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National Literacy Programme

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| Audience | Lead members for education, regional consortia, local authority directors of education, local authority advisers, headteachers and schools' senior management, and teacher training institutions. |
| Overview | This document provides an overview of the Welsh Government's intended actions to improve standards of literacy in Wales. |
| Action required | This document may be used by regional consortia, headteachers and senior school leaders to plan for and implement change. |
| Further information | Enquiries about this document should be directed to: Literacy Branch Curriculum Division Department for Education and Skills Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ Tel: 0300 062 5525 e-mail: curriculum@wales.gsi.gov.uk |
| Additional copies | This document can only be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills |

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Introduction

The ambition for Wales

The Welsh Government aims to help everyone reach their potential, reduce inequality, and improve economic and social well-being.

Literacy is an essential life skill. To make sense of the world around them, young people need an understanding of written and spoken language, the ability to interpret what has been written or said, and to draw inferences from the evidence that surrounds them. It is also about being able to communicate – accurately, fluently and persuasively.

There is much excellent learning and teaching in literacy taking place in schools across Wales. However, these positive experiences in education are not consistent and action is needed to ensure that all learners benefit from excellent teaching of literacy and develop the skills that are so vital to their future success.

The National Literacy Programme (NLP) for Wales sets out the actions that will be taken by the Welsh Government and our partners to achieve a step-change in standards of literacy over the next five years. Milestones for key actions are available on the [Welsh Government website](#).

Our underlying principle is that all learners should be taught well. It is particularly important that learners acquire sound literacy skills early on in their education. Early oracy and the development of reading skills are particularly important building blocks and there is a national expectation that all primary schools should teach phonics in a consistent and interesting way, using frequent and regular access to phonics programmes. In 2007, Estyn stated that:

“ Around seventy-five per cent of words in English and almost all words in the Welsh language are phonically regular. Learning about sound and symbol relationships is therefore important in learning to read. ”

If all learners have access to excellent teachers who can deliver phonics and other reading skills in a consistent and interesting way then learners educated in Wales can be expected to significantly improve their standards of reading by the time they leave primary school. If learners can also be supported to develop their oracy and writing skills by the time they leave primary schools they are more likely to benefit fully from their learning in secondary school. Similarly, learners leaving secondary school should have developed the higher-order oracy, reading and writing skills necessary to support

their future choices in further education or employment. We are committed to enabling all learners to achieve their full potential.

As an objective measure of our success, our national ambition is, that by 2015, Wales will be among the top 20 nations in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Setting ourselves an ambitious target for PISA 2015 is the right approach because PISA tests the skills that young people need in order to succeed.

There is no doubt that it is a very challenging target. Just as we make progress, so will other countries around the world. In order to improve standards significantly, we must transform what is happening in our schools.

The Welsh Government cannot raise standards of literacy alone. Literacy standards will only improve if there is commitment from regional school improvement consortia, local authorities, governing bodies, headteachers, teachers and support staff. Similarly, we need parents/carers to share our commitment and provide good role models for their children so that they value education and take advantage of the improved experiences in literacy that will be on offer. It is vital that we all work together to ensure that learners get an excellent education, and literacy is an essential component.

The NLP will be reviewed on a regular basis in order to allow for new actions to be added if they are needed and for our plans to align with the best advice available. This will keep us focused on our ambition which is to have consistent standards of literacy across Wales, allowing us to tackle disadvantage and, as a country, be better able to compete economically on a global scale.

The need for action

Unfortunately, literacy in Wales is not as well developed as we would wish it to be. The 2009 PISA results were a wake up call for all of us involved in education in Wales. The 2009 results for Wales were poor in terms of comparison to prior performance, to other UK nations, as well as internationally. In reading, our mean score was significantly lower than our UK counterparts and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) average, and our international 'ranking' was lower than in 2006.

These results support what Estyn annual reports for the last two years have been telling us. In 2009–10, Estyn reported:

“Despite achieving some progress in literacy in the last six years, Wales still has problems with low-level basic literacy.”

The 2010–11 report recorded some improvement, but still nowhere near enough:

“40 per cent of pupils in Wales still arrive at secondary school with reading ages below their chronological age.”

The NLP seeks to address these shortfalls and sets out the actions that will be taken by the Welsh Government and our partners to improve literacy over the next five years.

The challenges we need to address

It is essential that we understand why literacy levels in Wales are not as high as we would like in order to identify the actions needed to improve standards. We have also consulted local and international academics and experts specialising in school improvement and have taken account of international research in order to determine appropriate priorities and activities.

The key messages that emerge are as follows.

- **There is too much variability of practice.** There is large variation in the way schools implement literacy programmes and, as a result, there is too much fragmentation. Similarly there is also variety in what practitioners understand by the term 'literacy', how it should be evidenced by learners and how it should be assessed. This evidence has led us to conclude that we need an agreed set of national expectations and standards to ensure that consistent approaches and priorities are set across Wales.

- **Initial training and continuing professional development (CPD) is not sufficiently focussed on literacy.** Literacy training through initial teacher training, induction and ongoing professional development has not always been coherent in its approach or consistent in its quality. We cannot be confident that all our teachers know how best to teach learners to read and write. Too few teachers see themselves as teachers of literacy and assume that literacy will be taught by others. We need to develop a programme that provides support and development for practitioners.
- **More and earlier support is needed for those learners not reaching the expected standards.** While all learners should be taught well first time some may need targeted intervention programmes to improve standards of literacy and help them catch up. To date targeted interventions have often been small scale, focusing only on a small number of learners. Consistent methods have not always been used to identify those who require support, approaches used to help learners improve their skills are of varying quality, and tracking and monitoring is not always rigorous. This evidence has led us to conclude that we need to prioritise targeted intervention at school, class and learner level.
- **A consistent approach to setting expectations.** The approach to planning, capacity-building and accountability differs between schools and because of this it is difficult at either a national or local level to chart progress or identify areas for improvement with sufficient confidence. This has led us to conclude that we need to agree systems for implementing and monitoring accountability and challenge in schools across Wales.

This evidence leads us to believe that the actions in our NLP need to focus around four key themes:

- setting national expectations and standards
- greater support and development
- stronger targeted interventions
- greater accountability and challenge.

The actions that support these four themes require that:

- all teachers of every subject across every phase of education will become teachers of literacy
- there is improved professional development and opportunities for greater collaboration between schools
- regional school improvement consortia work with schools to ensure that they are supported and challenged in order to achieve higher standards
- the Welsh Government sets a clear vision and direction by working collaboratively with partners to agree national standards in literacy and consistent approaches to learning and teaching.

By embedding literacy skills in every aspect of education and by providing quality support, our ambition is to achieve the following.

- Learners of every age will become confident in their oracy skills and will become proficient readers and writers.
- Learners will focus on the development of first language literacy in either English or Welsh with the expectation that learners attending Welsh-medium schools are equally literate in both languages by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Learners who are currently falling behind their peers will achieve their potential.
- More able and talented learners will be appropriately challenged.
- Learners will leave primary schools with improved literacy skills so that they benefit fully from their learning in secondary school.
- Learners leaving compulsory education will have the oracy, reading and writing skills necessary for further education or employment.

Description of the main activities¹

National expectations and standards

In order to ensure that we have clear, precise expectations for the improvement of literacy across the curriculum a **National Literacy and Numeracy Framework** is being developed. It draws on the features of high-performing international models by setting out annual expected outcomes in literacy and numeracy. This framework will provide the driving force for our improvements and will shape the changes we make in other areas.

¹ The annex contains a list of objectives and actions.

The framework will contain English and Welsh literacy components for oracy, reading for information and writing for information. These will:

- establish annual expected outcomes in literacy for all learners aged 5 to 14
- determine how learners are performing against national standards for literacy and provide a continuum of development
- inform teachers of all subjects how to apply literacy across the curriculum to raise levels of attainment
- enable schools to identify how best to support and challenge all of their learners
- ensure that learners, parents/carers and teachers are clear as to how learners are progressing and what are the next steps.

After a consultation period the Literacy and Numeracy Framework will be launched in January 2013 and will become a statutory curriculum requirement from September 2013. From 2013 senior managers and teachers will have access to a wide range of guidance materials to support the effective implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, including examples of learner work to support decision making regarding formative assessment.

The Literacy and Numeracy Framework will highlight the range of reading strategies to demonstrate the importance of phonics and the need to complement their use with a combination of phonological, graphic and grammatical strategies. This will re-emphasise how the teaching of reading should be developed from reception to 14 years of age.

Alongside the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, we are developing English and Welsh² **national reading tests**. These bespoke tests for all learners in Years 2 to 9 are being developed by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and will be available for the first time in May 2013. The tests will assess achievement holistically by including varying elements of comprehension and higher-order reading skills. The tests will:

- provide summative data and allow practitioners to gain an objective picture of the levels of attainment of individuals, across school years and whole schools

² Learners in Year 2 in Welsh-medium schools will sit the Welsh reading test only, and Year 3 learners in Welsh-medium schools will sit the Welsh reading test on a statutory basis and the English reading test on a voluntary basis.

- be formative in as much as they will allow teachers to gain an accurate picture of where a learner is in terms of their reading.

Alongside the main tests, we will provide additional, non-statutory diagnostic test materials to be used at teachers' and schools' discretion. The results of the diagnostic tests will be used internally at school or local authority discretion to support intervention and any corrective action that needs to be put in place.

Ongoing assessment is a core element of good teaching practice. The tests in themselves will not raise standards; it is what happens in response to the test that will make a difference.

The formative assessment of learners through the Literacy and Numeracy Framework and the summative assessment of the reading tests will provide teachers with an indication of learner progress in literacy. This will allow schools to better identify and support learners who are falling behind with appropriate intervention strategies, and provide more able and talented learners with greater challenge.

The **teaching of reading** in the Foundation Phase is delivered through the Language, Literacy and Communication Skills Area of Learning within the *Foundation Phase: Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008) and specific guidance has been issued to support this – *Language, Literacy and Communication Skills* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). The guidance illustrates that children in the Foundation Phase should have access to a wide range of books to enable them to enjoy reading and to make progress in their ability to read their own work and that of others through phonics, role play and rhymes. Phonics has a place in the Foundation Phase but must be an integral part of the learning experiences and not as a stand-alone session.

A suite of guidance and training materials will also be developed to support senior managers in the Foundation Phase and across the curriculum in order to effectively implement the Literacy and Numeracy Framework.

Support and development

The key to success for learners lies in the quality of teaching. In order to make the necessary improvements to literacy in Wales we must ensure that all teachers become accomplished teachers of literacy. To achieve this, all schools will be required to adopt a more systematic approach to developing the skills of teachers and support staff in the

learning and teaching of literacy skills. The NLP outlines this national approach to professional development in literacy through initial teacher training, induction and CPD.

We have made changes to the arrangements for **performance management and professional standards** so that they work together to inform practitioners about professional development priorities. This ensures that practitioners are focussed on priority areas such as literacy. This is known as the practice review and development (PRD) process.

The PRD model also recognises that the culture of CPD needs to move from 'one-off' courses towards more effective forms of development such as coaching and mentoring, reflective practice, action enquiry, building practice on the basis of evidence (based on the most effective practice in Wales and internationally) and participation in professional learning communities (PLCs).

One of the key ways to upskill teachers is to ensure that they are given opportunities to undertake additional study to enrich and enhance their classroom practice. To ensure that this is implemented consistently, the Welsh Government is to offer the opportunity for newly qualified teachers to undertake the **Masters in Educational Practice**. The intention is for the Masters to be:

- practical in nature and focussed upon improving teaching practice
- about improving practice and raising standards, and will be awarded for demonstrating excellent, effective practice
- focused on certain key priorities, such as improving the learning and teaching of literacy.

The Masters will include a specific focus on literacy (including a focus on the teaching of reading and the introduction of phonics) alongside other modules including child development, behaviour management and additional learning needs (ALN), all of which have been identified as barriers to learners developing their literacy skills to their full potential.

Further support is available through the introduction of a national model for **PLCs**. The model provides teachers with an effective method to work through issues or barriers to school improvement in the area of literacy. It also provides an effective form of professional development for all staff involved in a PLC (including support staff).

A PLC is a group of practitioners working together using a structured process of enquiry to focus on a specific area of their teaching to improve learner outcomes and so raise school standards. PLCs encourage professional collaboration and transfer of effective practice within and between schools. This can help reduce variation in teaching performance within and between schools.

The characteristics of an effective PLC are that they:

- focus on learner needs and so have a clear sense of purpose
- are data informed so they work on areas in most need of improvement
- pay close attention to pedagogical improvement
- use structured processes of enquiry so that their outcomes lead to informed changes in professional practice
- provide practitioners with opportunities to engage in purposeful collaborative work to innovate, develop and learn together
- operate through distributed leadership with all members participating in decisions and taking joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work.

Improving learning and teaching in literacy will be a key element of the action enquiry undertaken by PLCs. As they develop we expect that the informal evidence gathered from the implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework and formal data gathered from the reading tests will provide the focus for the PLCs' action enquiry.

In order to support reflective practice and to ensure that consistent messages are being conveyed, the Welsh Government is to provide a single, web-based repository for **high-quality resources**. This resource will be housed on the new Learning Wales website (to be launched in September 2012) and will consist of a range of materials to suit the varying needs of practitioners in Wales. For example, academic research will be available for practitioners studying for their Masters course, evidence for improving literacy will be available for PLCs to use in their action enquiry and approaches to using phonics will be readily available for teachers needing specific guidance.

Targeted intervention at school, class and learner level

Successful learning relies heavily on the skills of the teacher. While there have been initiatives to embed literacy skills across the curriculum, until now there has not been a coordinated approach that sets standards for literacy across the curriculum. The purpose of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework is to fulfil this need. In order to ensure that the current approach is successful, many teachers will need upskilling. Research has found that one of the most successful forms of CPD is through collaborative learning implemented in a non-threatening way.

The Welsh Government will, through the School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant, require that local authorities identify **outstanding teachers of literacy** to work with their peers to build the skills, knowledge and capacity of other teachers and practitioners in sharing effective practice in literacy. These outstanding teachers will be released from a percentage of their teaching commitments on a regular basis to model best practice, support PLCs, and partner other teachers and schools with little or no expertise in literacy. They are likely to be successful teachers whose skills will depend on the role they are fulfilling, for example they may be literacy experts or subject teachers with a particular expertise in improving learners' levels of literacy.

The NLP requires schools to use the Literacy and Numeracy Framework together with the reading tests as a way of identifying learners who are considered to be falling behind their peers. The Welsh Government will provide guidance to advise on appropriate **targeted intervention programmes** and on their successful implementation. The School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant will fund these programmes so as to improve provision.

Early identification of more able and talented learners in literacy will mean that teachers can implement appropriate enrichment activities that will enhance their literacy skills. Enrichment activities, guidance and research evidence will be available within the new Learning Wales website to support teachers. Teachers will also have opportunities to discuss the literacy development of these learners with an outstanding teacher of literacy and/or as part of PLC action enquiry.

The underachievement of boys is of international concern. Research in Wales and further afield has found that boys that underachieve largely do so because they do not acquire the level of literacy required to access the wider curriculum. The Welsh Government has commissioned research to identify possible causes and resolutions to this problem. We are currently piloting a range of approaches in selected local authorities across Wales. We will address the findings as they become available by establishing a national programme of interventions to deal with the wide range of issues that undermine and form barriers to boys' achievement in schools.

Accountability and challenge

The School Standards Unit (SSU) has introduced a process of **national banding** of schools and stocktakes as a way of strengthening accountability and of driving up educational standards.

Many local authorities already operated some kind of banding system but there was variation in terms of approach and quality. A national system was needed to enable comparison across regions, provide a national picture of capacity, and enable challenge, support and targeted intervention to be based on relative need.

The SSU meets with the four regional education consortia on a regular basis to carry out stocktake meetings. This is a rigorous process for monitoring the support and challenge provided by consortia to raise standards in their schools. The stocktakes use:

- data and analysis to build a clear, shared understanding of the challenges faced
- coherent planning and capacity-building focussed on 'how' to raise standards and narrow gaps
- routines and responses to take stock of progress, evaluate capacity and assess quality of implementation.

Stocktakes are focused on the three national priorities of literacy, numeracy and breaking the link between poverty and attainment. As a result of these stocktakes and the banding information, the regions have been working on action plans for specific support and intervention for targeted schools.

The NLP sets an ambitious and challenging agenda for the next five years. It:

- sets challenging, yet achievable standards for learners
- creates an environment conducive to collaboration with partners
- encourages all teachers to improve their skills through collaboration and support
- focuses on helping learners develop their skills, make faster progress and move on to the next stage of their education with confidence so that they can achieve their full potential.

To do this we need to strengthen the good practice that already takes place in many of our schools by identifying the support and challenge needed to ensure that every school in Wales will successfully improve standards of literacy.

Annex: Actions to be implemented

The Welsh Government has set four clear priorities and associated actions to guide our work and the work of our partners over the next five years. Milestones for key actions are available on the [Welsh Government website](#).

1. National expectations and standards

We will:

- establish a clear, shared vision for literacy in Wales that is supported by local authorities, consortia and teachers
- maximise the scope within the curriculum to teach communication skills including oracy, reading and writing by developing a statutory Literacy and Numeracy Framework and by creating a professional development programme to support its implementation
- strengthen our approach to the assessment of literacy so that learners' progress can be tracked; this will include the introduction of national reading tests for all learners from Years 2 to 9.

2. Support and development

We will:

- support professional development in literacy through the PLC network and by identifying outstanding teachers of literacy who can model best practice in the classroom
- ensure all qualifying teachers are trained in literacy teaching by establishing a national approach to professional development in literacy through initial teacher training, induction, and CPD; we will also introduce a Masters in Educational Practice which will focus on literacy, numeracy, and developing teachers' practical skills and knowledge
- quality assure, make accessible and maintain a bank of leading practice literacy resources, to be available through a dedicated area on the Welsh Government website.

3. Targeted interventions

We will:

- use the banding system to help identify those schools that would benefit from targeted support and challenge
- identify teachers with low skills in teaching literacy, encourage them to engage with PLCs and partner them with an outstanding teacher of literacy
- implement proven intervention programmes for learners at risk of falling behind or those not achieving their potential; this will include research into boys' underperformance and guidance on catch-up programmes.

4. Accountability and challenge

We will:

- expect all local authorities, working within consortia, to set clear actions for raising standards in literacy; we will undertake regular 'stocktakes' to monitor progress and hold consortia to account
- place a greater emphasis on performance in literacy by ensuring all headteachers have an objective to improve literacy standards where required and by including literacy in Practising Teacher Standards (PTS).