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**Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response**

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<b>Pwnc / Subject:</b>	Revised professional standards for assisting teaching, teaching and leadership

**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 2000<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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

Overall, Estyn considers the revised framework to be a well-conceived, relevant and enabling set of professional standards that, with effective support and consistent implementation, could enhance the professionalism, confidence and impact of the education workforce in Wales. It places a strong emphasis on developing a reflective, collaborative and equitable system capable of sustaining improvement.

The revised professional standards present a clear and coherent framework that generally aligns effectively with Wales' national mission for education. The structure provides a logical continuum from assisting teaching through to system leadership, enabling practitioners to see themselves as part of a shared professional community committed to continuous improvement and development.

The framework captures the essence of effective professional practice within the context of Curriculum for Wales and places pedagogy as a core strand of the profession. The emphasis on reflective questions and descriptors, rather than prescriptive criteria, represents a positive cultural shift away from compliance towards professional dialogue, enquiry and self-evaluation. This approach supports Estyn's view that sustainable improvement emerges from reflective practice and robust self-evaluation.

The framework's alignment with national priorities such as Cymraeg 2050, anti-racism and the well-being of future generations, strengthens its relevance and moral coherence. However, there is no explicit reference to the vital priority related to reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment. Importantly, the inclusion of teaching assistants within the same continuum affirms the collective responsibility of all staff for learner progress, supporting a culture of parity and respect across roles.

Several areas warrant careful consideration.:

Firstly, implementation support and exemplification could be useful. Practitioners would benefit from clear, practical illustrations of what each standard looks like in

action at different career stages. A risk is, that interpretation may vary across schools and regions, leading to inconsistency.

Secondly, sufficient time, capacity and professional learning would enable staff to engage meaningfully with the standards, particularly teaching assistants and early career teachers.

Thirdly, there is also scope to strengthen reference to digital pedagogy, innovation and system leadership in a rapidly evolving educational context, for example, the recent developments of Artificial Intelligence.

The consultation document refers frequently to “*system leadership*” and “system leaders” but there is no clear definition of this term in a Welsh context. This lack of clarity may lead to inconsistent interpretation among practitioners, particularly as system leadership is distinct from school-level leadership and plays a key role in driving improvement across the wider education system. The document would be strengthened by including a definition of what system leadership entails in Wales, outlining its scope, responsibilities and expectations to support consistent understanding and effective use of the standards.

Furthermore, while the standards promote reflection, it will be essential that they are used developmentally rather than evaluatively, preserving the culture of trust that underpins effective professional growth.

In conclusion we:

- support the clearer, more accessible standards which include support for teaching assistants
- support the general principles which underpin the standards. That these are used developmentally rather than evaluatively is essential to ensure they are implemented effectively.
- support the reflective practice approach, which supports schools' self-improvement
- suggest that the national priority related to reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment to be reflected more strongly
- call for exemplifications of what the standards could look like in practice to ensure consistency and aid implementation
- call for appropriate professional learning to ensure staff engage with the standards regularly and purposefully
- call to strengthen references to digital pedagogy as it's an area with a rapidly evolving landscape, which includes the increased use of AI in schools
- suggest that a definition of system leadership is included
- suggest that the proposal to use the standards for validation and accreditation purposes be considered very carefully
- suggest that the Welsh language could be embedded more explicitly as a cross-cutting theme within all five standards

## Consultation questions

**Question 1a: Do you agree that the structure for the revised professional standards is clear and easy to understand?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the structure of the revised professional standards is clear, coherent and easy to understand. The five-part model consisting of Pedagogy, Collaboration, Professional Learning, Innovation and Leadership offers a logical and integrated framework that reflects the nature of professional practice in Wales. The arrangement from teaching assistants through to system leadership allows practitioners to locate themselves within a professional continuum, recognising progression and shared accountability. The inclusion of descriptors and reflective questions provides clarity about intent without reducing professional judgement to checklists. The layout is straightforward and the language accessible, encouraging conversation rather than compliance. We consider the structure intuitive but feel that exemplification and effective professional learning would be beneficial to ensuring a consistent understanding across the system.

**Question 1b: Do you agree that the structure for the revised professional standards is relevant to current needs and practices?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the revised structure is relevant to the current context of education in Wales. The framework reflects the wider reform agenda that emphasises professional enquiry, inclusion, wellbeing and equity. It recognises the increasingly collaborative and reflective nature of the profession and aligns closely with the characteristics of effective schools identified through our inspections. Its relevance is strengthened by explicit links to national priorities such as Cymraeg 2050, anti-racism and the well-being of future generations. We believe the structure is contemporary and adaptable, capable of evolving alongside the profession.

**Question 2a: Do you agree that the revised professional standards, linked questions and supporting descriptors are appropriate for teaching assistants?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the revised standards are appropriate for teaching assistants and that their inclusion in the same framework as teachers and leaders is both timely and important. This integration recognises the crucial role of support staff in learner progress and wellbeing. The descriptors and reflective questions are pitched at an accessible level and encourage purposeful discussion about learning, inclusion and collaboration. They invite teaching assistants to see themselves as professionals engaged in growth, rather than as ancillary staff subject to direction. To achieve consistency, we feel there is a need for equitable access to professional learning and clear exemplars showing how the standards apply across diverse contexts such as early years, ALN and Welsh-medium education.

**Question 2b: Do you agree that the revised professional standards, linked questions and supporting descriptors are appropriate for teachers?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the standards are relevant and suitably challenging for teachers. They emphasise adaptive pedagogy and professional reflection, which is a core feature of effective teaching under the Curriculum for Wales. The reflective questions encourage teachers to connect theory, evidence and classroom practice. We feel the framework could help practitioners plan, review and refine their teaching while aligning their professional learning with school priorities. Estyn welcomes this coherence but notes that implementation will require adequate time and support to enable teachers to engage meaningfully with reflection rather than treating the process as administrative.

**Question 2c: Do you agree that the revised professional standards, linked questions and supporting descriptors are appropriate for in-school leaders?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the standards are appropriate for in-school leaders and accurately capture their dual role as pedagogical and organisational leaders. The descriptors highlight the importance of modelling professional enquiry, sustaining collaborative cultures and maintaining ethical leadership. These expectations mirror Estyn's evidence from effective schools, where middle and senior leaders support school improvement. The standards support leadership capacity building, though we feel that guidance illustrating progression from classroom leadership to senior roles would further strengthen clarity and support staff development.

**Question 2d: Do you agree that the revised professional standards, linked questions and supporting descriptors are appropriate for headteachers?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the standards are comprehensive and well aligned to the roles of headteachers. They articulate leadership as moral, strategic and pedagogical, placing the headteacher's role firmly within the pursuit of equity and learner success. The framework emphasises the headteacher's responsibility for culture, professional learning and community partnership. To ensure consistency, we recommend that implementation guidance clarify how the standards intersect with headteacher performance management and school improvement frameworks.

**Question 2e: Do you agree that the revised professional standards, linked questions and supporting descriptors are appropriate for system leaders?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the standards are relevant for system leaders and reflect the growing expectation that leadership extends beyond the single school. The focus on collaboration, evidence informed practice and capacity building aligns with the principles of a self-improving system.

The consultation document makes regular reference to "*system leadership*" and "*system leaders*", particularly within the revised descriptors and questions. However, while the term is used across the document, it does not provide an explicit definition of what is meant by system leadership in the Welsh context. This creates potential ambiguity for practitioners, especially given that system leadership is a developing and sometimes contested concept within international education reform.

The absence of a definition weakens the clarity and usability of the document. As system leadership underpins several standards, particularly those involving cross-school collaboration, sector-wide improvement and engagement with multi-agency structures, practitioners would benefit from a concise explanation of:

- the scope of a system leader's responsibilities,
- how system leadership differs from school leadership and headship and
- the expected behaviours, influence and accountability associated with this role.

Providing a clear definition would strengthen the document by ensuring that all practitioners, including those aspiring to or operating within system-level roles, share a common understanding. It would also support consistency in interpretation during

professional development reviews and when using the standards as part of leadership development pathways. A well-articulated definition would enhance coherence, reduce variability in interpretation and help practitioners and partners understand how system leadership contributes to improvement across the wider education system in Wales.

The framework sets clear expectations for ethical influence and cross-school partnership. We support this approach and recommend continued alignment with national bodies, such as 'Dysgu' and regional improvement services to maintain coherence across the system.

**Question 3a: Do you agree that the revised professional standards and supporting descriptors are appropriate for use in mandatory statutory induction (Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT))?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the standards and descriptors are suitable for use in statutory induction for newly qualified teachers. They offer early career teachers a developmental tool that bridges initial teacher education, induction and ongoing professional learning. The reflective questions could help mentors facilitate purposeful dialogue and support NQTs in identifying their professional enquiry projects (if this requirement is due to continue). Successful implementation will depend on mentors and induction validators being confident in using the framework to support growth, as well as ensuring induction profiles are appropriate. It would be helpful to clarify for NQTs and mentors how the professional standards should play a role in developmental feedback, as part of the induction review and lesson observation process.

**Question 3b: Do you agree that the revised professional standards and supporting descriptors are appropriate for use in the contexts of both validation and accreditation (for example TALP and NPQH)?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the revised standards are appropriate as considerations for validation and accreditation processes such as TALP and NPQH. The emphasis on reflection, professional enquiry and ethical leadership supports consistency across leadership development programmes. The shared professional language strengthens coherence between different phases of professional learning and could enhance progression through leadership pathways.

However, it will be essential that the standards are used developmentally rather than over-evaluatively. If the standards are used for validation and accreditation purposes, this could contradict many of the aims set out in the document, e.g. 'The professional standards are intended to be used responsively, allowing individuals to engage with them in ways that best support their own professional development and reflective practice.' Or 'The descriptors are not meant to be read or used as a checklist, scorecard or spreadsheet. Instead, they are deliberately designed to encourage individuals to explore aspects of their work and engage with the professional standards in ways that resonate with their professional context.' If they are to have a dual purpose, this will need to be explicit, particularly how they should be used as a 'threshold' for accreditation purposes.

**Question 4: Do you agree that the revised professional standards and supporting descriptors will facilitate informal developmental conversations?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the revised standards could facilitate informal, developmental professional conversations. The reflective questions are designed to provoke curiosity and discussion rather than judgement. When used well, they could deepen professional understanding of pedagogy and strengthen collaborative learning cultures. We view this as a possible strength of the framework, noting that schools with open, reflective dialogue can sustain improvement most effectively. However, it is essential that there is purposeful professional learning related to how to use the standards in order to realise this aim.

**Question 5a: Do you agree that the revised professional standards, supporting descriptors and linked questions are supportive and developmental?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the standards are supportive and developmental. They encourage professionals to take ownership of their growth and see professional learning as integral to their role. This orientation fosters a culture of trust and reflection consistent with the aims of Curriculum for Wales. The challenge will be ensuring that the developmental intent is preserved in practice and not reduced to a performance-management tool.

**Question 5b: Do you agree that the revised professional standards, supporting descriptors and linked questions promote a sense of professionalism?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the standards promote professionalism by articulating clear values of integrity, respect and ethical conduct. They reinforce the view of teaching and leadership as intellectually demanding and morally purposeful professions. The emphasis on reflective practice and professional autonomy enhances the status of the profession and aligns with Estyn's framework where a belief that professional trust and responsibility, when done well, are key areas that lead to improvement. The inclusion of a range of roles also promotes a sense of professionalism across the system.

**Question 6a: Do you agree that the revised professional standards and supporting descriptors will prompt professional conversations that will encourage a focus on the priorities for the education sector in Wales?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the standards could encourage professional conversations focused on sector priorities. They explicitly reference national objectives such as equity, wellbeing, inclusion and bilingualism, enabling practitioners to align their work with these priorities, though there could be a stronger focus on some, such as reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment. The standards could help ensure that discussions about practice are firmly connected to the strategic direction of education in Wales.

**Question 6b: Do you agree that the revised professional standards and supporting descriptors will enable the developing school improvement agenda?**

**Agree**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn agrees that the revised standards can support the developing school-improvement agenda. The framework promotes enquiry, collaboration and reflection which are conditions that underpin self-improving schools. By linking professional learning directly to learner outcomes, the standards provide a coherent structure for schools to plan and review improvement. Alignment with regional and national professional learning frameworks will be essential to maintain consistency.

**Question 7: Are there any descriptors that are unclear, should be changed or are missing?**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn finds the descriptors generally clear and comprehensive, but we suggest further elaboration in certain areas: greater emphasis on the developments in digital pedagogy and innovation; clearer articulation of progression between roles and tiers. Practical examples would support a consistent understanding.

**Question 8: What sort of support might be useful to enable the standards to be used effectively?****Supporting comments:**

To enable the standards to be used effectively, we recommend a range of exemplification, interactive materials on Hwb and specific professional learning on how to best use the framework. Professional learning should be tailored to different roles. Collaborative local authority guidance, with support from 'Dysgu' will help ensure consistent interpretation and equitable access to professional learning opportunities.

**Question 9: Are there other impacts of these proposals which you would like to share your views on?****Supporting comments:**

Estyn believes the new framework could strengthen a culture of reflection, enquiry and collaboration, with positive effects on professionalism and staff wellbeing. It may also enhance retention by clarifying career pathways. The main risk lies in workload and variable support; these should be mitigated through clear guidance and adequate time for professional reflection. A strong professional learning programme to support the implementation of the standards is essential. It is also essential that the standards align with other developments within education and are part of a coherent plan.

**Question 10: What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposals 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?**

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

**Supporting Comments:**

Estyn believes the standards can have a positive impact on the Welsh language. The framework promotes Cymraeg 2050 and encourages bilingual practice across all roles. Implementation should ensure equal access to Welsh-medium professional learning and bilingual exemplification of good practice.

**Question 11: In your opinion, could the proposals 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?**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn suggests that the Welsh language could be embedded more explicitly as a cross-cutting theme within all five standards. Practitioners should be encouraged to use and promote Welsh in professional contexts and system monitoring should ensure parity between Welsh and English medium settings.

**Question 12: 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:**

**Anonymity**

**Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer for your response to remain anonymous, please indicate below:**

**I would like to remain anonymous Yes | No**