
Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

Enw / Name:	Owen Evans
Rôl / Role:	His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales
E-bost / Email:	ChiefInspector@estyn.gov.uk
Rhif Ffôn / Tel No:	029 2044 6446
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Background information about Estyn

Estyn is the Office of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, we are independent of the Welsh Government.

Our principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000¹ and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, we must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by those receiving education and training in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers, including whether the financial resources made available to those providing education and training are managed efficiently and used in a way which provides value for money;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Our remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary, secondary, special and all age schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and initial teacher training.

¹ This act to be replaced by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 when the quality provisions are commenced.

We may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, we have set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

Response

Introduction

Estyn welcomes the Welsh Government's continued commitment to refining and updating the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) Framework guidance through systematic annual review.

Our inspection and thematic evidence show that learners benefit most when curricula balance subject depth, progression, strong classroom practice and clear assessment expectations. However, our recent inspection and thematic evidence tells us that, especially in the secondary sector, there is too much variability in quality of teaching, curriculum coherence and disciplinary depth, which often has a negative impact on pupil progress. These wider system challenges shape our view of the draft guidance. Across schools, we have also noted that there is not a strong enough understanding amongst leaders and teachers of expectations in each area of learning and this is contributing to a lowering of expectations in some schools.

We welcome the strengthened expectations around science learning, the clarity provided on qualification availability from 2027, and the alignment between reporting arrangements and the 14–16 Learning Entitlement. However, there are several areas where greater clarity would support schools more effectively, in particularly around equitable access to provision, Welsh medium parity, progression routes and practical implementation considerations.

Key messages and policy calls:

- Ensure equity of access to high quality science provision, including triple science, regardless of school size, medium, or staffing constraints.
- Strengthen expectations for Welsh medium parity across all new qualifications including resources provision and reporting arrangements.
- Provide clearer guidance and support on progression routes, especially from double science and non-examination assessments (NEA) heavy courses to post 16 study and across vocational pathways

- Provide timely guidance for the 2027 reporting arrangements, including definitions, examples and bilingual templates.
- Ensure reporting arrangements support precise self-evaluation and improvement planning to support leaders rather than adding unnecessary administrative burden
- Continue to monitor and publish progress routes for all qualifications to allow impact of curricular and examination changes to be evaluated.
- Review the balance between time required for teaching and learning and that necessitated by assessment requirements in certain qualifications

Consultation questions

Q1: Do you agree that the guidance is clear about Welsh Government’s expectations with regards to the use of science qualifications for 14 to 16-year-old learners, following the decision by Qualifications Wales (QW) to continue offering triple science?

Somewhat agree

The draft guidance sets out a clear national expectation that all learners follow substantial science qualifications, with the double award of The Sciences as the main route and Triple Science retained for those ready to study it. This clarification is helpful. However, our evidence shows that the depth, sequencing and quality of science teaching vary considerably across secondary schools. Where these expectations are not securely embedded, progression to post-16 science can be inequitable. In practice, workforce constraints and reduced subject-specific support can hinder provision, especially in smaller and Welsh-medium settings, risking inequity of access unless mitigations are explicitly addressed.

Please note here what additional information or support to the framework guidance would be helpful:

- Clear expectations about progression into AS/A level sciences from different qualification routes.
- Guidance on ensuring equitable access to triple science and alternative qualifications
- Confirmation of simultaneous Welsh medium availability for specifications, assessments and resources.

Q2: Do you agree that the guidance makes clear that VCSEs, Skills Suites and Foundation qualifications will be available from September 2027?

Somewhat agree

The stated timeline for the availability of VCSEs, Skills Suites, and Foundation qualifications from September 2027 provides schools with further helpful clarification. However, schools will require further information and practical support on the purpose, assessment models, and progression pathways of these qualifications (including into L2+/L3 and apprenticeships), which will need to be available bilingually and in a timely manner. A number of providers say they would welcome this information being provided more promptly. Guidance for schools on how to select the most appropriate learning pathway for pupils within and beyond school settings would also be helpful. Our inspection evidence shows the lack of rigorous assessment for a few qualifications has led to some providers entering a number of learners for perceived easier qualifications to increase the capped 9 points score. Concerns around workforce and resource availability to provide a wider range of qualifications whilst retaining quality provision remains. Equity in appropriateness of accessing and achieving success in this suite of qualifications will require constant review.

Please note here what additional information or support to the framework guidance would be helpful:

- Clearer guidance and support for schools as to the suitability of courses for different learners within their settings
- Training for the workforce to support the delivery of these qualifications, ensuring that Welsh-medium and English medium training and resources are available at the same time
- Support for schools to help ensure suitable workforce and resources for quality delivery, including through the medium of Welsh
- Centralised and regular reviews of the uptake and progression of learners on these pathways both within schools and onto learners' next steps

Q3: Do you agree that the updates to the guidance make clear that future reporting arrangements for 14 to 16 learning have been built around the 14 to 16 Learning Entitlement?

Somewhat agree

The guidance clearly links future reporting with the 14–16 Learning Entitlement, helping ensure that national curriculum and assessment reforms align more coherently. Schools do, however, require more detailed, timely guidance to implement reporting arrangements and to understand performance measures effectively and sustainably.

Our inspection evidence shows that schools struggle with precise self-evaluation and impact-focused improvement planning. Overly complex or unclear performance measures and reporting expectations increase administrative pressure and limit providers' ability to

evaluate and plan for improvement precisely. We would support reporting arrangements which include a wide range of measures, and which take sufficient account of contextual factors to support leaders to evaluate their schools effectively. In addition, we would support a suitably strong focus on the outcomes of pupils impacted by poverty.

Please note here what additional information or support to the framework guidance would be helpful:

- Clarity on how the reporting arrangements align with national improvement processes
- Clear guidance for leaders on how the range of data measures may inform their self-evaluation and improvement work
- Clarity around performance measures and how standards will be considered both at pre- and post-16

Q4: Do you agree that the updates to the guidance make clear that new reporting arrangements will be introduced in 2027?

Strongly agree

The guidance states clearly that the new reporting arrangements will be introduced from 2027. However, it is essential that the information about the exact nature of the reporting arrangements is shared in good time, with plenty of time for providers to familiarise themselves with them prior to their introduction. If this is the case, this should provide schools with helpful notice and align with the CfW cohort timeline. However, as it is not yet confirmed what the reporting arrangements will be, we are unable to comment here in more detail.

Q5: What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of this section of the Curriculum for Wales guidance on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English.

-Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?

- Require awarding bodies to release all specifications, assessments and resources simultaneously in Welsh and English which will continue to support Welsh language progression within subject pathways.
- Monitor and publish the uptake of qualifications by language medium.

-Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?

- Support cluster or partnership-based models to enable smaller Welsh medium schools to offer full science pathways.

- Test reporting templates and digital tools with Welsh medium schools before rollout.

Q6: In your opinion, could these proposed amendments to the Curriculum for Wales Framework guidance be formulated or changed so as to:

-have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or

-mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?

The amendments could be strengthened further through:

- Further support for the simultaneous Welsh and English versions of all qualification materials and reporting frameworks.
- Stronger guidance on how schools can promote Welsh language progression within science, vocational and applied pathways.
- Recognition and mitigation of workforce supply challenges in Welsh medium provision.

Q7: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Whilst these changes to the guidance give further clarification around provision and expectations for progression in the science qualifications, the lack of certainty around the triple science qualification remains a concern. The absence of clear, consistent expectations and longer-term stability creates challenges for schools in curriculum planning, timetabling, staffing and pupil recruitment. This uncertainty risks variation in access to triple science provision between schools, which in turn raises concerns about equity for learners across Wales. Clarity and assurance about the status and expectations of the triple science qualification may help to support learner progression in the science subjects. In the current climate of limited resources and reduced workforce in a number of subject areas, the capacity of many schools to currently deliver a high-quality curriculum is stretched. Our recent thematics and inspection evidence report this as the case, not only for Welsh and science, but in other subject areas. Therefore, without further support in terms of resources, training, recruitment and professional development, schools' ability to provide quality provision for new qualifications remains uncertain.