
Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

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| Dyddiad / Date: | 04.02.2026 |
| Pwnc / Subject: | Response re Provision of INSET (in-service education and training) days in Wales |

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 generally supports the Welsh Government's proposal to confirm the provision of six INSET days per academic year and to strengthen the guidance on their use. Estyn's inspection and thematic evidence consistently demonstrates that high-quality professional learning is key to improving teaching, leadership and pupils' outcomes, particularly during a period of significant systemic reform.

Schools in Wales continue to operate in a context of significant change, including the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales, reforms in Additional Learning Needs (ALN), and the gradual introduction of new qualifications. In this context, protected time for professional learning, planning, and collaboration is essential if practitioners are to embed reforms effectively and sustainably.

However, Estyn's evidence also shows that the impact of INSET days varies significantly between schools. Where INSET is most effective, it has a clear focus on improving teaching and learning, is evidence-based, sustainable and part of a long-term plan, and closely aligned with school improvement priorities. Conversely, where INSET is not strategically coordinated or overly focused on compliance, its impact on classroom practices and pupils' outcomes is more limited.

Therefore, Estyn supports the overall direction of the proposals, emphasising the importance of clarity of purpose, fairness and strong leadership oversight to ensure that additional time leads to meaningful improvements for pupils.

Key messages and policy calls:

- Confirmation of six days of INSET provides valuable protected time, but the impact depends on quality and focus, not just on the number of hours.
- The guidance should continue to prioritise teaching and learning, allowing for professional judgement to respond to local context.

- Collaboration between schools and clusters should be encouraged and enabled, but not rigidly enforced.
- Clear communication with parents and carers is essential to mitigate disruption and maintain confidence.
- Welsh-medium and bilingual professional learning must be supported to ensure fairness across the system.

Consultation questions

Q1: Do you agree that 6 INSET days should be provided every year from 2026 to 2027 by changing the school teachers' pay and conditions (Wales) document?

Agree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Estyn agrees with the proposal to formalise the provision of six INSET days a year. This reflects the current reality that expectations on schools and the education workforce have increased significantly over recent years, particularly in the context of curriculum reform, ALN reform and changes to qualifications.

Keeping the sixth day of HMS also gives schools stability and certainty when planning their medium and longer-term professional calendar. Eliminating the extra day would risk undermining progress already made in giving staff specific time to engage in professional learning and collaborative planning.

At the same time, Estyn emphasises that the value of this arrangement depends on how the time is used. To ensure a positive impact on learners, it is essential that schools use this time intentionally, strategically and in a way that supports clear improvement priorities such as improving teaching and learning.

Q2: Do you agree that INSET days should be used mainly or wholly for training, planning and preparation in relation to the purposes outlined (which relate to ALN, curriculum and assessment, qualifications and national priorities)?

Agree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Estyn supports this proposal as it provides clarity about the main purpose of INSET days and helps ensure consistency across the system. Focusing these days on areas such as the curriculum, assessment, qualifications, ALN and national priorities helps schools align professional learning with wider policy expectations.

However, it is important that the term "training" is not interpreted too narrowly. To be effective, INSET days should respond to the needs and context of individual providers and allow time for a wide range of professional learning activities, including collaborative planning, professional discussion, reflection on practice and the development of new ways of working. These activities are an integral part of preparing staff to respond to change and improving pupils' experiences.

Q3: We propose to change the guidance to advise that schools engage with other schools and local authorities to coordinate the timing of INSET days across groups, clusters or local authorities. This is to reduce disruption for families with children in multiple schools and to enable better collaboration between schools where possible. This will be coordinated between headteachers and local authorities. Do you agree?

Agree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Estyn agrees with this proposal as it offers clear benefits to families, particularly those with children in more than one school. Coordinating the timing of INSET days can help reduce the practical challenges associated with childcare and improve the overall experience for parents and carers.

In addition, the synchronisation of INSET days creates meaningful opportunities for schools to work together on common issues, such as curriculum planning, pupil transition or responding to national priorities. It also offers an opportunity for Welsh and bilingual schools to collaborate and share practice. However, Estyn recognises that this will not always be practical in all contexts. The guidelines should therefore encourage coordination where possible, while respecting local differences and the individual needs of schools.

Q4: We propose to change the guidance to ask schools to communicate the purpose and timing of their training with local authorities and parents or carers at the beginning of the academic year. Do you agree?

Agree **Disagree** **Neither agree nor disagree**

Supporting comments

Estyn supports this proposal as it promotes transparency and helps build trust between schools, local authorities and families. Early communication enables parents and carers to plan ahead and understand why INSET days are necessary.

Communicating the purpose also gives schools the opportunity to explain how the professional learning conducted on these days is related to improving pupils' experiences and outcomes. This helps reinforce the message that INSET days are a direct investment in the quality of education. However, the guidance will need to allow flexibility for schools to adjust the purpose if necessary, for example if evidence of self-evaluation during the year results in a change in priorities.

Q5: We propose to change the guidance to advise that schools do not group more than 2 INSET days together in a block. Do you agree?

Agree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Estyn agrees in principle. Distributing professional learning across the year helps maintain momentum and support sustainable improvement, enabling practitioners to apply, evaluate and refine their learning over time. It also reduces the impact on pupils.

Q6: We propose to change the guidance to advise that schools do not arrange more than 2 INSET days as twilight sessions within the academic year. Do you agree?

Agree **Disagree** Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Whilst twilight sessions can be useful for specific or mandatory training, they are not always suitable for work related to pedagogy development, curriculum planning or reflective practice. Therefore, we do not agree with the proposal of 2 days INSET being organised as twilight sessions as over-reliance on such sessions can limit the depth of professional learning and the opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Full INSET days allow staff to fully engage with the content and maximise the impact of professional learning.

Q7: Do you agree that the guidance should emphasise that at least 4 INSET days are used wholly or mainly to deliver professional learning relating to learning and teaching, in line with the proposed purposes of INSET days in schools? (This will mean no more than 2 INSET days will be used on training not related to learning and teaching.)

Agree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Estyn strongly supports this emphasis as it helps to ensure that the main purpose of INSET days remains on improving teaching and learning. Devoting the majority of time to this area gives a clear message about priorities and reduces the risk that INSET time will be used primarily on operational or administrative matters.

It also provides a clear framework for schools in making decisions about the content of INSET, while still allowing space for other matters necessary for the effective functioning of a school.

Q8: What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposal 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

The proposals offer the potential to support positive outcomes for the Welsh language, particularly when INSET days are used to strengthen Welsh-medium pedagogy, bilingual curriculum design and practitioners' confidence to use Welsh professionally. The encouragement to arrange INSET at the same time as other schools also offers an opportunity for Welsh-medium and bilingual schools to collaborate and share practice.

However, Estyn highlights a potential risk that unequal access to high-quality Welsh-medium professional learning, particularly in some regions or specialist areas, can widen existing inequalities if not proactively addressed.

Q9: In your opinion how could the proposed policy 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 recommends that the guidance should:

1. Specifically encourage the use of INSET days to develop staff capacity and confidence to teach through the medium of Welsh and bilingually.
2. Ensure equitable access to professional learning through Welsh, including through national provision and regional collaboration.
3. To promote collaboration between Welsh-medium and bilingual schools to share effective practice and build the capacity within the system.

Q10: 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:

Supporting comments

Estyn highlights the importance of:

1. Monitoring the impact of revised INSET arrangements on teaching quality and pupil outcomes, not just compliance.
2. Avoid unintended consequences for schools serving disadvantaged communities, where capacity constraints may limit effective use of INSET.
3. Ensure coherence between INSET expectations and professional learning guidelines.

In addition, this consultation could be an opportunity to consider more creative and co-ordinated ways of organising time for professional learning, rather than relying entirely on individual days scattered throughout the year. Exploring or experimenting with arrangements that provide more extended blocks of time could support deeper, collaborative and sustainable development work, and improve the effectiveness of professional learning across the system.

Anonymity

Responses to consultations may be made public. Your response will be anonymous. However, if you would like your name to be published alongside your response, tick the box.

I agree to my name being published alongside my response to this consultation.