessments in place to monitor this development. However, a few reported challenges in quantifying progress in the areas of wellbeing and engagement in learning.

16. Around half of the practitioners reported that short-term stays or interventions for learners within EOTAS provision made it difficult to complete meaningful assessments that provided insights into learner progress in relation to the progression steps. Most practitioners considered that, as there was no prescribed way of measuring progress, it made it difficult to align and compare learner progress during transitions to and from mainstream schools.

17. It was a common view amongst practitioners that the removal of attainment targets introduced challenges relating to how and when to conduct assessments. This - along with the use of different reporting strategies, varied expectations about which metrics indicate progress, and inconsistent methods of sharing data between education providers – was reported to have made it difficult to align and compare learner progress during transitions.

18. Due to learners often only attending EOTAS provision for short periods of time, practitioners highlighted that this made it difficult to complete meaningful assessments relating to progression steps. This meant that the progress learners did make in other areas (for example, wellbeing and behaviour) was not easily visible or quantifiable through the Curriculum for Wales lens.

19. Some concerns were raised around the lack of guidance available to underpin the new GCSE and VSCE qualifications by a few practitioners.[1] This had caused concern over whether they were meeting the requirements of Curriculum for Wales and effectively preparing their learners for examinations.

Research Question 3: How are key stakeholders collaborating (or engaging in professional dialogue) to support EOTAS learners?

20. It was common practice for EOTAS providers to collaborate with various stakeholders such as parents/carers, local authorities, health practitioners and

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[1] It should be noted that since the fieldwork's completion, WJEC has released their draft Made-for-Wales GCSE specifications for teaching from September 2025. The VCSE will be available to 14 to 16-year-olds from September 2027 with specifications released in academic year 2026/27 (Welsh Government, 2024a).

educational psychologists to support learner engagement and progress, health and wellbeing, and careers and work-related experience (CWRE). CWRE emerged as a particular area of emphasis in providers' collaboration with others; with over half of practitioners highlighting how work-related learning created meaningful pathways for learners who had previously disengaged from more traditional academic approaches.

21. All PRUs reported working with mainstream schools. Where collaboration worked well, communication and regular meetings to share information about a learner's progress, needs, and experiences were facilitated by designated liaison staff or the local authorities.

22. However, over half of non-PRU EOTAS providers reported little or no contact with mainstream schools. This resulted in perceived challenges such as inconsistent communication and data sharing processes to determine what learners had previously learnt and in agreeing what progression should look like for different learners.

Research Question 4: Do practitioners in PRUs have access to professional learning and support to assist with curriculum and assessment design?

23. Almost all practitioners working in PRUs reported accessing professional learning opportunities in areas including curriculum design, leadership and assessment. These practitioners noted that engaging in professional learning was beneficial to them and improved their knowledge of key aspects of Curriculum for Wales, such as the four purposes and cross-cutting themes.

24. However, a few practitioners felt that professional learning offered by education consortia and local authorities failed to address the specific challenges faced by EOTAS providers such as the need for smaller classes, limited staffing, and higher proportions of learners with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and behavioural support needs.

25. Some EOTAS practitioners reported using in-house training instead of external professional learning. Examples included sharing internal expertise and commissioning or developing bespoke training in response to need, such as

supporting a specific additional learning needs (ALN), behaviour support, or teaching and learning strategies.

Research Question 5: Are non-PRU EOTAS provided with local authority designed curriculum, as per the legislation?

26. Despite local authorities having a duty to secure appropriate curricula for learners referred to non-PRU EOTAS, more than half of these of these providers reported developing their own approach, sometimes due to having minimal direction. This was considered by a few providers to have created challenges for them in understanding and realising mandatory aspects of the Framework. This raises questions about whether learners across EOTAS provision have equitable access to learning that reflects the requirements of the Framework.

Research Question 6: How does the local authority decide what EOTAS provision should be provided to learners?

27. All local authority representatives noted that learner needs were central to determining the type of EOTAS provision allocated, along with factors such as mental health, physical health, academic progress, and engagement in mainstream education. Decisions regarding EOTAS placements involved multiple stakeholders and sometimes formal processes such as Fair Access or specialist provision were used.

28. More than half of the local authority representatives reported they had quality assurance mechanisms in place to monitor the EOTAS provision offered within their jurisdiction and ensure equity for learners who were moving across different educational settings. These included assessing the suitability of the curriculum and its relevance to learners' needs; reviewing safeguarding measures in place; and the overall quality of the learning experience.

Areas for consideration

29. The fieldwork found limited evidence to indicate whether the curricula provided by local authorities were sufficient to meet non-PRU EOTAS learner needs. More

support may therefore be needed from local authorities to strengthen this area. The following areas of consideration should be explored to facilitate this:

- local authorities should ensure that non-PRU EOTAS provision is meeting the mandatory requirements of Curriculum for Wales for all EOTAS learners

- clear communication channels between local authorities, mainstream schools, and non-PRU EOTAS providers regarding curriculum implementation should be established

- where none exist, defined quality assurance processes should be established by local authorities to monitor and review non-PRU EOTAS provision, with the responsibilities of key stakeholders clearly assigned

- local authorities should maintain regular contact with non-PRU EOTAS providers through designated liaison officers/nominated member of staff, so there is a consistent line of support for curriculum queries

- opportunities for professional learning should be provided to non-PRU EOTAS providers operating within, or commissioned by, the local authority so they are aware of Curriculum for Wales requirements and are supported to meet them effectively

30. This study highlighted several areas where professional learning opportunities for both PRUs and non-PRU EOTAS providers could be enhanced:

- opportunities for increased collaboration between EOTAS providers should be supported; this would enable practitioners to share expertise regarding how best to support learners' needs in the context of common challenges

- a more coherent professional learning offer across local authorities is important for ensuring a consistent understanding of the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales and the support needed by EOTAS learners who transition across provision.; the professional learning offered should take into account the diversity of EOTAS contexts and learners to make the professional learning offer more relevant for EOTAS providers

- good practice examples of assessment practices for Curriculum for Wales for PRUs should be provided.

31. The research identified the need for stronger methods of facilitating effective data sharing between schools, local authorities, and EOTAS providers to support progression and assessment arrangements as learners transition.

32. Welsh Government should consider options to create a secure shared digital platform for mainstream schools, local authorities, and EOTAS providers that enables:

    - real-time updates on learner progression

    - seamless transfer of assessment data

    - documentation of successful support strategies and areas of personal interest

    - recording of learners' specific needs (for example, SEMH, ALN, physical health) and current interventions

33. Designated transition coordinators within each provision (mainstream and EOTAS) could be identified to facilitate smooth transitions for learners. These roles would have responsibility for ensuring there is timely and complete information sharing between providers.

34. Establishing regular cross-sector practitioner forums to support the sharing of effective practices and improving transition experiences for learners could be explored.

35. Obtaining PRU curriculum summaries for this study was challenging. Further research should consider whether there are challenges for PRUs in developing their summaries and if so, what support might be provided to overcome this.

36. Further research should consider what improvements could be made to the visibility and availability of PRU curriculum summaries, and consideration should also be given to how an assessment of these summaries can be integrated into existing processes, such as Estyn inspections.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Welsh Government has commissioned Arad Research to lead a formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales. Arad Research is working alongside a number of organisations as part of a wide-ranging programme of research, including Cardiff Metropolitan University, Bangor University, the Open University in Wales, the University of Stirling, the University of Auckland and AlphaPlus Consultancy Ltd.

1.2. The evaluation adopts a mixed methods approach, including surveys of practitioners, surveys of parents/carers and learners, longitudinal case studies to understand schools' curriculum realisation journeys and several topic-based qualitative studies exploring specific elements of Curriculum for Wales.

1.3. This report presents the findings of qualitative research into curriculum reform in education other than at school (EOTAS) provision, including pupil referral units (PRUs) led by Bangor University in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University. The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 provides an overview of the formative evaluation, before focusing on the context and guiding research questions for this qualitative study

- Chapter 2 sets out the methodological approach adopted, describing the approach to recruiting evaluation participants, data collection methods, analysis and the limitations of the research

- Chapter 3 provides an overview of research findings

- Chapter 4 presents the conclusions and areas for consideration

Overview of the formative evaluation

1.4. The aim of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which the reforms are working as expected as set out in the [Curriculum for Wales Framework](#) (the Framework). The evaluation objectives are to:

- review the theory of change (ToC) in the [scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales](#), and make revisions if necessary, in particular to take fuller account of equity within the ToC.

- consider the extent to which the mechanisms in the ToC, and the anticipated activities, outputs, and short/medium-term outcomes are being realised as expected

- explore the degree of variation between approaches across schools and other provision[2] and describe what factors and/or conditions are supporting or impeding the effective realisation of the reforms and what additional support is needed

- explore the views, practices and experiences of senior leaders and practitioners in schools, and other settings and provision in relation to Curriculum for Wales, including to what extent and in what ways do views, experiences and practices differ for different types of practitioners and settings, and why

- explore the views, practices and experiences of senior leaders and practitioners in PRUs and other EOTAS provision in relation to Curriculum for Wales, as well as local authority officials responsible for designing the curriculum for non-PRU EOTAS provision.

- explore the views and experiences of learners in schools and other settings and provision in relation to Curriculum for Wales, as well as their parents/carers, including to what extent and in what ways do views and experiences differ for different types of learners and parents/carers and why

- draw conclusions and highlight areas for consideration for policy and practice across the whole system to support the future realisation and effectiveness of the curriculum and assessment reforms, ensuring these fully consider the breadth of the reforms across different stakeholder groups, contexts, provision and settings

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[2] Within the overarching evaluation objectives, the term 'school' is used to refer to a range of educational settings including mainstream primary and secondary schools, all-through schools, special schools, and EOTAS provision, including PRUs. In this report, references to EOTAS/EOTAS provision refer to both PRU and non-PRU EOTAS provision. Where applicable, references are made to 'PRUs', 'non-PRU EOTAS' or 'mainstream schools' where findings relate to these specific groups.

Background and context

1.5.   Curriculum for Wales is the cornerstone of the Welsh Government's efforts for educational reform and to build an education system that raises educational standards in Wales and ensures public confidence. Curriculum for Wales has four purposes which 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](#)) and Successful Futures ([Donaldson, 2015](#)), the report published following Professor Graham Donaldson's independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements, set out the 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 PRU is required to develop its own curriculum, within the nationally defined Curriculum for Wales Framework, enabling 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.

1.6.   Under the Curriculum for Wales Framework, the four purposes are underpinned by integral skills to be developed across a wide range of learning and teaching. These integral skills are: creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, personal effectiveness and planning and organising. Subjects are organised around six Areas: Expressive Arts; Health and Wellbeing; Humanities, Languages, Literacy and Communication; Mathematics and Numeracy; and Science and Technology. Across these six areas, within the [Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance](#) there are 27 mandatory statements of what matters that ensure a level of consistency in curriculum design across settings and schools, as learners must develop an understanding of all statements ([Welsh Government, 2024b](#)).

1.7.   As part of Curriculum for Wales, literacy, numeracy and digital competence are mandatory cross-curricular skills. This means that practitioners are responsible to

develop and ensure progression in these skills across all curriculum areas. When designing their curriculum, schools should also embed cross-cutting themes in learning across the curriculum. The cross-cutting themes include Relationships and sexuality education, Human rights, Diversity, Careers and work-related experiences and Local, national and international contexts.

1.8.   At the time of this research, Curriculum for Wales was in use for all primary school aged learners and for learners in Years 7 and 8.

1.9.   This section offers a brief overview to provide some background and context to the study from a review of existing literature regarding the key aspects of curriculum design and assessments related to EOTAS in Wales.

The role, structure and commissioning of EOTAS in Wales

1.10.   EOTAS is provision arranged by local authorities in Wales for learners of compulsory school age who face barriers to learning which make attendance at mainstream or special schools unsuitable (Hughes, 2019; Welsh Government, 2024c). Learners may require EOTAS instead of attending mainstream schools for a number of different reasons including social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, challenging family circumstances and personal issues. Others who attend EOTAS provision may be learners at risk of exclusion, those who persistently refuse to attend school, have additional learning needs (ALN) or face particular challenges with regards to literacy or numeracy skills.[3] The Education Act 1996 detailed the legal basis for EOTAS, highlighting that local authorities need to arrange for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise for learners who might not receive it due to illness, exclusion, or other factors.

1.11.   The most common type of EOTAS provision in Wales are PRUs. PRUs are a type of school established and maintained by a local authority and provide short or medium-term placements; reintegration support for learners returning to primary, secondary, or special schools; and/or preparation for further education, training, or employment (Hughes, 2019; Welsh Government, 2014; Welsh Government, 2024c).

1.12.   In addition to PRUs, local authorities in Wales provide EOTAS through various other provisions. Examples include but are not restricted to further education colleges,

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[3]See the paper submitted by Estyn as part of the Senedd's Children's, Young People, and Education Committee's inquiry into EOTAS.

individual tuition at home or in hospital, work-related education, third sector organisations, and tailor-made packages combining different providers and part-time attendance at mainstream schools (Estyn, 2023; Hughes, 2019).

1.13.   In the 2023/2024 academic year, 2,597 learners in Wales received EOTAS provision (Welsh Government, 2024d), 44.7% of which were enrolled to a PRU. Learners can attend EOTAS provision on a full-time, part-time or dual-registered basis. These arrangements are designed to provide suitable education based on learners' unique needs. Learners may require an EOTAS placement to aid phased transition, accommodate their mental health or medical needs, or in response to their behavioural needs (Estyn, 2023) and EOTAS provision can ease the transition between education stages (primary, secondary, post-16, further training) or the workplace. Dual-registration policies are intended to encourage mainstream schools to keep in touch with learners and stay involved in their progress while they are attending EOTAS provisions (Welsh Government, 2020).

1.14.   Provision is based on the needs of the learner and therefore there is no definitive guidance available to say how long learners should be accessing EOTAS provision. However, the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into EOTAS (Senedd Cymru, 2019) highlighted that the system should encourage an approach that supports the majority of learners to reintegrate back into mainstream education, if it is safe and appropriate to do so. This is reflected in the Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance[4] which refers to supporting reintegration and transition as a key feature of EOTAS provision.

1.15.   A report by Welsh Government (2020) highlighted that some schools commission provision to support their educational offer to learners. In some instances, this is due to the local authority delegating funding to schools to commission external provision directly rather than centrally. In other instances, schools have used their internal budgets to meet the needs of their learners.

1.16.   Only local authorities can commission EOTAS as it is defined under section 19A of The Education Act (1996). However, The Education Act (2002) and the Learning and Skills Measure (2009) provide governing bodies of maintained schools with the power to commission external services, including educational services and these

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[4] For a comprehensive overview of the Curriculum for Wales guidance for EOTAS providers please see the Designing your Curriculum section of Hwb

are being used by schools to support their curriculum offer to keep their learners in school.

Curriculum design and realisation

1.17. [The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act (2021)](#) jointly places duties on the teachers in charge, management committees, and the local authority to design and realise the curriculum in PRUs. In the case of other EOTAS provision, the local authority has a duty to secure a curriculum that complies with legal requirements [(Welsh Government, 2024e).](#)

1.18. To meet the duties set out within the Curriculum for Wales legislation [(Welsh Government, 2024e),](#) the curriculum within EOTAS provision must:

- enable learners to develop in ways described in the four purposes

- provide appropriate progression for learners

- be informed by the development and maintenance of a shared understanding of progression (as defined in Section 57 of the Act[5])

- be suitable for learners of differing ages, abilities, and aptitudes

- be broad and balanced, as far as possible

- encompass the Health and Wellbeing Area

- address the relationship and sexuality education (RSE) code, in a way that is developmentally appropriate for learners

- develop mandatory cross-curricular skills, with the Literacy and Numeracy Framework and the Digital Competency Framework sitting alongside the Curriculum for Wales Framework guidance

1.19. The curriculum must also make provision, if it is reasonably possible and appropriate to do so, that meets all other mandatory elements of the Curriculum for Wales. An example where it may be necessary to disapply or modify the curriculum is if a learner is undergoing treatment for an acute illness and it cannot be reasonably expected to fulfil the requirements of Curriculum for Wales [(Welsh Government, 2024e)](#).

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[5] [Explanatory Note and Direction Under Section 57 of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021](#)

1.20.   Part 4 of the [Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021](#) outlines the duties related to progression and assessment for schools, PRUs, funded non-maintained nursery settings, and EOTAS provision. The statutory Curriculum for Wales guidance for EOTAS also outlines that curriculum design and realisation should:

- nurture and strengthen the health and wellbeing of each learner

- encourage systematic collaboration between learners, parents/carers, school, and EOTAS providers

- provide access to an inclusive curriculum that focuses on the needs of each learner

- support EOTAS learners' reintegration or transition to mainstream education, specialist provision, further education, training, or the world of work ([Welsh Government, 2024c](#))

Assessment and progression

1.21.   Learner progression along the continuum of learning from ages 3 to 16 years is central to Curriculum for Wales. Local authorities and PRUs are required to put in place assessment arrangements for EOTAS learners that: (i) assess the progress made by learners in relation to the curriculum that has been devised for them; and (ii) consider the next steps in their progression to understand what teaching/learning is required. When planning and realising learning experiences, practitioners should be clear about why assessment is necessary, what is to be gained from it, and what the outcomes will be used for ([Welsh Government, 2024e,](#) [2024f](#)).

1.22.   Curriculum planning, design, and implementation should support learners to reintegrate into and/or transition from EOTAS to mainstream school, specialist provision, further education, training, or employment ([Welsh Government, 2024e](#)). Learners' progression should remain under review throughout the school year, and an open dialogue should be maintained between key stakeholders to develop/retain an understanding of learners' strengths, achievements, areas for improvement, and any barriers to learning ([Welsh Government, 2024e,](#) [2024f,](#) [2024g](#)).

Collaboration with stakeholders

1.23. PRUs, and other organisations commissioned by the local authority to provide non-PRU EOTAS, should make the following information available to parents/carers termly and annually:

- brief particulars of progress in learning across the curriculum

- brief commentary regarding the learner's wellbeing

- summary of progression needs and next steps

- summary of their child's attendance record, including authorised and unauthorised absences

- results of any assessments and qualifications attained brief advice of how parents/carers can support their child's progression ([Welsh Government, 2021](#))

1.24. [The Curriculum and Assessment Act Wales (2021](#)) sets out the obligation for local authorities and the practitioner in charge of the PRU to ensure that the curriculum meets requirements. This responsibility should also be shared by the management committee of individual PRU's, where such arrangements exist ([Welsh Government, 2021](#)). The management committee of PRUs should include four compulsory stakeholder groups: parents/carers, PRU staff, the local authority, and the community ([Welsh Government, 2014](#)).

Study aims and research questions

1.25. This study addressed two central aims related to EOTAS provision, these were:

- to understand how Curriculum for Wales guidance is being implemented in practice

- to explore how providers of EOTAS are supported to enact Curriculum for Wales

1.26. Following feedback from a workshop in February 2024 with Welsh Government policy officials working on EOTAS, the research team developed a list of key research questions and sub-questions that guided the data collection for this study. These were as follows:

Research Question 1: In what ways are EOTAS providers supporting learners to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework?

- How have practitioners adapted their teaching to meet the needs of individual learners since the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales?

- To what extent and in what ways is the health and wellbeing of each learner being nurtured and strengthened?

- Is there access to an inclusive curriculum that focuses on the individual needs of each learner?

- Does the local authority curriculum include both the mandatory aspects and those which the local authority must enact if practical and appropriate to do so?

Research Question 2: To what extent and in what ways have the Curriculum for Wales and assessment arrangements enabled EOTAS providers to support their learners? (Where arrangements encapsulate planning and designing; teaching and learning; reviewing curriculum; and assessment).

- How does this support equity and diversity?

- Is there any additional support practitioners need to align their practice with the expectations of the Curriculum for Wales?

Research Question 3: How are key stakeholders collaborating (or engaging in professional dialogue) to support learners being educated other than at school?

- How do these conversations inform decisions about progression and curriculum realisation?

- Are learners being education other than at schools supported to reintegrate into or transition to mainstream or specialist provision, and/or enabled to progress towards further education, training or the world of work?

Research Question 4: Do practitioners in PRUs have access to professional learning and support to assist with curriculum and assessment design?

Research Question 5: Are non-PRU EOTAS provided with local authority designed curriculum, as per the legislation?

- If not, what resources are needed to fill this gap?

- If so, is this sufficient to meet learners' needs?

Research Question 6: How do the local authorities decide what EOTAS provision should be provided to learners? Do they face challenges in finding providers who are able to enact the local authority curriculum?

2.   Methodology

2.1.   This chapter outlines the methodology employed during the research. This includes information on recruitment methods, fieldwork conducted, the analytical approach and research limitations

2.2.   A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. One of the main advantages of qualitative research is that it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and the particular contexts in which they were working.

Recruitment and sample

2.3.   The aim of the recruitment and sampling approach was to recruit individuals in a range of roles related to EOTAS provision across Wales. These included practitioners who design the curriculum and teach in EOTAS provision, and representatives from local authorities such as inclusion officers and those involved with referral, commissioning, and securing the curriculum. The rationale for this was to illustrate the diversity of approaches and experiences across provision with regards to realising the Curriculum for Wales.

2.4.   PRUs were invited to express interest in participating in one or more of the studies that were taking place during the first wave of the research as part of the formative evaluation of Curriculum for Wales. The opportunity to engage with the evaluation was publicised to PRUs through Welsh Government channels (including the Dysg newsletter and Hwb), as well as via the extensive education networks and partnerships of the higher education institution delivery partners on the evaluation. PRUs were invited to express interest in participating in any of the four studies or the Curriculum Journeys[6] study by completing an online form. Non-PRU EOTAS providers were also contacted directly with an invitation to participate through publicly available information, and Welsh Government officials distributed an invitation to participate to a small number of non-PRU EOTAS providers for which contact details were held. The ADEW (Association of Directors of Education Wales) PRU headteachers network was used to contact Directors of Education in local

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[6] The Curriculum Journeys aspect of the evaluation involved longitudinal case studies of 10 schools across Wales for the duration of the evaluation.

authorities, who were asked to share information about the research with colleagues with responsibility for EOTAS as part of their role in relevant departments (such as education and inclusion teams).

2.5.   A total of 36 individuals participated in this study including representatives from nine PRUs, nine local authorities and 10 non-PRU EOTAS providers, delivering provision for secondary aged learners up to GCSE. All regions of Wales (North, Mid and West, Central South and South East) were represented in the sample, including settings in urban and rural locations. Seven of the nine PRUs offer some type of primary-age provision, with all offering secondary provision. Three out of the ten non-PRU EOTAS providers deliver support to learners of primary school age.

2.6.   Five of the discussions took place with representatives from a PRU and associated local authority both present. All other discussions were held with PRU, non-PRU EOTAS and local authority representatives individually.

2.7.   A summary of the participants/settings involved in the study is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: PRUs, local authorities, and non-PRU EOTAS represented in the fieldwork (undertaken between June and October 2024)

Region	Number of PRUs represented	Number of local authorities represented	Number of non-PRU EOTAS represented
North	3	3	1
Mid and West	3	2	1
Central South	1	2	4
South East	2	2	4

Source: Primary data collected by the authors

Research methods

2.8.   The data collection was conducted through online discussions (Microsoft Teams). The research discussions lasted around 60 minutes and were audio recorded with the permission of participants.

2.9.   A semi-structured approach was taken for discussions using open-ended questions
that offered the flexibility to recognise variation in perspectives among different
individuals and groups within the sample. The research participants were senior
leaders and/or teaching staff from EOTAS providers or local authority
representatives who took part in one-to-one or group discussions. Local authority
representatives included a mix of senior leaders and officers such as those with
responsibility for inclusion or for managing PRUs and EOTAS provision.

2.10.   Research tools were informed by discussions at a workshop with Welsh
Government policy representatives in February 2024 and were aligned with the
overarching approach to the Curriculum for Wales formative evaluation. Full
discussion guides can be seen in Annex B.

2.11.   The aim of the discussions was to allow PRU, non-PRU EOTAS and local authority
participants to describe their perspectives and practices relating to realising
Curriculum for Wales in EOTAS provision.

2.12.   One of the models that was used as part of this research is Theory of Action (ToA).
The ToA is based on a tripartite model which centres on: understanding what
actions education leaders and practitioners are taking to support the implementation
of Curriculum for Wales; examining the constraints that influence and shape those
decisions and behaviours related to actions; consider what they perceive to be the
consequences of these actions. The discussion topic guides were therefore cross-
referenced against the ToA model when designed. Using the ToA model provided a
valuable structure to understand what EOTAS providers were doing in relation to
Curriculum for Wales and their perceptions of the emerging impact of these
activities. The ToA model was also utilised as part of the analysis process, which is
discussed in the next section.

Analysis

Discussion transcripts

2.13.   By adhering to Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) guidelines for thematic content
analysis, the researchers adopted an inductive approach to data coding. This
allowed the researchers to identify themes within the data that naturally occurred
without any pre-conceptions and to limit repetition in reporting where answers to

research questions overlapped. The researchers used the software tool NVivo for managing and analysing the large quantities of qualitative data efficiently and rigorously. Braun and Clarke's (2022) six step process to analysis was followed:

- familiarisation with the data (reading each of the transcripts of discussions to clarify understanding of content discussed)

- generating initial codes to identify significant data (generating and reviewing the codes in relation to the research questions and topics set out in the discussion guides)

- searching for themes (organising these codes into groups based on commonalities enabled themes to be identified)

- reviewing themes (refining these themes to ensure they accurately reflect the data and are distinct from one another)

- defining and naming themes (clearly defining what each theme represents and assigning concise names that capture their essence)

- producing the report (presenting the themes in a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions)

2.14. Once the discussion transcripts were anonymised and checked for accuracy, the researchers re-read the transcripts multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content and to identify preliminary patterns or recurring ideas.

2.15. The next stage involved generating initial codes from the data, a process facilitated by NVivo's coding features. This involved labelling sections of the data with 'codes' that represent specific concepts or ideas. By highlighting relevant sections of the transcript and assigning codes, the research team systematically categorised the data.

2.16. Following refinement, the research team explored the themes against the research questions and began to construct the narrative presented within Section 3 of this report. The ToA model was referenced as part of this process and analysis, so that consideration was given to the relationships between actions (reported by participants), the constraints (or conditions that influence those actions) and the consequences. At least two researchers involved in this study were engaged in each part of the process throughout.

Review of curriculum summaries

2.17.   It is a mandatory requirement for PRUs to publish a curriculum summary before the start of each academic year and update as appropriate ([Welsh Government, 2024e](#)). The Welsh Government does not, however, specify that a curriculum summary should be published online. During the initial planning of this study, it was intended that all PRUs and local authority representatives in the sample would be asked to share a copy of their curriculum summary, where one was available. The purpose of this was three-fold: (i) it would provide insight into the awareness of this requirement; (ii) the content could be analysed to examine to what extent the summaries conform to Curriculum for Wales guidance; (iii) it could further substantiate some of the themes/issues that were raised in discussions. However, despite efforts to obtain the curriculum summaries, only three practitioners responded to the request.

2.18.   Contacting all PRUs and relevant local authority officials to obtain this information was considered. However, there was a concern that this may pose a validity risk in that curriculum summaries may be produced specifically for this fieldwork as attention would be drawn to the requirement.

2.19.   It is acknowledged that it would have been beneficial to review the contents of these summaries in more depth to complement the analysis of the discussion data and provide further insight and examples that would address the research questions. However, it would not have been possible to draw meaningful conclusions from just three summaries. Therefore, it was agreed with Welsh Government officials to not progress this element of the methodology; however, a recommendation has been made later in the report to consider how a collation and assessment of these summaries could be integrated into existing processes, such as Estyn inspections.

Limitations

2.20.   The following limitations of the research, and mitigation measures, are outlined below.

2.21.   Thirty-six practitioners agreed to participate in the study. The sample's composition was made up of different individuals across nine PRUs, nine local authorities and 10 non-PRU EOTAS providers. Welsh language EOTAS providers did not form part of

the sample, however, where relevant for example in areas with high levels of Welsh speakers, Welsh language and bilingual provision was discussed.

2.22.   The voluntary nature of participation may have also affected some individuals' motivation to participate. While these diverse viewpoints are valuable, the sample was small and does not represent all types of EOTAS provision across Wales. Findings are thus not generalisable.

2.23.   The discussions carried out as part of this study provided a snapshot of a moment in time, limiting the ability to explore PRUs' and non-PRU EOTAS' Curriculum for Wales 'journey' and progress over time.

2.24.   Due to the limitations on time available for discussions (discussions with participants lasted on average 60 minutes), it was not always possible to get a full sense of what planning had been undertaken and the level of detail that was involved.

2.25.   Beyond the participant groups recruited, there are other stakeholders that play a key role in the development of EOTAS curriculum and supporting learner transitions to and from PRUs, such as parents/carers and practitioners in mainstream schools, who were not included in the sample.

2.26.   This strand of the research did not include the perspectives of learners (i.e., their experiences of the curriculum in EOTAS provision), but this could be explored in other areas of the formative evaluation (specifically within planned qualitative research with learners). Some of the themes and insights arising from the data collection offer elements to explore with learners through other stages of the evaluation.

2.27.   Researchers were conscious of the need to mitigate the risk of social desirability bias[7] from participants, who may have been inclined to provide responses they felt were expected or aligned with policy norms. For example, practitioners in this study may have omitted some details about the challenges that they have faced with Curriculum for Wales implementation due to fear that it may reflect negatively on them or the provision they provide. To mitigate this risk, the team emphasised how honest feedback could positively influence improvements to policy and practice, while ensuring complete anonymity in the final report.

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[7] 'Social desirability bias' refers to potential bias in research where the answer given may be affected by what the respondent perceives to be socially acceptable.

2.28. Researchers' bias is a potential limitation of social research which was mitigated in this study. Throughout this process, researchers kept a reflexivity journal to reflect on their personal experiences, thoughts, and interactions at different stages of the research process from design through to analysis and reporting. This enhanced self-awareness and offered opportunities to reduce bias or reflect on its potential impact (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017).

3.   Findings

3.1.   This chapter presents the findings of the research, drawing on conversations with the 36 practitioners. From herein the term 'practitioners' reflects those working in EOTAS to deliver provision to learners, whilst 'representatives' denotes those in local authorities who are responsible for overseeing or commissioning EOTAS provision. The research tools in Annex B set out the questions practitioners and local authority representatives were asked during the discussions, each of these aiming to address the overarching research questions.

3.2.   The research sought to address two central aims in relation to EOTAS provision. These were to:

- understand how Curriculum for Wales guidance is being implemented in practice

- explore how EOTAS providers are supported to enact Curriculum for Wales

3.3.   Following analysis, the research team identified the following themes based on the data collected during the study:

- Theme 1**:** Curriculum design and flexibility

- Theme 2: Assessment and progression

- Theme 3: Collaboration and partnership working

Theme 1: Curriculum design and flexibility

3.4.   This theme documents what practitioners and local authority representatives perceived to be the benefits and challenges associated with realising Curriculum for Wales within EOTAS provision.

Theme 1: Curriculum design and flexibility

Most EOTAS practitioners and local authority representatives believed that the flexibility of Curriculum for Wales brought numerous benefits to learners within EOTAS provision. This included the following points:

- The flexibility afforded to design a bespoke curriculum within the nationally defined Framework was considered by most practitioners to work well given the diverse characteristics and backgrounds of learners supported in EOTAS provision.

- Most local authority representatives highlighted how the flexibility of Curriculum for Wales facilitated practitioner agency and ownership in developing the curriculum. This enabled practitioners in EOTAS provision to develop local links to community groups to provide more authentic and localised opportunities for their learners.

- EOTAS practitioners commonly reflected on how flexible approaches were leading to more supportive learning environments and varied experiences for learners. A more holistic approach to learning that valued wellbeing and personal development also contributed to improved behaviour, according to some practitioners.

- Most EOTAS practitioners and local authority representatives also noted that Curriculum for Wales facilitated the integration of health and wellbeing to all aspects of the learning experience. It was felt that this integration supported learners' health and wellbeing in a more cross-curricular way.

- Most EOTAS providers reported tailoring their curricula to meet learners' needs and aspirations. Many noted this was having a positive impact on learners' attitudes to learning, leading to a sense of achievement and increased self-esteem.

- Around half of EOTAS practitioners highlighted that implementation of Curriculum for Wales had led to a greater emphasis on learner voice and involving them in curriculum design. This was considered to have empowered learners to take ownership of their education and develop a sense of purpose.

A number of challenges were mentioned by EOTAS practitioners and local authority representatives. These included the following points:

- A few practitioners expressed concern and uncertainty around the new GCSEs and other qualifications, with the lack of guidance and specificity leaving them unsure about whether they were meeting the expectations of Curriculum for Wales and effectively preparing learners for examinations.

- A few PRU leaders noted a reluctance amongst their staff to move away from subject specialisms and embrace more cross-curricular approaches. These participants highlighted how, due to the often small-sized workforce within PRUs, taking on responsibilities across all areas of the curriculum could be overwhelming for staff.

- Nearly half of non-PRU EOTAS practitioners perceived Curriculum for Wales to have little relevance to their own provision. Reasons for this included having different non-academic learning priorities and a focus on vocational and employability needs. This related to learners who were dual-registered and therefore also attending mainstream schools. As such, these practitioners did not feel that the introduction of Curriculum for Wales had led to changes in their own provision or practice.

- More than half of non-PRU EOTAS practitioners reported having little contact with their local authority concerning curriculum design and delivery and therefore received minimal guidance in understanding and realising mandatory aspects of the Framework.

- Due to the variety of different provision, some PRU practitioners and local authority representatives reported acute challenges in effectively supporting dual-registered learners from different mainstream schools. They noted how differences in curricula and the sequencing of learning created difficulties in ensuring curriculum alignment.

- A few local authority representatives highlighted concerns that single-registered EOTAS learners were likely have a narrower curriculum than those in mainstream schools. This was highlighted as being particularly relevant to learners approaching their GCSE studies due to staffing capacity or the perceived need amongst practitioners to focus on specific subjects and qualifications.

Benefits

3.5.   It was a common view amongst EOTAS practitioners that the flexibility of Curriculum for Wales allowed them to be responsive to learner needs and to adapt their curriculum accordingly. The flexibility afforded to design a bespoke curriculum within the nationally defined Framework was considered to work well given the diverse characteristics and backgrounds of learners supported in EOTAS provision. EOTAS providers reported developing bespoke learning experiences tailored to individual learners' interests, aspirations, and needs.

> "There's a lot more flexibility. It's very much around the needs of the kids and their abilities and giving them an experience that they can then build on." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

> "[The learners are] all completely different. It's very hard to say one size fits all. We really have to adapt and change. I feel that the [Curriculum for Wales] does give us some sort of flexibility for that." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.6.   Most local authority representatives referred to the importance of EOTAS practitioners having the opportunity to offer a bespoke curriculum that met the needs of their individual learners through the enactment of the Curriculum for Wales. These representatives also perceived that practitioners had a greater understanding of the potential for more personalised learning, due to the flexibility of Curriculum for Wales.

> "It's not a content-driven curriculum. It's not an outcome-driven curriculum in the way it was. I think that it is a purpose-driven curriculum and giving people the opportunity to develop what they believe to be best for their contexts." (Representative, Local Authority)

3.7.   Most local authority representatives also reported that Curriculum for Wales allowed for practitioner agency and ownership in developing a curriculum that reflected their respective local communities. They suggested that this allowed for greater responsiveness to topics and events in their communities, bringing more authenticity and local context to learning. One participant who held a dual role within a PRU and the local authority noted that having agency to develop links with the local community was beneficial for learners.

> "…[with] things like teacher agency and ownership over the curriculum it feels like there is more control - the ability to develop a local curriculum that reflects the needs of the locality and then helps children and pupils see their locality…the idea of bringing authenticity into learning far more - and

again…that agency to own and develop their own local curriculum." (Representative, Local Authority)

"The young people feel very isolated, so I'm trying to develop links within our school community and with a local community...some of our young people are working with local residents and developing those positive experiences of giving back. If they're growing stuff [in the gardens and polysheds], we can donate what we grow. At the same time [they are learning about] cooking on a budget...we'll be teaching them hospitality and catering and maybe opening up to the dream of a community café." (Practitioner and Local Authority Representative, PRU)

3.8.   EOTAS practitioners frequently expressed the view that this flexibility was missing within the previous curriculum, which was considered to be more rigid and structured with 'too much' emphasis on numeracy and literacy. They highlighted that Curriculum for Wales allowed for more freedom and creativity, not only in learning and teaching, but to also meet the wider needs of their learners and engage in activities that could benefit the local community. Examples included more outdoor learning to contextualise knowledge of geography and local history; offering a wider variety of subject choices for learners completing qualifications; and providing learners with more time in work-based settings to gain workplace skills, such as stock counting and practising operating machinery.

> "[The learners] engaged because we're trying to create a real hands-on engaging curriculum...We were out and about quite a lot...It's a real sense of 'Let's get down to Aldi's', 'Let's get over to the memorial area. Why is that there?'…that's what the curriculum has allowed us the freedom to do." (Practitioner, PRU)

3.9.   Practitioners noted that the flexible nature of Curriculum for Wales allowed practitioners to create a more supportive and relevant learning environment, which they reported to be beneficial for their learners. Most practitioners observed increased engagement and motivation with learners through this process. A more holistic approach to learning that valued wellbeing and personal development also contributed to improved behaviour, according to some practitioners.

> "We do 'listening to learners' activities and take feedback from the pupils in the PRU and they're certainly saying, 'I want to come to school now more because I'm doing more of the things that I want to do' and [it is] more interesting because they're linked to activities in the community or things that are in the news." (Practitioner, Local Authority)

> "We always start off on anger management and mental health - that's our core structure. And then [learners] have got the ability to choose the next unit they

[want to follow] or the next four or five through the whole academic year…so, you can see how far they've come in regards to the basic sort of skills. They can see what qualifications and units they've achieved with us. They can also see their behaviour, attitudes, everything else has all improved." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

"I like the fact that it [the Curriculum for Wales] is much freer and more creative…We're able to teach numeracy and literacy, but also through creativity and making things more fun now. You're given much more flexibility to suit your learners." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.10. Most practitioners and local authority representatives acknowledged that health and wellbeing (as well as creating a nurturing learning environment more broadly) had always been a priority when supporting learners through EOTAS. However, the perceived flexibility within Curriculum for Wales allowed a shift from a content-driven approach to a more learner-centred, purpose-driven model which allowed for the integration of health and wellbeing into all aspects of the learning experience. This gave practitioners the opportunity to create an environment and ethos that supported the wellbeing of individual learners in a cross-curricular context. Some approaches cited included outdoor learning and pursuits, community engagement, music therapy, and mindfulness.

> "Nurture obviously is what we do first and foremost…Going back to the four purposes - healthy, confident individuals - that's what we're trying to make our students hopefully become by the time they leave us. That isn't anything new to us." (Practitioner, PRU)

> "Many of our learners are anxious or have got health needs. If they're not in a place to learn, we've got to focus on their health and wellbeing first…it's very personalised to every learner, but it really is at the heart of our curriculum." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.11. Most EOTAS providers reported tailoring their curricula to meet learners' needs and aspirations. This included taking a more practical approach to provide opportunities; for example, using work experience and sessions with professionals from different careers (addressing the careers and work-related experience (CWRE) cross cutting theme). Many noted this was having a positive impact on learners' attitudes to learning as the personalised approach allowed them to focus on progression and attainment, leading to a sense of achievement and increased self-esteem.

> "I think there's quite a focus on [learners'] aspirations [in the Curriculum for Wales]. I know that we certainly spend a lot of time talking about that...there's always a lot of trying to bring these new experiences and new understandings to learners within EOTAS. I think that's always been key…with careers and

work-related experiences, we do a lot of work with Careers Wales. We have group sessions where we have different professionals come in and try to inspire our learners." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

"Yes [it does enhance learners' attitudes towards learning] because they feel a sense of achievement because if you're setting it at their level, they're able to achieve it and then they accomplish something. And yes, definitely it raises their self-esteem." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.12.   Around half of EOTAS practitioners highlighted that implementation of Curriculum for Wales had led to a greater emphasis on listening to learners' voices and involving them in curriculum design. This focus on learner agency was considered to empower them to take ownership of their education and develop a sense of purpose. One example provided from a PRU was a charity initiative which learners set up to support those in the local community who were experiencing homelessness. The learners took an active role in the organisation and running of the event, which supported ideas around enterprise and citizenship.

> "We have pupil voice sessions, we have team talk, we have the [Religion, Values and Ethics aspect of the] curriculum and that also allows pupils to have some lead in their own learning. I think those elements have been really important for us…it led to students wanting to work with a local charity. We worked with [homelessness organisation] where the students had to organise, set up, advertise and run a 'give what you can, take what you need' [stall/event]…It was driven partly by the qualification, but also how the students wanted to interpret and run with it." (Practitioner, PRU)

Challenges

3.13.   A perceived lack of guidance and specificity around new GCSE and the forthcoming VCSE (Vocational Certificate of Secondary Education) qualifications presented challenges for a few practitioners. In relation to exams, moving away from what was perceived as a more prescriptive curriculum made it difficult for these practitioners to know what to teach and whether their current resources and foci were appropriate. They felt this lack of guidance and specificity made it harder to ensure they were meeting the expectations of Curriculum for Wales and preparing learners effectively for their next steps, including examinations. More clarity regarding how the new GCSE and VCSE qualifications would look was desired by a few

practitioners as specifications for many subjects were not yet published at the time of this fieldwork.[8]

> "…because schools have autonomy over their own curriculum, how can we ensure that there's sort of parity between curriculums? If we're thinking about formal qualifications, are we going to all be teaching the skills that are required for them to achieve that qualification? We don't know yet, do we? Because the new teaching of the GCSE isn't until next year." (Practitioner, PRU)

> "Once it gets to key Stage 4, we really struggle to be able to do a new curriculum as well as old qualifications and now bringing in new qualifications. The balance on staff time and staff being able to do that is really, really hard and I haven't, we haven't mastered how to do that yet...Some key planning documents, for instance in English language GCSE over key Stage 4 and how that aligns to the new curriculum would be fantastic." (Practitioner, PRU)

3.14. Some practitioners highlighted that implementing Curriculum for Wales required a 'mindset shift' in the way they thought about teaching and learning. Due to the more holistic and integrated nature of Curriculum for Wales, some practitioners, who had trained and been employed as subject specialists (for example, teachers of English), perceived that they were expected to embrace a more cross-curricular approach. A few PRU leaders reported reluctance of their staff to attend training for curriculum areas outside of their subject specialism in the early stages of implementation. Two PRU leaders working in the secondary sector reported that taking on responsibilities across all areas of the curriculum could be overwhelming for staff, noting that PRUs often have fewer staff to share responsibility compared to mainstream schools.

> "In the beginning, they [teachers] were only comfortable joining the AoLE [Area] networks of their subject...it's just about that constant reminding, we're all teachers of health, wellbeing, cross curricular skills. As secondary teachers we're notorious for saying 'that's not my subject'...some staff are really embracing this whole new approach. For other staff, they're a little bit more reluctant to give up on their subject." (Practitioner, PRU)

> "I think the biggest issue is working in a small team. The responsibilities become massive…I don't mind releasing staff to go and do [training], but their heads just explode with all that information. They need to lead on this and this and this. They just go 'wow'...I think that one of the barriers is overload." (Practitioner, PRU)

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[8] Note that the discussions were conducted between July and August 2024, with the first wave of the Made-for-Wales GCSEs due to be delivered from September 2025. Subject specifications were made available via the WJEC website in September 2024, shortly after the discussions were completed, with Welsh Government publishing 14 to 16 learning guidance in September 2024.

3.15.   Nearly half of non-PRU EOTAS practitioners perceived Curriculum for Wales to have little relevance to their provision for various reasons. Three mentioned that they focused more on their own specialism and that their priority was their learners' vocational and employability skill needs. Another mentioned that Curriculum for Wales had little relevance as their focus was not on academic skills, but rather on learners' behaviour and wellbeing. These comments referred only to EOTAS learners who were dual-registered with a mainstream school and who were likely to be attending lessons focusing on other Areas there. Another non-PRU EOTAS practitioner reported not noticing any change in what was being offered by the local authority since the roll out of the Curriculum for Wales as they had "always been based as practical learning as opposed to anything else" (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS).

3.16.   Six practitioners working for non-PRU EOTAS providers, representing more than half the non-PRU EOTAS sample, reported having little to no contact with local authorities in terms of curriculum design and delivery. All six were based in different local authorities across Wales. Opportunities and challenges with regards to collaboration between EOTAS providers and local authorities are further discussed in sections 3.45-3.49.

> "We haven't had any sort of help from local authorities." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.17.   One non-PRU EOTAS practitioner reported that, as there was little contact with the local authority concerning curriculum design and delivery, their knowledge of Curriculum for Wales came from their experiences of delivering the Agored Cymru[9] qualifications. Some of the qualifications they mentioned included personal social education, work-related education, independent living skills, and essential skills for work and life. They perceived that this holistic approach "falls in line with the Welsh curriculum" (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS). Two other non-PRU EOTAS practitioners also reported using the Agored Cymru qualifications as part of their curriculum design, but it was unclear as to whether this was prompted by the roll out of Curriculum for Wales.

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[9] Agored Cymru is an awarding body for education and training providers across Wales. The qualifications are designed to meet skills needs in Wales and support employability and progression for learners.

3.18.	Some practitioners working in PRUs and local authority representatives also highlighted that dual-registration arrangements presented an acute challenge for curriculum alignment as EOTAS learners within a PRU attended different mainstream schools, each with a potentially different curriculum and sequencing of learning: "[Learners] have to compartmentalise the curriculum when they are with us, to the curriculum [at] school. We've got 59 schools that potentially refer pupils to us. There's absolutely no way we can follow 59 different curriculums" (Practitioner, PRU). To manage this, one practitioner considered that it was important to develop an agreed understanding for dual-registered learners between their mainstream school and the EOTAS provider to support progress and potential reintegration.

> "The complexities come when they [learners] are registered in more than one [educational provision]. They spend part of the week with us, part of the week in mainstream. So, it is aligning the curriculum, but they come from mainstream schools who have their own ideas about what individual curriculums are." (Practitioner, PRU)

3.19.	Two of the local authority representatives noted that the single-registered EOTAS learners were likely to have a narrower curriculum than in a mainstream school, particularly for Year 10 or 11 learners, due to staffing capacity or the perceived need to focus on core subjects and qualifications.

> "Their curriculum is so small that they might only be doing three or four focused GCSEs [and so] actually the breadth of curriculum sometimes gets missed then." (Representative, Local Authority)

Theme 2: Assessment and progression

3.20.   This theme focuses on experiences and challenges EOTAS practitioners and local
authority representatives reported surrounding assessment practices and the
monitoring of learner progression.

Theme 2: Assessment and progression

It was a common view that the introduction of Curriculum for Wales supported a positive
shift towards the acceptance of more holistic and qualitative approaches to assessment in
EOTAS provision. Some providers cited examples of changes to assessment practices,
which included:

- focusing on assessing individual progress rather than attainment against fixed targets
- measuring a range of non-academic outcomes such as wellbeing, confidence and
behaviour to gain a holistic understanding of learners' progress

Some EOTAS practitioners spoke of involving their learners in target setting and in self-
assessment. This was reported to have helped learners to develop confidence and
independence.

Some EOTAS providers reported that they celebrated progress data in areas that
mainstream schools may overlook (for example attendance, behaviour, attitudes towards
learning). This was reported to have helped change learners' perspectives around what
success can look like.

More than half of EOTAS practitioners commented that wellbeing and personal
development was as important as academic progress. This resulted in the Health and
Wellbeing Area being placed at the centre of their EOTAS provision, with assessments in
place to monitor learner development.

Since enacting the Curriculum for Wales and removal of attainment targets, most
practitioners in EOTAS provision encountered challenges in knowing how and when to
conduct assessments. This – along with the use of different reporting strategies, varied
expectations about which metrics indicate progress, and inconsistent methods of sharing
data between education providers – was reported to have made it difficult to align and
compare learner progress during transitions.

Around half of practitioners reported that short term interventions for learners within EOTAS
provision made it difficult to complete meaningful assessments and understand progress in
relation to elements of the Curriculum for Wales Framework, notably progression steps.

Practitioners in EOTAS provision noted that were able to evidence learners' progress in non-academic domains (e.g. in wellbeing, behaviour) but found it challenging to measure or quantify the contribution they made towards learners' progress in knowledge and skills.

Shifting assessment practices

3.21. Almost all practitioners reported focusing on the individual progress of learners, rather than fixed attainment targets. The introduction of Curriculum for Wales was considered by most to support a positive shift towards the acceptance of more holistic and qualitative approaches to assessment in EOTAS provision. A few practitioners reflected on new methods they introduced to capture progress since introducing the Curriculum for Wales. These aimed to maintain an element of individualisation by gauging and acting upon learners' interests, with examples including:

- trialling a learner journal, which captured these interests along with key details from Individual Development Plans (IDPs)[10] (where applicable), and individual targets

- encouraging learners to attend 'Lego therapy' to collect data on how they play and engage with tasks

- supplementing GCSE work with learning tools designed to enable learners to see how they are developing skills that align with the four purposes and how activities can be designed to fill any gaps

3.22. Some EOTAS practitioners spoke of involving their learners in target setting and in self-assessment. The rationale underpinning this process was to allow learners to "understand this is where I've got to go, this is where I could get to, and this is what I need to do" (Practitioner, PRU). This was reported to have helped learners to develop confidence and independence.

3.23. Some EOTAS providers reported that they celebrated progress in areas that mainstream schools may overlook (for example attendance, behaviour, attitudes towards learning), which helped change learners' perspectives around what success can look like. One practitioner noted that many of their learners do not

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[10] IDPs are part of the ALN system's processes. For more information see: The additional learning needs transformation programme: frequently asked questions.

believe they can achieve GCSEs when they first arrive, but by the end of the year "they have 7, 8, or 9 different certificates in their hands, and they can't believe how much work they've actually done" (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS). EOTAS practitioners reflected on how celebrating the journey can help learners to better understand expectations and develop confidence.

> "Over a couple of lessons, [we develop] an assessment for learning table [for] whatever we're working on. And the students are clear on the objectives, aims and targets. We've got a table where you can get the students to highlight a statement that they feel they've covered, and a space for a comment or something really individualised to that lesson [which] they think they've achieved." (Practitioner, PRU)

3.24.   More than half of EOTAS practitioners commented that wellbeing and personal development was as important as academic progress. This has resulted in the Health and Wellbeing Area being at the centre of their EOTAS provision, with assessments in place to monitor this development. Some of the wellbeing assessments cited were derived from the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)[11] programme and the 'connected to nature'[12] scale. A few EOTAS practitioners reported struggling to quantify progress in the areas of wellbeing and engagement in learning, and just under half of all the EOTAS practitioners observed variation between provision regarding what constitutes 'progress'. They explained that as EOTAS providers they value and work on improving wellbeing, confidence, attendance, behaviour, attitudes to learning, and overcoming barriers for their learners. However, parents, mainstream schools, and further education/training providers were perceived to often remain primarily focused on traditional academic outcomes and formal qualifications. One LA representative suggested that this challenge existed before the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales, but it is unclear if this was the view of the majority.

> "We measure success in a very different way to a mainstream school. Our mainstream schools might laugh at what we consider as achievements, but for us, it's massive. We might have kids that come to us with 3% attendance. And if they then leave at 20%, that's excellent." (Practitioner, PRU)

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[11] ELSA is an approach to help schools support the emotional and social development and needs of learners, attempting to overcome barriers to learning and wellbeing by building emotional resilience, self-awareness and social skills.

[12] The connectedness to nature scale: A measure of individuals' feeling in community with nature. By Mayer and Frantz 2004.

3.25.   It was a common view that the previous curriculum placed more emphasis on conducting assessments to assess progress towards attainment targets, but that these were not always appropriate for EOTAS learners. For example, several EOTAS practitioners noted that some of their learners were not able to sit and focus for long periods of time, had negative experiences of education/assessment in the past, had gaps in learning such as limited reading and writing skills due to absence, and had low self-esteem and confidence due to being "knocked back so many times" (Practitioner, PRU). It was also noted that some learners are only referred to EOTAS provision for a short period of time. It was a common view that assessment under the Curriculum for Wales is a more flexible approach and less stressful for learners with diverse learning needs.

> "The Curriculum for Wales does allow greater flexibility to design that curriculum component and look at the assessment that goes alongside it. I think it is a movement in the right direction, but more importantly it gives PRU and EOTAS [providers] an opportunity to do something that perhaps wasn't there 5-10 years ago because it was quite a restrictive curriculum offer." (Representative, Local Authority)

Challenges in measuring progress

3.26.   Whilst assessment against attainment targets was not always seen as appropriate for EOTAS learners, not assessing in this way did pose two main concerns: (i) communicating between providers and (ii) accountability in inspections. These are outlined in more detail below.

Communicating between providers

3.27.   It was a common view amongst practitioners that the removal of attainment targets introduced challenges relating to how and when to conduct assessments. This - along with the use of different reporting strategies, varied expectations about which metrics indicate progress, and inconsistent methods of sharing data between education providers – was reported to have made it difficult to align and compare learner progress during transitions.

> "I think teachers are quite nervous about how they're assessing and whether they're doing it properly. And maybe if there was a bit more of an assessment bible, then we'd know that we were doing it correctly." (Practitioner, PRU)

> "Everybody doing their own different assessments is very confusing…I think we should work collaboratively with schools and the local authority and work together on an assessment tool that we can use together for recording." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

> "As far as mainstream schools, it would be good if there was a shared system, whereby we could assess a [learner], they could assess a [learner] at the same time and (then) share that data. We're not there yet, so we report back weekly on things like attendance and engagement, which is massive for our young people and their wellbeing...In good examples, we get that back in return from mainstream schools. It's quite rare. And there's a lack of consistency around expectations for that." (Practitioner, PRU)

3.28.   While nearly half of the EOTAS practitioners reported using baseline assessments to understand learners' prior knowledge and learning needs upon entry[13] a few nonetheless highlighted difficulties in ascertaining this. This was linked to learners arriving from different mainstream schools with diverse approaches to realising Curriculum for Wales and sharing data. One practitioner working in a PRU noted that the information they received was often focused on reasons for referral (for example, behaviour or attendance issues) rather than academic progress or previous learning undertaken by the learner.

3.29.   Due to learners often only attending EOTAS provision for short periods of time, around half of practitioners mentioned offering short-term interventions or short-stay provision, ranging from a few weeks to a few months. They highlighted that this made it difficult to complete meaningful assessments relating to progression steps, which meant that the progress learners did make in other areas (for example, wellbeing and behaviour) was not easily visible or quantifiable through the Curriculum for Wales lens.

> "It's harder now because of the progression steps... [It is] difficult to pinpoint what progress in the [Areas] or the cross curricular skills have actually been made." (Practitioner, PRU)

> "[It is often a] very transient cohort in that they've come from all very different schools. They've had very different foundations to learn in that we haven't been part of or we're not sure about and perhaps they only stay with us for a short time...We're not taking a set of learners on a journey." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

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[13] It is a requirement for all schools and PRUs to undertake "on entry" assessments of all learners. By understanding the work and progress learners have made to date, these assessments are intended to support transition and tailoring of teaching to the individual needs of the learner. See Supporting transition from the current arrangements to Curriculum for Wales for further information.

Accountability in inspections

3.30.   Two PRU practitioners and two local authority representatives expressed concerns about evidencing progress for inspection purposes due to a lack of clear or agreed standards for accountability. A PRU practitioner stated, "people like data, they like to see shiny graphs and pie charts", but they felt sometimes progress cannot be visualised this way, such as when measuring wellbeing or changes in behaviour.

> "We know our children; we know where they need to be heading. But it's that horrible thing of an inspector comes in [and] can you prove it? It would be really interesting to look at what [Estyn] wants in terms of assessment…What criteria are Estyn looking for? Where are they getting that criteria from? And [are schools] just evidencing it through photos and things like that?" (Practitioner, PRU)

Theme 3: Collaboration and partnership working

3.31.   This theme highlights the importance of collaboration and engagement between different stakeholders involved in the implementation of Curriculum for Wales in EOTAS provision, including parents/carers, learners and practitioners.

Theme 3: Collaboration and partnership working

Most of the practitioners working in EOTAS provision reported engaging with learners and their parents/carers to support the enactment of Curriculum for Wales. A variety of different methods were used, including learner voice sessions, debates, and feedback via person-centred planning (PCP) meetings.

It was widely believed that incorporating learner and parent/carer voice helped to increase the relevance of the curriculum for learners, allowing it to be more responsive to their needs and interests, and to increase their engagement in learning.

All EOTAS practitioners referred to working well with other organisations, with examples such as:

- professional agencies supporting a holistic approach to meeting learner needs (for example Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services (CAMHS), social services)

- businesses supporting employability skills and career awareness

- working with a range of stakeholders to support the development of IDPs for learners with ALN, including the learner, their parents/carers, their school, educational psychologists, health practitioners and the local authority

Most practitioners also noted that collaboration was key to supporting the transition of learners into other provision, whilst also ensuring that their needs continued to be met. Over half of EOTAS practitioners highlighted that collaboration with organisations such as Careers Wales and local businesses helped develop employability skills and provided work experience and career guidance for their learners. This collaboration was noted by practitioners as promoting meaningful pathways for learners who had previously disengaged from more traditional academic provision.

All PRUs reported working with mainstream schools due to learners transitioning between provision. In some cases, relationships between PRUs and mainstream schools were facilitated by designated liaison personnel, open discussions and regular meetings, to share information about learners' progress, needs, and experiences.

A few non-PRU EOTAS providers noted that they sustained regular communication with mainstream schools via email and meetings. However, over half of non-PRU EOTAS providers reported little or no regular contact with schools, which presented challenges in relation to information sharing and planning learner progression. Additionally, over half of non-PRU EOTAS practitioners reported limited or no communication with local authorities. In some cases, this was reported to have presented challenges for providers in understanding and implementing Curriculum for Wales.

All local authority representatives noted that learner needs were central to determining the type of EOTAS provision allocated along with factors like mental health, physical health, academic progress, and engagement in mainstream education. Sometimes formal processes such as Fair Access Panels were used to make decisions about EOTAS placements.

Almost all PRU and a few non-PRU EOTAS practitioners reported accessing professional learning, however this varied in terms of how much professional learning they had engaged with and how recently this had taken place. Examples cited included sharing internal expertise and attending regional training opportunities.

Some faced challenges in accessing external professional learning due the impact of on provision of staff being released. A few practitioners felt that more could be done to tailor the content to address the different challenges and dynamics of EOTAS provision and the diverse needs of their learners.

Engaging learners and their parents/carers

3.32.   Most EOTAS practitioners reported using one or more strategies to engage with learners and their parents/carers to support the enactment of Curriculum for Wales. These enabled learner voice to be incorporated into curriculum design to foster greater ownership and engagement among learners.,

3.33.   For some EOTAS practitioners, such approaches were considered important, given that their learners were likely to have faced more challenges in engaging with learning compared to learners who did not receive EOTAS. Moreover, it was widely believed that incorporating learner and parent/carer voice helped to increase the relevance of the curriculum for learners, allowing provision to be more responsive to their needs and interests, and therefore more engaging.

"We use pupil voice to try and find out what the learners are interested in and encourage their aspirations…we're just trying to involve the learners as much as we can in their learning." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

"They're involved with their own curriculum because they have such a personalised curriculum we couldn't do without their voice...they buy into it far more, if it's that they are personally interested in." (Practitioner, PRU)

3.34. Most practitioners valued parents'/carers' insights into what motivated and interested their children, as well as what they felt was working or not working well. This included using channels such as messaging apps, informal conversations, questionnaires, and PCP meetings. For these practitioners, this engagement helped support the creation of a curriculum that met learners' individual social, emotional and/or behavioural needs. It was unclear to what extent this represented a change in practice that was prompted by the introduction of Curriculum for Wales.

3.35. At a more formal level, practitioners in PRUs noted that parents/carers were involved in PCP meetings, the PRU management committee and meetings with multiple stakeholders, such as social services, to discuss how to best support their children. Many non-PRU EOTAS practitioners mentioned having regular contact with parents/carers through more informal means such as phone calls, texts, and other online platforms.

3.36. However, a few practitioners in both PRU and Non-PRU EOTAS provision also noted some challenges in engaging with parents/carers. These included the time needed to successfully engage with them and the influence of their own prior experiences of education, particularly if they had been negative. One non-PRU EOTAS practitioner also highlighted that their learners were referred from across the county so it could sometimes be challenging to engage with parents/carers face-to-face.

"Each of our centres engages closely with parents. Also, obviously, we do PCP meetings where parents and the child [have] a big voice in terms of planning ahead and what the next steps are for that year." (Practitioner, PRU)

"We work really closely with parents and carers…the only difficulty is that it takes quite a long time to get those parents on board. For some of our learners, if they've had quite poor experiences of school and parents had quite poor experiences, they're somewhat reluctant to have those conversations because they think it's going to be something negative. You're trying to change the mindset of the whole family really to have that those aspirations and to look forward." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

Multi-agency working

3.37. All EOTAS practitioners referred to working well with other professional organisations and partners (such as CAMHS, social workers, occupational therapists, youth justice, educational psychologists) to support learners with 'complex needs', especially in relation to wellbeing. For example, one non-PRU EOTAS practitioner mentioned working with the local educational psychology department who undertake wellbeing assessments and offer advice on learner needs. Other organisations, particularly social services and youth justice, were reported to be involved in referral processes or as part of the PRU management committee.

3.38. All practitioners considered that these relationships were successful in supporting the holistic and inclusive approach they developed through the Curriculum for Wales. They noted that these partnerships were generally initiated by EOTAS providers, whereby they "can just pick the phone up and say 'we need this support, or can we have some advice?'" (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS).

> "[As support for learners] we've got social services, we've got young people that are looked after and therefore looked after coordinators, we've got an early help hub which is that step below social services. We've got counselling and CAMHS services" (Practitioner, PRU)

3.39. Over half of EOTAS practitioners highlighted that collaboration with organisations such as Careers Wales and local businesses helped develop employability skills, provided work experience and career guidance to their learners. These practitioners noted an emphasis on helping learners understand the world around them and promoting meaningful pathways for learners who had previously disengaged from more traditional academic provision. One PRU worked with a local company that provided advice and guidance around what makes a good CV and conducted roleplay interviews; two PRUs noted that they worked with local businesses to arrange work experience placements for their learners; one non-PRU EOTAS provider referred to links with the Arts Council for Wales and the local football club which had led to authentic learning experiences for learners. It is worth noting that engagement with external partners and services was not consistent across EOTAS providers, and frequency of contact with these organisations varied depending on when providers felt they had a gap in their provision and when external input would be valuable.

"We had trips to local industries and looked at the types of occupations that are on offer there. Again, just for them [learners] to see what is around because sometimes they have a very narrow vision of what they can do and where they can go. As part of that [Stage 1 Careers and work-related experience, (CWRE)[14]] award, we were looking to open their eyes to other things in the area, what qualifications would you need and the different approaches. It's not just straight GCSE [to] A level." (Practitioner, PRU)

"We have a multi-agency approach to everything…we work closely with the third sector as well…we think it's very important for our learners to understand the society and the community around them. So that means we're working with as many different people as we think is appropriate." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.40.   Most practitioners also noted that collaboration was important in supporting the transition and/or reintegration of learners into other provision. Some EOTAS providers used a gradual reintegration approach, working closely with schools and other providers, to encourage learners to spend increasing amounts of time in mainstream settings, whilst still receiving any support required. This "joined up working…is essential" (Practitioner, PRU). For these practitioners, collaboration helped to ensure that learners' needs were being met and that conversations about their progress were taking place.

3.41.   Many practitioners highlighted factors that enabled or facilitated collaboration for the transition and reintegration of learners. All PRUs worked with mainstream schools, as this was where their learners came from and where they might transition back to. In some cases, relationships between PRUs and mainstream schools were facilitated via designated liaison personnel, open discussions and regular meetings to share information about a learner's progress, needs, and experiences.

3.42.   A few non-PRU EOTAS providers outlined examples of how they had remained in regular communication with mainstream schools via email and meetings after learners had moved to other provision or reintegrated into mainstream schools. However, over half reported little or no regular contact with schools. They reported that this resulted in challenges such as inconsistent data-sharing processes to determine what learners had previously learnt and in agreeing progression plans for individual learners.

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[14] For more information, please see Carers Wales 2024. Careers and work-related experiences toolkit.

3.43.   Some practitioners additionally outlined how schools, EOTAS providers, and the local authority collaborated to produce IDPs to ensure a holistic approach to meeting individual needs. These often included specific learning goals, support strategies, and a plan for transition.

> "I think one of the things that was working well was our team [for] parent partnership in school - a group of local authority staff linked to each secondary school - and we could give advice whether it was about behaviour or anxiety, school avoidance. [Schools] could flag students that were a concern, and we could offer advice that might be useful to help keep them in school before they then transferred to us. There was a lot of joined up working. And then if they did come to us, we did know a little bit about this young person and what might grab their interest." (Practitioner, PRU)

> "We've got a school liaison officer who is the one that is directly in contact with the schools. She'll be the one that's sending over the information and reports and getting information passed down to the delivery coaches." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

> "Social services, outside agencies sometimes get in touch, one school rep turns up every week to see how their kids are doing, others they just have email correspondence with us, others it's just non-existent." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.44.   There were mechanisms in place across EOTAS providers to provide a more gradual approach to transition for learners who would benefit from this (for example allowing them to spend time in a mainstream school with someone they were familiar with from the EOTAS provision present). This approach appeared to remain largely consistent across different types of EOTAS providers.

> "We meet with the schools or [the learner's] provider beforehand. And then we will also go on visits with them. We will often move our sessions into [the other provider's] buildings, so they become a bit more familiar with the buildings to start with. And it's gradual…sometimes [provider staff] even go into a class with [learners] if they need them to." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

> "We'll have transition meetings with schools or other local authorities if they go into a different local authority transition, it's over a period of weeks, months even. Sometimes we will support that young person and attend school with them if needs be. We'll share the data with school and the class teacher and all support staff." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

Collaboration with local authorities

3.45.   All local authority representatives noted that learner needs were central to determining the type of EOTAS provision allocated along with factors such as mental health, physical health, academic progress, and engagement in mainstream

education. Some local authority representatives highlighted that, in some cases, formal processes such as Fair Access Panels[15] and specialist provision panels, were used to assess learner needs and make decisions about EOTAS placements. These panels involved professionals from various agencies, including the local authority, schools, and other support services.

> "All learners will go through a fair access panel in order to go to EOTAS provision. Those who come to us are those who, for various reasons, are just unable to access full-time provision, so many of them have got mental health needs or physical health needs and are just not really coping with that sort of full-time expectation." (Representative, Local Authority)

> "We've got entries via placement panel from the local authorities. So, schools apply for a place, and we get quite an eclectic mix of children, behaviours, needs. I sit on that [fortnightly Additional Learning Needs (ALN)] panel with four or five other professionals within the local authority. And then the decision is made [on] whether we should go forward with a placement at a specialist setting such as [name of provision omitted]." (Representative, Local Authority/PRU)

3.46. More than half of the local authority representatives reported they had quality assurance mechanisms in place to monitor the EOTAS provision offered within their jurisdiction and ensure equity for learners who were moving between different educational provision. These included assessing the suitability of the curriculum and its relevance to learners' needs; reviewing safeguarding measures in place; and the overall quality of the learning experience. However, ongoing challenges because of the perceived increased flexibility in Curriculum for Wales were also noted, for example the lack of a standardised local authority curriculum across different educational provision, as well as reported inconsistencies in data collection and sharing. Local authority representatives reported that this had led to challenges for practitioners in supporting learners transitioning from EOTAS to mainstream school or vice versa, a view echoed by several EOTAS practitioners.

> "One of the great dangers of Curriculum for Wales is if all schools go off and develop their own curriculums, as kids move across settings, that transition becomes more and more complex because they're parachuted into a school." (Representative, Local Authority)

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[15] The School Admission Code (Statutory Code document no: 005/2013, 7/2013) states that all local authorities must have appropriate protocols in place for admitting children they consider to be hard to place so that unplaced children, especially the most vulnerable, are offered suitable school places promptly. Fair Access Panels are one method of ensuring fair access to all learners.

3.47.   To try to address these perceived challenges relating to transition between provision, one local authority representative highlighted that their local authority employed education improvement officers, whose role focused on developing and monitoring the implementation of Curriculum for Wales across EOTAS provision. Another representative noted the importance of quality assurance systems within their local PRU.

> "We've got an education improvement service, and the manager of the service integrates frequently with the college, and they do things like quality assure the mapping of the provision, so that's really strong...sometimes like the PRU for instance, they'll offer quite a wide provision and that's where our PRU quality assurance mechanisms kick in to make sure that's effective."
> (Representative, Local Authority)

3.48.   Over half of the non-PRU EOTAS providers reported a lack of communication and support from local authorities regarding Curriculum for Wales, and this was considered to have created challenges in understanding and realising mandatory aspects. A few non-PRU EOTAS providers highlighted a need to improve the process of sharing information and data with mainstream schools about learner needs and progress; developing consistent approaches to curriculum and assessment; as well as aligning training and sharing expertise. One non-PRU EOTAS practitioner did report having a good relationship with a specific department within the local authority although this was not in relation to Curriculum for Wales, suggesting relationships between EOTAS providers and local authorities are multiple and varied in nature.

> "I think we need to work collaboratively with the local authority and schools to make sure we're all singing off the same hymn sheet. Because our children are only with us supposedly for a short period of time...they come to us and then they go into another secondary school after us, so we need to be the link." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

> "The local authority don't specifically talk to us very much. They're actually quite difficult. So, our contact comes predominantly from the schools." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

> "[We do not have contact with the local authority] in terms of the [design or content of the] curriculum but we have a really good relationship with the local authority in the Home Education Department and with the schools we work with." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.49.   A few practitioners in PRUs suggested that establishing platforms for sharing practice and learning could help practitioners learn from each other's experiences

and address challenges collaboratively, whether online or through face-to-face meetings. However, they noted that it can be difficult to find the time to collaborate. One PRU practitioner suggested using online collaboration tools such as shared documents to share practice instead of having to find the time to meet face-to-face.

> "I like the idea of working more closely with other Pupil Referral Units...[but] it's difficult because we are very far [geographically] and to be able to be released when you need to be teaching in a school day…I hope in the future we can find a way of putting stuff on a shared drive, but you just get [invited to] more face-to-face meetings." (Practitioner, PRU)

Professional learning

3.50.   Almost all PRU practitioners reported accessing professional learning opportunities, although evidence indicates that this varied in terms of the extent of professional learning and how recently they had accessed such support. Some had participated in training delivered by regional educational consortia[16] covering areas such as curriculum design, leadership, and assessment. In some cases, local authorities provided funding for staff to be released for training and supported collaboration between PRUs to develop curricula and share approaches. Practitioners in PRUs who had accessed professional learning opportunities noted benefits such as increased familiarity with the Curriculum for Wales Framework, including the four purposes and cross-cutting themes. A few also accessed training from commercial providers unaffiliated with Welsh Government-funded programmes, though the extent to which these were aligned with the principles of the Curriculum for Wales was unclear.

> "There have been some online and some face-to-face [professional learning] and we did some with our cluster group. Don't think we've had so much recently - when it [Curriculum for Wales] was being rolled out, there was obviously more of a drive in the early stages. We also used some of our twilight sessions to split ourselves throughout the [organisation] into different Areas to look at different tasks." (Practitioner, PRU)

> "I did some training for Learning for Excellence [a commercial training provider], a couple of years ago now. That was useful, and it was showing how we can really work with the four purposes and how the subjects can crossover, and how you can mind map your ideas around a theme rather than

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[16] In October 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle, announced that the Welsh Government will "bring together the current functions of the National Academy for Education Leadership and some of the functions of the regional consortia and local authority partnerships into a new national body. The body will be responsible for designing and delivering professional learning and leadership support on a national level in response to changing practitioner and Welsh Government priorities." (Welsh Government, 2024h).

a particular subject. So, then you can see where and how it fits all together. And I look back and refer to that sometimes with my planning." (Practitioner, PRU)

3.51. Some EOTAS practitioners reported challenges in accessing professional learning opportunities and instead often utilised in-house training. Examples of in-house training included:

- sharing internal expertise (i.e., a practitioner with expertise in trauma-informed practice might lead training sessions for other staff); practitioners shared their knowledge of different subject specialisms, such as art to support cross-curricular learning in the context of Curriculum for Wales

- adopting a needs-based approach (i.e., commissioning or developing training in response to specific needs identified within the setting, such as supporting a specific ALN, behaviour support, or teaching and learning strategies)

- dissemination of information (i.e., disseminating information from external training that some staff members have attended to the rest of the team).

    "We do a lot of in-house training. We do a lot of professional development...personal learning as well and we tend to disseminate [training resources] amongst ourselves." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.52. A few practitioners highlighted that training opportunities from the regional education consortia and local authority often lacked a specific focus on the unique challenges and contexts of EOTAS providers, and the learners that attend their provision. They felt that these opportunities were often designed for mainstream schools, with little consideration for the different challenges and dynamics of EOTAS provision, such as smaller class sizes and a greater focus on individualised learning. For these practitioners, the content of the training they had attended was too generic and did not consider the specific and diverse needs of EOTAS learners (for example social, emotional, health and behavioural needs). Similarly, sometimes the training was considered to be too theoretical and lacked sufficient practical examples that could be applied directly in the context of EOTAS provision. Practitioners reported that this made it difficult for them to apply the training into their daily work.

    "It's very hard to find something as niche as what we do...when we are networking, we're just trying to see if there's anything that somebody else is

doing that we can use, but there's nobody [offering provision] as niche as we are." (Practitioner, non-PRU EOTAS)

3.53. A small number of practitioners reported that being released to engage with external training was difficult, limiting their access to professional learning. They highlighted that EOTAS provision was often run by small teams, meaning that releasing even one or two practitioners to attend training could significantly disrupt the provision. Some also reported challenges in being able to organise appropriate supply staff and underlined the impact on learners as a result of even short-term changes to staffing and the learning environment.

> "It's a journey that we're on and it is about finding the relevant training for staff. But then you're mindful in a PRU that I don't want my staff off-site because I can't get good quality supply staff to come in because the pupils take time to get used to new adults in the environment." (Practitioner, PRU)

4. Conclusions

Conclusions in relation to research questions

Research Question 1: In what ways are EOTAS providers supporting learners to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework?

4.1.   It was a common view amongst EOTAS practitioners that some of the key benefits of implementing Curriculum for Wales were increased learner engagement and improved motivation, a greater focus on learner needs and aspirations, and a more holistic understanding of learner progression. Some practitioners also highlighted improved behaviour from learners through a more holistic approach to learning that valued wellbeing and personal development.

4.2.   Most EOTAS practitioners highlighted the benefits of Curriculum for Wales's flexibility and felt its ethos aligned well with the provision and supportive learning environment they already provided. For them, Curriculum for Wales allowed further opportunities to design bespoke curricula to cater to the diverse needs, abilities and interests of individual learners, whilst reflecting the nurturing environment and learner-centred approaches of their existing EOTAS provision.

4.3.   The flexibility of Curriculum for Wales was perceived by most local authority representatives to support practitioner agency and ownership, enabling them to develop the curriculum in line with their local context and learner needs. These representatives felt this was a beneficial way to provide a wide range of authentic learning opportunities to learners as well as develop links to local community groups.

4.4.   Health and wellbeing was emphasised as a priority for learners across all EOTAS provision and was highlighted by most participants as a core aspect of their curriculum provision. Activities included working collaboratively with external agencies such as CAMHS and social services to deliver holistic and individualised support to learners. However, Curriculum for Wales realisation had also encouraged practitioners to consider how health and wellbeing could be integrated in a more cross-curricular context. Most EOTAS practitioners and local authority representatives highlighted that this integration alongside more flexible approaches

to learning environments was particularly beneficial for learners; for example, through outdoor learning and pursuits, community engagement, music therapy, and mindfulness.

4.5.   Within EOTAS provision, most practitioners used learner voice to incorporate learner interests and preferences into curriculum design. This included hosting feedback sessions and debates and incorporating learner voice into IDP development. They believed that this approach was creating more engaging learning experiences.

4.6.   Nearly half of non-PRU EOTAS practitioners perceived Curriculum for Wales to have little relevance to their own provision. Reasons for this included having different non-academic learning priorities and a focus on vocational and employability needs. This related to learners who were dual-registered and therefore also attending mainstream schools. As such, these practitioners did not feel that the introduction of Curriculum for Wales had led to changes in their own provision or practice.

Research Question 2: To what extent and in what ways have Curriculum for Wales curriculum and assessment arrangements enabled EOTAS providers to support their learners? (Where arrangements encapsulate planning and designing; teaching and learning; reviewing curriculum; and assessment)

4.7.   Almost all practitioners reported focusing on the individual progress of learners, rather than fixed attainment targets. The introduction of Curriculum for Wales was considered by the majority to support a positive shift towards the acceptance of more holistic and qualitative approaches to assessment in EOTAS provision.

4.8.   Some EOTAS practitioners reported positive developments in how Curriculum for Wales assessment arrangements had helped learners understand their own progress. They outlined a shift towards more formative approaches that supported learner self-awareness and engagement with their educational journey. Some practitioners highlighted the celebration of learners' development in areas that mainstream schools may overlook (for example attendance, behaviour, and attitudes towards learning), which helped change learners' perspectives about what success can look like.

4.9.   Over half of EOTAS practitioners commented that wellbeing and personal development were as important as academic progress. This has resulted in the Health and Wellbeing Area being at the centre of their EOTAS provision, with assessments in place to monitor this development. However, a few reported challenges in quantifying progress in the areas of wellbeing and engagement in learning.

4.10.   Around half of the practitioners reported that short-term stays or interventions for learners within EOTAS provision made it difficult to complete meaningful assessments that provided insights into learner progress in relation to the progression steps. Most practitioners considered that, as there was no prescribed way of measuring progress, it was difficult to align and compare learner progress during transitions to and from mainstream schools.

4.11.   It was a common view amongst practitioners that the removal of attainment targets introduced challenges relating to how and when to conduct assessments. This – along with the use of different reporting strategies, varied expectations about which metrics indicate progress, and inconsistent methods of sharing data between education providers – was reported to have made it difficult to align and compare learner progress during transitions.

4.12.   Due to learners often only attending EOTAS provision for short periods of time, practitioners highlighted that this made it difficult to complete meaningful assessments relating to progression steps. This meant that the progress learners did make in other areas (for example, wellbeing and behaviour) was not easily visible or quantifiable through the Curriculum for Wales lens.

4.13.   Some concerns were raised around the lack of guidance available to underpin the new GCSE and VSCE qualifications by a few practitioners.[17] This had caused concern over whether they were meeting the requirements of Curriculum for Wales and effectively preparing their learners for examinations.

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[17] It should be noted that since the fieldwork's completion, WJEC (2024) has released their draft Made-for-Wales GCSE specifications for teaching from September 2025. The VCSE will be available to 14 to 16-year-olds from September 2027 with specifications released in academic year 2026/27 (Welsh Government, 2024a).

Research Question 3: How are key stakeholders collaborating (or engaging in professional dialogue) to support EOTAS learners?

4.14.   It was common practice for EOTAS providers to collaborate with various stakeholders such as parents/carers, local authorities, health practitioners and educational psychologists to support learner engagement and progress, as well as health and wellbeing, and CWRE. CWRE emerged as a particular area of emphasis in providers' collaboration with others, with over half of practitioners highlighting how work-related learning created meaningful pathways for learners who had previously disengaged from more traditional academic approaches.

4.15.   All PRUs reported working with mainstream schools, as this was where their learners were referred from and where they might transition back to. In some cases, where collaboration worked well between PRUs and mainstream schools, open communication and regular meetings to share information about a learner's progress, needs, and experiences were facilitated by designated liaison personnel, leading to a more joined-up and holistic approach to meeting learner needs.

4.16.   However, over half non-PRU EOTAS providers reported little or no contact with mainstream schools. This resulted in perceived challenges, such as inconsistent communication and data sharing processes to determine what learners had previously learnt, and agreeing what progression should look like for different learners.

Research Question 4: Do practitioners in PRUs have access to professional learning and support to assist with curriculum and assessment design?

4.17.   Almost all practitioners working in PRUs reported accessing professional learning opportunities in areas including curriculum design, leadership and assessment. These practitioners noted that engaging in professional learning was beneficial to them and improved their knowledge of key aspects of Curriculum for Wales, such as the four purposes and cross-cutting themes.

4.18.   However, a few highlighted that professional learning offered by education consortia and local authority failed to address the specific challenges faced by EOTAS providers such as the need for smaller classes, limited staffing, and higher proportions of learners with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and

behavioural support needs. Some EOTAS practitioners reported using in-house training instead of external professional learning. Examples of this included sharing internal expertise and commissioning/developing bespoke training in response to need, such as supporting a specific ALN, behaviour support, or teaching and learning strategies.

Research Question 5: Are non-PRU EOTAS provided with local authority designed curriculum, as per the legislation?

4.19.   Despite local authorities having a duty to secure appropriate curricula for learners referred to non-PRU EOTAS, more than half of these of these providers reported developing their own approach, sometimes due to having minimal direction. This was considered by a few providers to have created challenges for them in understanding and realising mandatory aspects of the Framework. This raises questions about whether learners across EOTAS provision have equitable access to learning that reflects the requirements of the Framework.

Research Question 6: How does the local authority decide what EOTAS provision should be provided to learners?

4.20.   All local authority representatives noted that learner needs were central to determining the type of EOTAS provision allocated, along with factors such as mental health, physical health, academic progress, and engagement in mainstream education. Decisions regarding EOTAS placements involved multiple stakeholders and sometimes formal processes such as Fair Access Panels or specialist provision were used.

4.21.   More than half of the local authority representatives reported they had quality assurance mechanisms in place to monitor the EOTAS provision offered within their jurisdiction and ensure equity for learners who were moving between different providers. These included assessing the suitability of the curriculum and its relevance to learners' needs; reviewing safeguarding measures; and the overall quality of the learning experience.

Areas for consideration

4.22.   The fieldwork found limited evidence to indicate whether the curricula provided by local authorities were sufficient to meet non-PRU EOTAS learner needs. More support may therefore be needed from local authorities to strengthen this area. The following areas of consideration should be explored to facilitate this:

- local authorities should ensure that non-PRU EOTAS provision is meeting the mandatory requirements of Curriculum for Wales for all EOTAS learners

- clear communication channels between local authorities, mainstream schools, and non-PRU EOTAS providers regarding curriculum implementation should be established

- where none exist, defined quality assurance processes should be established by local authorities to monitor and review non-PRU EOTAS provision, with the responsibilities of key stakeholders clearly assigned

- local authorities should maintain regular contact with non-PRU EOTAS providers through designated liaison officers/nominated member of staff, so there is a consistent line of support for curriculum queries

- opportunities for professional learning should be provided to non-PRU EOTAS providers operating within, or commissioned by, the local authority so they are aware of Curriculum for Wales requirements and are supported to meet them effectively

4.23.   This study highlighted several areas where professional learning opportunities for both PRUs and non-PRU EOTAS providers could be enhanced. The following areas of consideration should be explored to facilitate this:

- opportunities for increased collaboration between EOTAS providers should be supported; this would enable practitioners to share expertise regarding how best to support learners' needs in the context of common challenges

- a more coherent professional learning offer across local authorities should be developed; this would help to ensure a consistent understanding of the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales and the support needed by EOTAS learners who transition across provision

- local, regional and national professional learning events should take into account the diversity of EOTAS contexts and learners to make the professional learning offer more relevant to EOTAS providers

- good practice examples of assessment processes should be provided for PRUs to utilise, this would strengthen assessment practices for these EOTAS providers

4.24.   The points relating to professional learning may be important considerations for the National Professional Learning and Leadership Support body which aims to be operational from the 2025/26 academic year (Welsh Government, 2025), and the national professional learning entitlement (Welsh Government, 2022). Offering a more coherent professional learning offer across local authorities in Wales is important for ensuring a consistent understanding of the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales and what it can look like for EOTAS learners who transition across provision. Any training and/or professional learning offered should also offer some applied examples of what the Curriculum for Wales may look like in practice within an EOTAS context (for example, account for small class sizes, learners on short-term placements, and learners with metal health needs or ALN).

4.25.   The research identified the need for stronger methods of facilitating effective data sharing between schools, local authorities, and EOTAS providers to support progression and assessment arrangements as learners transition between providers. Welsh Government should consider options to create a secure shared digital platform for mainstream schools, local authorities, and EOTAS providers that is accessible to all stakeholders and enables:

- real-time updates on learner progression

- seamless transfer of assessment data

- documentation of successful support strategies and areas of learners' personal interest

- recording of learners' specific needs (for example, SEMH, ALN, physical health) and current interventions

4.26.   To facilitate smooth transitions for learners, designated transition coordinators within each provision (mainstream schools and EOTAS providers) could be

identified. These roles would have responsibility for ensuring there is timely and complete information sharing between providers.

4.27.   Establishing regular cross-sector practitioner forums to support the sharing of effective practices and improve transition experiences for learners could be explored.

4.28.   Obtaining PRU curriculum summaries for this study was challenging and further research should consider what improvements could be made to the visibility and availability of them. This could include exploring whether there are difficulties amongst PRUs in developing their summaries and if so, what support might be provided to overcome this. In addition, consideration should be given to how assessments of these summaries can be integrated into existing processes, such as Estyn inspections.

Annex A: References

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Annex B: Research tools

Annex B.1: Discussion guide for practitioners working in the local authority

Participants: practitioners in the local authority with responsibility for curriculum design and guidance in EOTAS including PRUs and inclusion officers.

Discussion prompts/questions

RQ6: How does the local authority decide what EOTAS provision should be provided to learners? RQ5: Are non-PRU EOTAS provided with local authority designed curriculum, as per legislation?

- To help us better understand the context in which you work, could you please outline any factors that may influence which type of EOTAS provision is offered to learners within your LA?

- If your local authority refers learners to PRUs, how do you work with teachers in charge and the management committees to design the curriculum?

- Are any other stakeholders involved in the process that we have not mentioned? If so, who? What role do they play?

- Are there any quality assurance measures in place to ensure the curriculum is being delivered and meeting the needs of individual learners?

  - If so, what do these look like?

  - If not, what resources do you think could fill this gap?

- If your local authority commissions other providers of EOTAS to deliver the curriculum, how do you go about arranging this?

- Do they all receive a local authority designed curriculum? If so, do they report that this meets the learners' needs? If not, what additional support would be valuable in bridging the gap?

- Are there any quality assurance measures in place to ensure the curriculum is being used effectively and meeting the needs of individual learners?

  - If so, what do these look like?

- o If not, what resources do you think could fill this gap?
- Do you face challenges in finding providers who are able to deliver the local authority curriculum? If so, can you outline what these challenges are?

RQ4. Do practitioners in PRUs have access to professional learning and support to assist with curriculum and assessment design

- Can you provide an overview of the professional learning offer available to PRUs and/or EOTAS in your local authority in relation to understanding and enacting Curriculum for Wales guidance?
    - o Have you found any of these opportunities to be more beneficial than others
        - ▪ If so, which and why?
        - ▪ Is there anything you feel is missing from this offer?
- Do you feel practitioners are engaging with this? If not, do you have insight into why this might be and/or suggestions about how to improve engagement?

RQ1. In what ways are PRUs and other providers of EOTAS supporting learners to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework?

- In what ways are PRUs and other providers of EOTAS supporting learners to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework?
    - o How does this compare to the previous curriculum approach?
    - o Do you feel that the Curriculum for Wales provide access to more inclusive curriculum that focuses on the needs of each learner, compared to the previous approach
    - o Do any of your future plans build on this? (for example, as roll-out continues for older learners?).

- To what extent and in what ways is the health and wellbeing of each learner being nurtured and strengthened?

- (If not addressed above) Do you feel the Curriculum for Wales will help enhance aspirations of EOTAS learners?

    o If yes – how, and in what ways?

    o If no – what more could be done?

    o How does this compare to the previous curriculum approach?

- (if not addressed above) Do you feel that the Curriculum for Wales will affect EOTAS learners' attitudes towards learning?

    o If yes – how, and in what ways?

    o If no – what more could be done?

    o How does this compare to the previous curriculum approach?

- Have you identified any challenges that make complying with the statutory Curriculum for Wales guidance challenging for PRUs and other EOTAS provision?

    o What are these?

    o Is there any support that might help to mitigate these challenges?

- There may be some instances where it is not reasonably possible and appropriate to enact all AoLEs for an individual. How are these decisions made within your LA?

- Do you feel the curriculum you receive/use meets the individual needs of your learners?

    o If no, in what ways is it lacking // could it be improved? Are there any resources you feel would be valuable in bridging the gap?

RQ2. To what extent and in what ways have the new curriculum and assessment arrangements enabled PRUs and EOTAS providers to support their learners?

- What are some of your considerations when developing assessment for EOTAS learners?

    o How is assessment used to support learner progression?

- o   Specific considerations for promoting equity and diversity?

- (if not addressed above) How is assessment data used to facilitate conversations around the transition or reintegration of learners to mainstream school, specialist provision, further education, training, or the world of work?

  - o   Do you feel this will be more or less successful than the arrangements under the previous curriculum?

RQ3. How are key stakeholders collaborating (or engaging in professional dialogue) to support EOTAS learners?

- From your experience in your LA, how are different stakeholders working together to support learners in PRUs and other EOTAS provision to make progress? It would be particularly useful to know who the key stakeholders are and what role they play.

  - o   How frequently do these conversations take place?

  - o   To what extent and in what ways are learners involved in curriculum design and development in your LA?

    - ▪   Benefits/challenges associated with approach?

    - ▪   Opportunities/plans to do more?

  - o   To what extent and in what ways are parents/carers involved in curriculum design and development in your LA?

    - ▪   Benefits/challenges associated with approach

- Are EOTAS learners supported to reintegrate into or transition to mainstream or specialist provision, and/or enabled to progress towards further education, training or the world of work?'

  - o   Opportunities/plans to do more?

Exit question

- Is there anything you would like to add that you feel is important, but have not had the opportunity to say during the focus group?

Annex B.2: Semi-structuredd discussion/focus group schedule for practitioners working in a PRU

Participants: teachers/ teaching assistants in PRUs who are responsible for curriculum delivery

Discussion prompts/questions

RQ4. Do practitioners in PRUs have access to professional learning and support to assist with curriculum and assessment design?

- Can you provide an overview of the professional learning opportunities that you are aware of, or have engaged in, to support you in your understanding and enactment of Curriculum for Wales guidance?
  - Have you found any of these opportunities to be more beneficial than others? If so, which and why?
  - Is there anything you feel is missing from the professional learning offer?
  - Have you faced any barriers in being able to access these opportunities?

RQ1. In what ways are PRUs supporting learners to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales framework?

- In what ways are your PRU supporting learners to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework?
  - How does this compare to the previous curriculum approach?
  - Do any of your future plans build on this? (for example, as roll-out continues for older learners?).
  - Can you provide an overview of your key initiatives around supporting health and wellbeing?
  - Can you provide an overview of your key initiatives around relationships and sexuality?

- (If not addressed above) Do you feel the Curriculum for Wales will help enhance aspirations of your learners?
    - If yes – how, and in what ways?
    - If no – what more could be done?
    - How does this compare to the previous curriculum approach?
- (If not addressed above) Do you feel that the Curriculum for Wales will your learners' attitude towards learning?
    - If yes – how, and in what ways?
    - If no – what more could be done?
    - How does this compare to the previous curriculum approach?
- Have you identified any challenges that make complying with the statutory Curriculum for Wales guidance challenging for PRUs?
    - What are these?
    - Is there any support that might help to mitigate these challenges?
- There may be some instances where it is not reasonably possible and appropriate to enact all AoLEs for an individual. How are these decisions made within your context?
- Is there access to an inclusive curriculum that focuses on the individual needs of each learner?

RQ2. To what extent and in what ways have the new curriculum and assessment arrangements enabled PRUs to support their learners?

- If you have been involved in the development and/or delivery of assessments for your learners, what are some of your key considerations?
    - How is assessment used to support learner progression?
    - Specific considerations for promoting equity and diversity?
- (If not addressed above) How is assessment data used to facilitate conversations around the transition or reintegration of learners to mainstream school, specialist provision, further education, training, or the world of work?

        ○   Do you feel this will be more or less successful than the arrangements under the previous curriculum?

- What are your considerations when using or reporting on assessments for your learners?

        ○   Specific considerations for promoting equity and diversity (both in delivery of assessments and use of data)?

- Is there any additional support practitioners need to align their practice with the expectations of the Curriculum for Wales?

RQ3. How are key stakeholders collaborating (or engaging in professional dialogue) to support PRU learners?

- From your experience, how are different stakeholders working together to support your learners to make progress towards further education, training or the world of work? It would be particularly useful to know who the key stakeholders are and what role they play.

        ○   How frequently do these conversations take place?

        ○   To what extent and in what ways are your learners involved the design and development of the curriculum you deliver?

                ■   Benefits/challenges associated with approach?

                ■   Opportunities/plans to do more?

        ○   To what extent and in what ways are parents/carers involved in design and development of the curriculum you deliver?

                ■   Benefits/challenges associated with approach?

                ■   Opportunities/plans to do more?

- Do you operate within an existing cluster of PRUs/schools that are delivering the Curriculum for Wales to share experiences?

        ○   If yes, what are the benefits of this (if any)?

Exit question

- Is there anything you would like to add that you feel is important, but have not had the opportunity to say during the focus group?

Annex B.3: Semi-structured discussion/focus group schedule for practitioners working for non-PRU EOTAS providers

Participants: practitioners responsible for curriculum delivery in non-PRU EOTAS

RQ1. In what ways are providers of EOTAS supporting learners to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework?

RQ5. Are providers of non-PRU EOTAS provided with a local authority designed curriculum, as per the legislation?

- What is your understanding of the requirements of the local authority curriculum for EOTAS learners?
    - o Are you aware of the Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance / key elements of the Curriculum for Wales (such as the AoLEs, four purposes, assessment arrangements)?
    - o Have you noticed any changes over recent years regarding the curriculum offering for EOTAS learners that have been referred by the LA?
        - ▪ If so, could you provide us with an overview of the key differences?
    - o Any changes to guidance around delivery of this curriculum?
        - ▪ If so, could you provide us with an overview of the key differences?
- Do you feel the curriculum you receive/use meets the individual needs of your learners?
    - o If no, in what ways is it lacking // could it be improved? Are there any resources you feel would be valuable in bridging the gap?

If able to answer:

- In what ways do you feel the local authority curriculum is supporting learners to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework?
    - How does this compare to the previous curriculum approach?
    - Can you provide an overview of your key initiatives around supporting health and wellbeing?
    - Can you provide an overview of your key initiatives around relationships and sexuality?
- (If not addressed above) Do you feel the Curriculum for Wales approach will help enhance aspirations of the learners who have been referred to you?
    - If yes – how, and in what ways?
    - If no – what more could be done?
    - How does this compare to the previous approach?
- (If not addressed above) Do you feel that the Curriculum for Wales will enhance EOTAS learners' attitude towards learning?
    - If yes – how, and in what ways?
    - If no – what more could be done?
    - How does this compare to the previous approach?
- Have you identified any issues that make complying with the statutory Curriculum for Wales guidance challenging for EOTAS providers?
    - What are these?
    - Is there any support that might help to mitigate these challenges?
- There may be some instances where it is not reasonably possible and appropriate to enact all Areas for an individual. If you are aware of the process, could you please outline your understanding of how these decisions are made within your context?

RQ2. To what extent and in what ways have the new curriculum and assessment arrangements enabled EOTAS providers to support their learners?

- What are some of your considerations when using or reporting on assessments for your learners?

    o How do you use these assessments to support learner progression?

    o Does your local authority use this data to make decisions about learner progression? If so, how?

    o Specific considerations for promoting equity and diversity (both in delivery of assessments and use of data)?

- (If not addressed above) How do you use assessment data used to facilitate conversations around the transition or reintegration of learners to mainstream school, specialist provision, further education, training, or the world of work?

    o Do you feel this will be more or less successful than the arrangements under the previous curriculum?

    o Does your local authority play a role in this? If yes, to what extent?

- Is there any additional support practitioners need to align their practice with the expectations of the Curriculum for Wales?

RQ3. How are key stakeholders collaborating (or engaging in professional dialogue) to support EOTAS learners?

- From your experience, how are different stakeholders working together to support EOTAS learners to make progress towards further education, training or the world of work? It would be particularly useful to know who the key stakeholders are and what role they play.

    o How frequently do these conversations take place?

    o If known, to what extent and in what ways are your learners involved the design and development of the curriculum you deliver?

        ▪ Benefits/challenges associated with approach?

        ▪ Opportunities/plans to do more?

- If known, to what extent and in what ways are parents/carers involved in design and development of the curriculum you deliver?

    o Benefits/challenges associated with approach?

- Opportunities/plans to do more?

RQ5. What are some of the facilitators and barriers to success associated with enacting the Curriculum for Wales in EOTAS?

- Reflecting on your experiences so far, what have been some of the key _____ in enacting the new local authority curriculum (the Curriculum for Wales) within your context?

  - Facilitators

  - Challenges

  - Successes

Exit question

- Is there anything you would like to add that you feel is important, but have not had the opportunity to say during the focus group?