

# Draft professional standards for assisting teaching

## Consultation response form

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Responses should be returned by **14 March 2019** to:

Pedagogy, Professional Standards and A Level Branch  
Pedagogy, Leadership and Professional Learning Division  
The Education Directorate  
Welsh Government  
Crown Buildings  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ

or completed electronically and sent to:

e-mail: [professionalstandardsreview@gov.wales](mailto:professionalstandardsreview@gov.wales).

**Question 1** – Do you agree that the values and dispositions, the five standards and their elements offer an appropriate shared purpose for those assisting teaching?

<b>Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Disagree</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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### Supporting comments

Learning support staff in maintained schools are one of seven groups of education practitioners that must register with the EWC in order to practice. EWC figures as at 31 March 2018 show that there are 32,662 registered learning support workers in Wales, compared to 35,576 registered school teachers, confirming that learning support staff now make up a significant part of the school workforce in Wales. Given this context, the EWC welcomes the development of a set of professional standards for staff who assist teachers in delivering teaching and learning and considers this to be a significant step in recognising their professionalism and importance within the education system.

The Council believes that developing a set of standards that encompass the range of roles and activities undertaken by the extensive cross section of learning support staff is challenging. Indeed, when the EWC registered this cohort for the first time in 2016, it received details of over 3,000 different job titles from employers. The Council observes that the standards align with the professional standards for teaching and leadership and are pitched at the same aspirational level allowing for growth and development.

While supporting the establishment of a set of standards for those assisting teaching, we would invite consideration of the following points, some of which are reiterations of observations we made in our previous response to the Welsh Government consultation on the professional standards for teaching and leadership in 2017:

- This is the first time that most learning support staff will engage with a set of professional standards. We have received feedback that learning support staff do not find the current format of the standards to be user friendly or easy to read. Similar views were received from teachers in relation to the teaching and leadership standards. We understand that it is the Welsh Government's intention to present the standards in a "dynamic" format. We would welcome a final format that is as user friendly as possible.
- We note that the standards are conceptually different to many other sets of standards, both within teaching and other professions. In other standards models internationally, one will see phrases such as "understand", "know" and "be able to". This is so the standards remain applicable to current registrants in maintaining their fitness to practise, as well as prospective registrants who have yet to start practising and are applying for registration for the first time. That said, we feel that the assisting teaching standards improve on the teaching and leadership standards in this respect.
- Whilst we appreciate that the standards are not primarily designed to drive capability or competency procedures, where actions needs to be taken to uphold the rights of the learner and preserve professional integrity, the standards present some difficulties to the EWC in discharging its statutory fitness to practise functions, given irregularities compared to other standards models, in particular:
  - Use of the standards will not be mandatory in the first instance

- There is no reference to the EWC Code of Professional Conduct & Practice. A reference to the Code was in the previous version of the teaching and leadership standards, but has been removed from the latest version without a clear rationale. The Council would encourage Welsh Government to consider establishing the Code into both sets of standards as this would provide an element of commonality, congruity and coherence both throughout a professional's career and between registrant groups.
- As stated in our response to the previous consultation on teaching and leadership standards, the Council considers there is a fundamental issue in respect of the ownership of the standards. As a standards body with a legislative remit that explicitly emphasises the EWC has a significant role in standards,

**Principal aims of the EWC in the Education (Wales) Act 2014**

***(a) to contribute to improving the standards of teaching and the quality of learning in Wales, and***

***(b) to maintain and improve standards of professional conduct amongst teachers and persons who support teaching and learning in Wales***

we are strongly of the view that standards rightly should be owned, developed and promoted by a profession, through its professional body working with its registrants and stakeholders. This is the model followed successfully in other jurisdictions within the UK and internationally. Indeed, it is the model that the Welsh Government has established for social care in Wales (through Social Care Wales – formerly the Care Council for Wales).

**Question 2 –** Do you agree that the descriptors of effective practice (as well as the sustained highly-effective practice attached to each element) capture teaching assistants' (TAs) and higher-level teaching assistants' (HLTAs) roles?

<b>Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Disagree</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Supporting comments**

As explained under question 1, learning support staff in schools undertake many different tasks and have a range of job titles. As such, developing a set of standards that is relevant for all permutations of the role / different levels of teaching assistants is a difficult task. We consider that the descriptors are comprehensive, however we feel that if the standards are to be used and engaged with, they need to be clear, concise and accessible. As with the teaching and leadership standards, Council would suggest that standards that require analysis and deciphering will be seen as onerous and will not be used as readily as more accessible ones, particularly given this is the first time most learning support staff will engage with a set of professional standards.

We would be pleased to see the Welsh Government consider whether refinements could be made in order to make the proposed standards more user-friendly, for example:

- The terminology is new to those assisting teachers. We have, 'elements / descriptors / dimensions'. The relative relationship, hierarchy and meaning of these categories and the statements that fall within them may be unclear to some learning support workers.
- The standards could be viewed as rather diffuse, unwieldy, and unmanageable when trying to look at them holistically and the sheer number of statements may be off putting.
- Looking at the descriptors, there is (in places) inconsistency in the proposed standards with some describing very broad areas of practice and others narrower.
- As the point above, the vocabulary used in the standards needs to be consistent.
- It is our opinion that specific, detailed, bespoke training will be needed if support staff are to be able to confidently engage with these standards in a meaningful way.

**Question 3 –** Do you agree that the descriptors attached to each element will support TAs and HLTAs to reflect on their practice and provide a focus for professional development?

<b>Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Disagree</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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### Supporting comments

It is hoped that the feedback from the schools involved in trialling the standards will enable Welsh Government to provide additional support practitioners and leaders may require in order to effectively implement and embed the standards. This is the first time that the majority of learning support workers will have engaged with professional standards, therefore they will need additional time and support to ensure that the standards are used to best effect to encourage their growth and development. It is vital that the school learning support workers who are working on a supply basis are also factored in to any communications and support mechanisms as these constitute a significant proportion of the learning support worker cohort, yet this group could potentially find themselves isolated from the process. Data from the Register of Practitioners show that as at 1 March 2018, there were 5,104 school learning support workers employed on a supply basis.

Since use of the standards is not compulsory, there is some concern that this may lead to a situation where some schools are actively encouraging and supporting staff to use the standards, where others may not, which can lead to disparity and unfairness in the system. Communication will be key to ensuring that leaders and practitioners alike understand the rationale for implementing the professional standards and the expectations from Welsh Government on how these can support improvement and develop professional practice.

Given that the standards are intended to help people grow and develop within their jobs our expectation would be that, in line with the teaching and leadership standards, the Professional Learning standard would include a continuing professional learning element (with descriptors that encouraged the user to engage with the Professional Learning Passport).

**Question 4 –** Do you think that it is appropriate for HLTA status to be dependant on the provision of evidence of having met the standards and relevant descriptors?

<b>Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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**Supporting comments**

It is our understanding that the HLTA standards (2011) will be superseded by the assisting teaching standards and we would call for absolute clarity in this regard to avoid any scenario where learning support workers wishing to progress to HLTA standard are under the misconception that they have to provide evidence both of having met the assisting teaching standards and relevant descriptors, **and** subsequently the HLTA standards, as this will have a significant time implication particularly given they do not get any protected time outside their working hours to do this.

Whilst it is important to review existing systems and improve upon them based on the future needs of education, it would be appropriate to consider how any changes to current practice might impact upon existing school learning support workers who have already met the HLTA standard.

It must also be taken into consideration that a number of learning support workers employed in schools are actually already fully qualified teachers or are working towards gaining QTS. Data from the Register of Practitioners show that of the 36,662 learning support workers registered with the EWC (as at 1 March 2018), a total of 759 held QTS and this number continues to increase.

The professional standards were devised prior to the devolution of pay and conditions to Wales and as such this was not a consideration when the working groups were tasked with developing them, but may now have to be considered in light of this change.

**Question 5 –** Do you think that using the standards for assisting teaching will promote the importance of the role and help TAs and HLTAs to feel valued?

<b>Agree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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**Supporting comments**

Firstly, we would argue that the standards can only help to promote the importance of these roles if a) they are used, and b) if they are used effectively. We would reiterate that whilst the standards can help to professionalise the work of those assisting teaching, this is only part of recognising the contribution of learning support workers to the education system, particularly in supporting pupils with additional learning needs. Clear career pathways, supported by relevant and high quality professional development opportunities are key.

Compared with teachers, learning support workers are working on relatively low pay, are not necessarily employed on full-time or permanent contracts and not all are paid/contracted to attend INSET/professional learning twilights, due regard is needed in designing training which they can access including cost / time implications.

Additionally, at present, whilst we know from the National Education Workforce Survey, and from data held on the Register of Practitioners that many learning support workers hold a range of professional and academic qualifications, as yet, there are no minimum qualification requirements for becoming a learning support worker, nor is there a formal training route as there is for teachers. The EWC was recently given additional powers to accredit ITE programmes, yet no similar process is in place for learning support roles. If we are to demonstrate a commitment to those in support roles, this is something that needs to be considered, since it would be fair to expect that there is some consistency of approach.

School culture is also a factor in recognising the contribution of learning support workers, which Government and school leaders should seek to develop in various ways, for example via inclusive development opportunities, reward and recognition processes and a shared vision.

All of these matters need to be taken into account when considering aspirations for a positive impact of the standards on professional practice.

**Question 6** – Do you agree that performance reviews, together with access to professional learning opportunities, are key to ensuring that the standards have the greatest impact on practice?

Agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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### Supporting comments

Evidence from the National Education Workforce Survey published in 2017 highlighted that 45.4% of School Learning Support Worker respondents had either never had a performance review, or had not had a performance review in the previous 12 months. Of the respondents that said they did have a review, **only 25.7% stated that their reviews included opportunities to review and reflect on their individual professional learning and development during the reporting year.** With this in mind, whilst learning support workers can gauge their own development against the standards, it is difficult to see how without a robust performance / development review system for learning support workers, that there will be suitable opportunities for staff to discuss their progress with their manager and discuss any development needs.

Evidence from the National Education Workforce Survey 2017 also highlighted some disparity between the development opportunities accessed by learning support workers compared with school teachers (4.1% of school teacher respondents stated they had not undertaken any professional development in the preceding 12 months compared with 14.2% of school learning support worker respondents). Cost was the main reason highlighted by school learning support workers as the main barrier to accessing professional development opportunities.

To ensure a cohesive and effective workforce, equality of opportunity and accessibility of appropriate learning and development opportunities for learning support workers are paramount. They perform a key role, and the development opportunities offered to them should reflect this. It is hoped that the funding earmarked for the professional development of teachers and teaching assistants will go some way to support education professionals in school settings, however it is important that Welsh Government provides clear guidelines about how this money can be spent to ensure parity and ensure that it is used effectively to make the desired improvements in the system.

**Question 7** – Do you think that, as a matter of principle, the performance reviews of those assisting teaching should be made a statutory requirement as part of schools’ performance review policy (i.e. a compulsory appraisal process set out in legislation)?

<b>Agree</b>	✓	<b>Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Supporting comments**

If the system is to be equitable, it would be appropriate to align performance review process for those assisting teachers with that of teachers, however there are inherent flaws with the current system. The National Education Workforce Survey conducted in 2017, for example, indicated that despite being covered in legislation, 10.2% of respondents in the school teacher category indicated that their last performance review was more than 12 months ago, and 5.7% indicated that they had never had a performance review. If there is a lack of sufficient oversight of the process, and no way of ensuring a consistent approach to performance reviews, they are unlikely to have the desired impact.

The performance review should be used as an opportunity for reflection and discussion which allows the individual to take ownership of their professional learning and development. Cognisance needs to be given to the fact that the performance review meeting is only one element of assessing staff performance, and schools will have their own mechanisms for building a picture of how well a member of staff is fulfilling their role.

Additionally, we would stress the importance of factoring in the supply workforce, since it is imperative that they also have opportunity to discuss their development needs on a regular basis. The supply workforce performs a crucial role in supporting learners and it is of paramount importance to ensure that they are given the support they need in order to contribute to realising Welsh Government’s objective of ‘developing a high-quality education profession’ which is enshrined in the National Mission.

**Question 8** – Do you consider the proposed timescale and the arrangements for introducing the new standards to be realistic?

<b>Agree</b>	✓	<b>Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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## Supporting comments

The standards for teaching and leadership were published in 2017, and NQTs commencing induction from that date were required to work to the new standards. All other teachers and leaders were required to transition to the new standards by September 2018. Professional standards for further education teachers and work-based learning practitioners were published in November 2017. Given that the suite of professional standards is already in place for the rest of the workforce, it seems appropriate that the standards for those assisting teaching, which have already been piloted, are rolled out in a timely manner. We would reiterate the need to support this group in adopting the standards.

The draft professional standards for assisting teaching are currently held within the Professional Learning Passport (PLP), hosted by the EWC (draft standards included in the PLP since 28 June 2018). The EWC offers support sessions to practitioners within schools to use the PLP, which includes an input on mapping activity against the standards, however given that many learning support workers do not get paid to attend training, the uptake from this group is invariably lower than for that of teachers.

**Question 9** – We would like to know your views on the effects that introducing professional standards for assisting teaching would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

- i) opportunities for people to use Welsh
- ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

What effects do you think there would be? How positive effects could be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

## Supporting comments

The inclusion of specific reference to Welsh Language within the standards can act as a lever to stimulate increased Welsh language use within school settings, however if the standards are not mandatory, commitment to developing Welsh language ability may be patchy across schools and regions. In order to meet the Welsh language demands for the future, and to meet the aspirations of Welsh Government's policy for one million Welsh speakers by 2050, there need to be sufficient and equitable opportunities for learning support workers to develop their skills, along with adequate funding to support schools in releasing staff for any development activity. Both practitioners and leaders need to be fully on board with, and demonstrate commitment to the standards for them to be effective. We would envisage that the National Academy for Educational Leadership will perform a pivotal role in engaging education leaders in the process.

Again, we would reiterate the fact that opportunities to develop Welsh language skills need to be available to all of the education workforce including school learning support workers who are employed on a supply basis.

School Learning Support Workers have been required to register with the EWC since 1 April 2016. The EWC holds valuable data on the Welsh language ability of the registered education workforce which can assist Welsh Government in workforce planning. The data on Welsh Language will be presented at our next policy briefing event later in 2019.

It is important to recognise that there are other languages spoken in the classroom. Data from the Pupil Level Annual School Census<sup>1</sup> (PLASC) highlight that in the number of pupils for whom English or Welsh is not their first language has been growing year on year (18,402 in 2011/12, compared with 27,836 2017/18). Whilst there may be an emphasis to develop Welsh language skills to support learners, consideration must also be given to the fact that education practitioners are also faced with dealing with challenges in supporting pupil literacy in English.

**Question 10** – Please also explain how you believe the proposed standards could be formulated or changed so as to have:

- i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language
- ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

### Supporting comments

No comments

**Question 11** – 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.

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

<sup>1</sup> <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Ethnicity-National-Identity-and-Language/pupilsaged5andoverfirstlanguageotherthanenglishwelsh-by-localauthorityregion-year>