

Editorial – Expanding Horizons for Educational Research, Policy and Practice in Wales

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Over the past five years, the *Wales Journal of Education* has undergone a number of transformations that has allowed the journal to expand its scope, reach and impact (Crick, Thomas and Beauchamp, 2023). We have successfully transitioned onto an entirely online platform (Janeway) both to facilitate the submission and review process and to house our publications in an easily accessible manner. We have expanded our publication formats to include traditional full-length research articles and *Focus on Practice*¹ collections, both of which are accompanied by *WJE Podcast*² recordings of short interviews between the Editorial team and authors. We have introduced an updated *Resources* section³, showcasing a variety of research methods and offering guidance on how to prepare *Focus on Practice* articles. And we have now also collated and categorised articles by subject that map onto the new *Curriculum for Wales' Areas of Learning and Experience* – among other key themes across educational research, policy and practice – in order to improve accessibility and understanding of the growing body of knowledge and evidence underpinning these domains.

As emphasised in our first Editorial as a new editorial team in 2021 (Beauchamp, Crick and Thomas, 2021), our aim was to support the Welsh Government's goal of

1 <https://journal.uwp.co.uk/wje/site/focus/>

2 <https://journal.uwp.co.uk/wje/site/podcast/>

3 <https://journal.uwp.co.uk/wje/site/resources/>

making education research in Wales ‘visible and accessible to all in order to help develop knowledge and expertise’ (BERA, 2019: 3). Our tracking data show high levels of engagement with the Journal, with 12,790 views and downloads in June alone this year, with numbers increasing on a monthly basis. Similarly, the number of citations has also grown year on year, which attests to the growing level of engagement with the journal and its increasingly diverse content within academia. More strikingly, our readership is not confined only to Wales, or the UK; since launching the new version of the Journal in May 2021, we have had high levels of website views (and resulting downloads) from the US (86,689), China (60,576), Germany (14,631), Canada (5,366), Brazil (4,999), Ireland (3,449), Singapore (3,013), Australia (2,676) and the Russian Federation (2,185) as well as 60,576 from the UK. Given the shared global challenges facing education today across various contexts and jurisdictions in terms of a post-COVID ‘new normal’ (see: Thomas, Crick and Beauchamp, 2023), budgetary pressures, staff recruitment and retention, falling literacy and numeracy skills, pupil absenteeism and challenging behaviours, among others, our goal is always to learn from other contexts facing similar issues and to contribute our research to help inform policies and developments elsewhere in the world. In this issue, as with previous ones, we continue to take stock of the wider education policy context in Wales, particularly as we observe the ongoing implementation of major education system-level reforms (Davies et al., 2024). The new Curriculum for Wales is now moving beyond initial rollout towards deeper implementation and evaluation; while the Curriculum offers a uniquely holistic, purpose-led approach, with an emphasis on cross-disciplinary learning and learner agency, the challenges of enactment at scale are becoming more visible (Evans, 2023). Research is beginning to highlight disparities in how schools interpret and operationalise the new Areas of Learning and Experience, including questions around assessment readiness, teacher workload, and the availability of high-quality, bilingual resources (Priestley et al., 2025; Estyn, 2025). We anticipate that these issues will generate fertile ground for further empirical and conceptual work, particularly around curriculum-making, practitioner agency, and the role of policy in enabling – or constraining – innovation in schools.

For these reasons, we welcome local, national and international research that provides insights into shaping current and future education policy and practice in Wales and beyond. This is perhaps particularly pertinent given the ongoing national curriculum and assessment review in England, which published its interim report in

March 2025 (Department for Education, 2025). Indeed, with our growing readership outside of Wales, our hope is that some of the initiatives that have originated here in Wales, as demonstrated in our main articles and in our *Focus on Practice* collections, can help support high quality education elsewhere in the world.

Alongside curriculum reform, the rollout of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) transformation in Wales represents another major policy shift. While the reforms rightly place the learner at the centre of planning and support, ensuring a consistent approach across local authorities, settings and agencies remains a live challenge (Conn et al., 2024). There is also a pressing need for robust evidence around early identification, co-produced support planning, and the interface between education, health and social care (Knight et al., 2024). Researchers working with children and young people with ALN, their families, and practitioners are in a strong position to inform the next phase of the implementation journey (Newton et al., 2025). As ALN reform intersects with broader debates about inclusion, equity, and resource allocation, we hope the Journal will serve as a key platform for exploring both the promise and the tensions of this evolving system.

As mentioned in previous issues, the focus of the journal is not just on schools and compulsory-level education; we very much welcome educational research on issues that affect the entire life course, from early years through to post-compulsory education, training and lifelong learning. Beyond schools, the further and higher education sectors in Wales are also undergoing significant change. With new regulatory pressures from Medr (the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research in Wales), intensifying debates around the sustainability of university funding and the system as a whole in both Wales and across the UK, universities face complex strategic choices. At the same time, higher education is a vital site for teacher education, educational research, and the delivery of professional learning, alongside being key anchor organisations for civic engagement and diverse economic impact through a place-based lens. As such, we encourage critical engagement with how both Welsh further and higher education institutions are adapting to these pressures, and what this means for the future shape of educational research and workforce development.

Professional learning is a key element of the education profession and helps keep practitioners across all settings and contexts engaged in learning not only from others but also from evaluating and observing their own practice. At the cusp of a new era of professional learning for teachers in Wales (OECD, 2025), we would

urge practitioners to continue to engage with the journal, both as a guide for up-to-date research around areas of interest to their own practice and as an outlet to publish their own research as part of their continuous journey of learning. Being an educator involves a life-long commitment to education, not only as a deliverer of learning but also as a recipient of it. The *Wales Journal of Education* is here to serve our practitioners' needs, both in their capacity as teachers and as learners.

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