The Open University ITE Partnership in Wales
PGCE Programme: Research Bulletin

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Welcome to the PGCE Programme's research bulletin. If you are undertaking any research or professional enquiries, we would welcome the opportunity to share this with the Partnership. You can find more about research across the partnership on the Partnership website, including items/blogs at Y Llais. If you wish to know more about PGCE Programme research activities, please contact Alison Glover (alison.glover@open.ac.uk).

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Anti-racist school leadership: The professional learning journeys of school leaders and implementation of anti-racist professional practice.

Perceptions of inspection: Interviews with four school leaders explore feelings about and responses to school inspections.

Partnership research activities: An immersive technology project with a primary school and the creation of a toolkit to support reflective practice.

Languages connect us

'Learners do not perceive how and where International Languages fit into the wider curriculum in Wales.'

The number of learners opting to study languages other than Welsh and English at GCSE has been in steep decline in Wales. The main focus for the paper is based on a dataset of nearly 6,000 Year 8 and 9 learner responses from the Modern Foreign Languages Mentoring projects' 64 partner schools. Findings showed that usefulness (for the future) and personal enjoyment were key motivators for choosing an International Language at GCSE. Learners also had an appetite for learning new languages that were not offered at school. However, the links between English, International Languages and Welsh as languages were not evident to many. Learners did not perceive International Languages as necessarily more difficult than other subjects; approximately half reported 'it's boring', with others commenting 'I'm not good at it'. Strategies that could increase learner engagement with languages are also discussed.

Arfon, E., Gorrara, D., Jenkins, L. and Owen, G. (2025) Languages Connect Us: An investigation into Learner Perspectives on International Languages in Secondary Schools in Wales, *Wales Journal of Education* 27(1), pp. 4-49. https://doi.org/10.16922/wje.27.1.2.

Emotional and mental well-being

'It's time, it's time for staff to… Staff have got to give up their breaks, their lunches maybe to have a restorative conversation (with a pupil) and they need their break and lunch because staff wellbeing is important.'

Whole school approaches can be beneficial to pupils' social and emotional well-being. Group interviews with 54 staff from 12 schools in Wales were conducted. Staff reported higher levels of pupil mental health challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and an absence of capacity in in-house and external support services. Poor staff well-being and significant workload pressures were also reported, driven in part by the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. This led staff to feel ill-prepared for the more complex issues being faced, exacerbated by a lack of access to relevant training to be able to support pupil and colleague mental health.

Brown, R., Anthony, R., Eyre, I., Lennon, J., Powell, N., Haslam, Z., Rowe, A., and Moore, G. (2025) A qualitative Exploration of Contextual Factors Within Schools Impacting the Introduction of the New Statutory 'Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing' in Wales, *School Mental Health*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-024-09740-z.

Anti-racist school leadership in Wales

'Anti-racism needs to be a core focus within school development planning and sustained reflective enquiry, through a whole-school approach.'

Wales's 2030 ambition of becoming an Anti-Racist nation has resulted in a multi-disciplinary mission for change. Even though the Curriculum for Wales supports the aims of the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, policy and school leaders have varied levels of understanding about how to put this ambition into practice. This small-scale research project used pen portraits and survey data to sketch professional learning journeys of school leaders and the implementation of anti-racist professional practice. Evidence is presented from one secondary and five primary schools, and one Local Authority representative. Participants concluded that they recognised their need to learn more. For meaningful structural reform it is crucial that leaders are willing to invest the necessary resources and exhibit the courage required for specialised anti-racist learning.

Clarke, R. and Haughton, C. (2025) Anti-racist school leadership in Wales: from theory to practice, *Equity in Education & Society*. https://doi.org/10.1177/27526461251335030

Perceptions of inspection

'It was a bit surreal – we all had to stand up as they (the inspection team) walked in and they sat down and just went through it, and there was no interaction.'

Accountability in education takes many forms. However, much has been written about the negative impact of inspection on teachers and leaders. Four school leaders were interviewed to explore their feelings about and responses to inspection, using Foucauldian insights on power and discourse as a frame. Findings suggest that the conduct of inspectors was of more concern to participants than the awarded judgements. While school leaders accepted inspection was a necessary process linked to the need to build and maintain public confidence, they were in broad agreement that the inspectors themselves did not communicate appropriately with school staff, were too authoritarian, and were at times disrespectful.
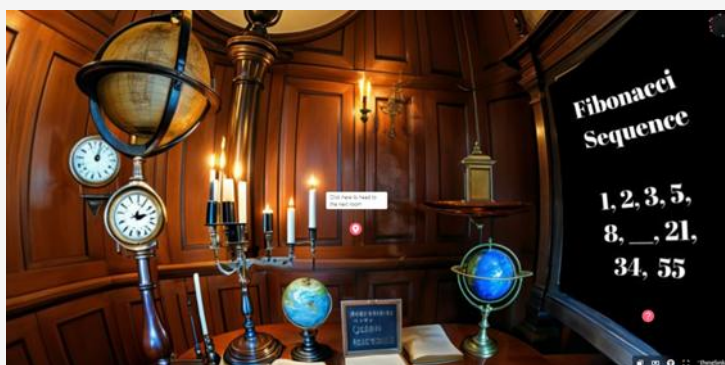
Evans, G. (2025) An inspector calls! School leaders' perceptions of inspection in Wales, *Policy Futures in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103251320826.

Open University ITE Partnership research activities

All Saints Primary School, Wrexham recently contributed to a small project to investigate the use of an immersive technology platform (Thinglink). After experiencing an interactive escape room, pupils created their own virtual learning environments.

Working together some student teachers and the PGCE team have created a toolkit to support reflective practice.

PGCE Partnership celebration of research 2025

The annual PGCE Research Conference was held in June 2025; full bilingual conference proceedings available here; and an online gallery of student teachers' summary posters of their small scale professional enquiries is here.

The conference included a keynote from Professor Teresa Cremin, student teachers and partner school colleagues had the opportunity to share their research findings on a range of studies and a discussion with Michael Rees (Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Rhydywaun) and Amelia Thomas (Fitzalan High School) offered valuable insights into teaching.

Artwork by Anthony Lewis

The Curriculum for Wales

The evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales has published its first set of full and summary reports. Some Partnership schools may have contributed to these findings, as a range of schools across Wales participated in the evaluation.

The findings are informed by a mixture of methods e.g. surveys, discussion groups and case studies on themes that include Health and well-being; Curriculum and assessment design and pedagogy; Equity and inclusion.

At the same time, the Welsh Government published its response to each of the individual reports: Health and well-being; Curriculum and assessment design and pedagogy; Equity and inclusion.