

Dadansoddi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

2/2019

PUBLICATION DATE:

24 JANUARY 2019

Study into a National Equivalency Entry Test for Initial Teacher Education Candidates Final Report

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

OGI © Crown Copyright Digital ISBN 978-1-78964-683-2

Title: Study into a National Equivalency Entry Test for Initial
Teacher Education Candidates
Subtitle: Final Report

Author(s): ICF Consulting Services Limited in association with
Arad Research



Full Research Report: Beadle, S., Thomas, H., and Hannah, A. (2018). *Study into a National Equivalency Entry Test for Initial Teacher Education Candidates*. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 2/2019
Available at: <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/study-national-equivalency-entry-test-initial-teacher-education-candidates/?lang=en>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

David Roberts

Social Research and Information Division

Sarn Mynach

Llandudno Junction

LL31 9RZ

Tel: 0300 062 5485

Email: SchoolsResearch@gov.wales

Table of contents

List of tables	2
List of figures	3
Glossary	4
Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction	15
2. ITE candidates and equivalency testing.....	26
3. The world of equivalency testing: feasibility of a national equivalency test ..	58
4. Appraisal of options	94
5. Conclusions and recommendations	104
Annex A: Data Tables (survey responses)	106

List of tables

Table 2.1 Target intakes for ITE courses by sector and type of course for 2016/17	27
Table 2.2 Entrants on ITE courses by sector and type of degree 2016/17	28
Table 2.3 Numbers of 2017/18 ITE candidates sitting and successful in equivalency tests	43
Table 2.4 Which provider did you first sit the equivalency test(s) with?	44
Table 2.5 Information about ITE equivalency tests offered by equivalency test providers	45
Table 2.6 Summary of current equivalency testing arrangements in ITE providers	52
Table 2.7 Numbers of ITE candidates sitting and passing pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests by provider (2017)	57
Table 2.8 Percentages of ITE candidates sitting and passing pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests by provider (2017)	57
Table 3.1 Equivalency and literacy/numeracy tests in other UK contexts	63
Table 3.2 Shortlisted tests	68
Table 3.3 Suitability of the shortlisted tests	78
Table 4.1 Strengths and weaknesses	94
Table 4.2 Gap between policy and practice	95
Table 4.3 Option assessment	101

List of figures

Figure 1.1 Overview of approach to evaluation..... 19

Figure 1.2 Overview of research tasks..... 20

Figure 1.3 Option appraisal approach..... 24

Figure 2.1 Candidates’ responses to the question: ‘When did you realise that you had to sit the equivalency test(s)?’ 33

Figure 2.2 Candidates’ responses to the question ‘Thinking about your application process, were you aware of the:’ 33

Figure 2.3 Candidates’ responses to the question ‘Thinking about your ITE provider, to what extent do you agree or disagree that they:’ 34

Figure 2.4 Candidates’ responses to the question ‘Did you receive any of the following support to help prepare for the equivalency test(s)?’ 36

Figure 2.5 Extent to which candidates agreed to disagreed with statements on the pre-test support received 37

Figure 2.6 Extent to which candidates agreed or disagreed that pre-application support arrangements required improvement 39

Figure 2.7 Views about the content of the equivalency test(s)..... 41

Figure 2.8 What equivalency test(s) did you sit? 43

Figure 2.9 Candidate estimates of the length of their equivalency tests 46

Figure 2.10 Candidates’ views about the results of the equivalency test(s)..... 47

Figure 3.1 ITE testing practices in other UK countries 59

Figure 3.2 ITE testing practices in additional English-speaking countries..... 61

Figure 3.3 Candidate opinions on future testing arrangements 81

Figure 3.4 Benefits and challenges of introducing a national equivalency test 86

Glossary

Acronym	Definition
BEd	Bachelor of Education
EWC	Education Workforce Council
FEI	Further Education Institution
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GTP	Graduate Teacher Programme
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
NMWCTET	North and Mid Wales Centre for Teacher Education and Training
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NRNT	National Reading and Numeracy Tests
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEWCTET	South East Wales Centre for Teacher Education and Training
SWWCTE	South West Wales Centre for Teacher Education
UCET Cymru	Universities Council for the Education of Teachers in Wales
USW	University of South Wales
UWTSD	University of Wales Trinity Saint David
WEST	The Wales Essential Skills Toolkit
WJEC	Welsh Joint Education Committee

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. ICF with Arad Research were commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake this study into the use of equivalency entry tests by initial teacher education (ITE) providers in January 2018. This report examines the practice of testing the literacy and numeracy of candidates for entry to ITE courses in Wales, the availability and suitability of tests for testing literacy and numeracy skills equivalent to a Grade B at General Certificate of Secondary Education level (GCSE), and an assessment of future options for equivalency testing.
2. Developing a 'high-quality education workforce' is central to the Welsh Government's current education action plan 'Education in Wales: Our national mission'. It is vital to ensure trainee teachers possess robust literacy and numeracy skills, particularly given that the new curriculum in Wales will mean that literacy and numeracy become cross-curriculum responsibilities for all teachers and raising standards in literacy and numeracy remains a strategic priority in education for the Welsh Government.
3. ITE providers must balance overcoming barriers to entry to attract a higher quantity of candidates regardless of their background, while also ensuring high standards are met during the selection process so that future teachers meet learners' needs in schools in Wales.

Purpose of the study

4. The Welsh Government was aware that individual ITE providers in Wales use their own equivalency entry tests for ITE candidates who do not meet the minimum GCSE Grade B requirement in English Language and/or mathematics. As part of the Welsh Government's continued strategy to improve ITE, this study aims to:
 - Identify and examine how ITE providers assess potential ITE candidates' literacy and numeracy competences when they do not hold GCSE qualifications (English/Welsh and maths) at Grade B;
 - Obtain the views of stakeholders about the current arrangements, alternatives and the potential for national equivalency tests;
 - Assess the feasibility of national equivalency tests taking account of, the policy objectives for ITE and their wider context, best practice in other countries, the suitability of tests to assess the standards needed, and the practicalities of implementing change;
 - Make recommendations on a way forward for the policy.

Methodology

Research tools

5. To meet the study aims the following research activities were completed:
- A documentary review of material for candidates available online and collected from ITE providers;
 - Scoping telephone interviews with five ITE provider staff (one in each provider);
 - In-depth telephone interviews with 20 ITE provider staff covering all the providers delivering ITE courses;
 - In-depth telephone interviews with 15 candidates taking equivalency tests who indicated in the survey (see below) that they would be willing to be interviewed;
 - In-depth telephone interviews with eight stakeholders with an interest in the policy area;
 - An e-survey of candidates who had completed equivalency tests in the last three years. This was principally distributed by the ITE providers;
 - Analysis of data relating to ITE candidates obtained from HESA, Welsh Government, UCAS, HEFCW and individual ITE providers in Wales;
 - Desk research examining information relating to equivalency tests and literacy and numeracy tests on ITE centre websites as well as government and agency websites from other parts of the UK, selected European countries and other English-speaking countries.

Analysis of options

6. To assess the feasibility of options for future policy on testing ITE candidates systematically we followed the process set out below.

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
A gap analysis, drawing on an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangements, and between current practices and the policy objectives of the testing. These objectives were identified as equivalence to a GCSE grade B standard, fairness, proportionality (to the cost/time for considering candidates), transparency and portability.	The identification of options, drawing on an examination of the current arrangements to see if improvements to current testing are one option for consideration; an assessment of the equivalence of other tests used/available for both literacy and numeracy (which may be used by one ITE provider in Wales or by other administrations) to see if any might be potential standard/national tests; consideration of developing bespoke tests drawing on others' experiences.	The assessment of options against a set of cost/benefit criteria. Two broad criteria were used: a) the extent to which the option will address policy gaps and b) the feasibility of the option in terms of costs of implementation, the capacity and expertise available to implement it and the time taken to implement the option.

What did the study find about ITE candidates and equivalency testing?

Entry requirements

7. All providers (aside from Cardiff Metropolitan University who accept a Grade D for some secondary candidates) require candidates to have a GCSE Grade C in English and/or Welsh and mathematics to be considered for entry, subject to passing an equivalency test. Entry requirements for ITE in Wales are well understood by providers and stakeholders but are not always clear to candidates. Not all candidates are aware of the Grade B requirement, qualifications that are considered equivalent and the different options for sitting an equivalency test until they have been made a conditional offer by their provider.
8. Providers, stakeholders and candidates perceive the Grade B requirement to be a barrier to recruitment and a contributor to the fall in ITE applicant numbers although the evidence for this is anecdotal. The number of applicants without a Grade B in English and maths is not recorded systematically by providers, although some providers do record this information.

Equivalency testing arrangements

9. A total of 214 candidates for 2017/18 entry sat English equivalency tests and 286 sat mathematics equivalency tests. All providers, aside from Teach First Cymru (who signpost candidates to the other providers), have developed or commissioned their own English and maths equivalency tests. Two providers (Bangor and Cardiff Metropolitan Universities) used private sector providers prior to developing their own tests.
10. All providers who have developed their own tests have used staff with previous experience of teaching or marking GCSE papers to do so. Providers report they have drawn on GCSE English and maths past papers at intermediate level in designing their equivalency tests. Some consulted with staff from examining boards.
11. Arrangements for implementing equivalency tests vary across providers in terms of test design and selection, pre-test support, length, timing, costs and resit policies. There are also significant variations in the pre-test support offered to candidates sitting equivalency tests. The support includes attending a 12-week course (USW), attending a two-day workshop (UWTSD), attending a shorter (around half a day) preparatory session (Bangor and Aberystwyth) and being provided with written guidance (Cardiff Met).

12. Providers offer several dates during the year for candidates to sit or resit their tests but the extent of testing dates varies between providers. The length of equivalency tests used ranges from 90 minutes to 2 hours. The costs to candidates for sitting (and resitting) equivalency tests vary significantly. These range from free (Cardiff Metropolitan and UWTSD) to £275 (for the course and test at USW). Candidates had mixed views about the testing arrangements and their experience.
13. Pass rates are variable with several providers having few if any candidates failing. Resit policies vary across providers from one resit (Aberystwyth, USW, UWTSD) to three resits (Bangor and Cardiff Metropolitan University) being permitted. All providers report that they accept equivalency test results from elsewhere, including private providers and other ITE centres. Candidates report that they have chosen which ITE providers' test to sit.

Other pre-entry testing

14. It is evident that providers have developed a broadly consistent approach for testing literacy and numeracy skills of all ITE candidates although these are administered by each ITE provider separately including the choice of test. Results at three providers are more consistent than those from the equivalency tests. However, both ITE providers and candidates have mixed views on the value of these tests.

What did the study find about the feasibility of a national equivalency test?

Equivalency testing practices elsewhere

15. No other English-speaking countries have national equivalency tests in place for ITE candidates who do not meet a minimum required standard in English and mathematics. Some individual ITE providers in other parts of the UK have developed in-house equivalency tests but these are not designed to assess candidates' competency at GCSE Grade B level and are used less widely than equivalency tests are in Wales. ITE providers often signpost candidates to two leading private equivalency testing organisations in the UK that are used by applicants who do not meet the minimum entrance requirements in literacy and numeracy.
16. National pre-entry tests of *all* ITE candidates' professional literacy and numeracy skills are also not generally common practice in English-speaking countries. England's 'professional skills tests' are an exception to this. Alternative models currently being used internationally include sitting national

tests prior to graduation, setting a national requirement to assess literacy and numeracy upon entrance but leaving providers with some autonomy, and using tailored versions of a commercial test.

17. There are no directly suitable alternative equivalency or literacy/numeracy tests being used in other professional contexts for admission to training or for a licence to practise and registration purposes in the UK.

Views on current arrangements and tests available in Wales

18. In terms of the strengths of current arrangements, provider staff largely believe in-house tests are more candidate-centred and reduce a potential barrier for applicants, particularly when the provider absorbs the cost of the test. Candidates mostly had positive experiences with test administration.
19. In terms of areas for improvement, many candidates think accompanying support from providers to prepare for the tests is important and should be standardised, but the nature and extent of support currently available varies between centres.
20. In addition, providers acknowledge the need for consistency between ITE centres. Stakeholders tend to express concerns about consistency and fairness for applicants. Candidates were often not sure the in-house equivalency tests they had sat were genuinely comparable to a GCSE Grade B standard or had as broad a coverage of the curriculum. Some provider staff acknowledge that their centre lacks a formal moderation or quality assurance process.
21. An assessment of existing tests shows that none are suitable for the purposes of national equivalency tests in their existing form. Providers' in-house equivalency tests have several weaknesses, including short lengths, high pass rates and a lack of robust moderation. Other national literacy and numeracy assessment tools in Wales serve quite different purposes and would not necessarily be adaptable.

Views on introducing a National Equivalency Test

22. Almost all ITE provider staff are in favour of introducing some form of national equivalency test. Stakeholders also acknowledge the need for consistency, but a few stressed proportionality in the context of teacher recruitment challenges. Candidates who had sat multiple equivalency tests at different providers would welcome a national test as it would have been more convenient.

23. The benefits of introducing a national equivalency test might include: greater fairness and consistency across providers, stronger currency and recognition in the profession, a reduced workload for ITE provider staff and more transparency, clarity and convenience for applicants.
24. The barriers and challenges to introducing a national test might include: the cost of test development and administration as well as costs for candidates, inflexibility of administration arrangements, achieving a consensus on the competencies to be assessed and lower candidate pass rates.
25. There were mixed views about the method of delivery. Online tests might reduce some administration and make marking quicker and more reliable. However, paper-based tests may be more appropriate for assessing candidates' writing skills and encouraging deeper thinking and more complex mathematical problem solving.
26. There were also mixed views on the competencies that should be assessed. Some stakeholders thought that the test should be modelled on the WJEC syllabus. Findings from interviews with ITE staff suggest that key areas of weakness among current trainees include writing skills, grammar, spelling and punctuation in English; and basic knowledge of fractions and percentages in mathematics.

Appraisal of options

Strengths and weaknesses of current practice

Theme	Strengths	Weaknesses
Test development and selection	<p>All providers have used practitioners experienced in teaching and marking GCSE maths and English papers to develop questions for equivalency test papers.</p> <p>All providers have used GCSE papers to develop the questions for their own in-house tests.</p> <p>Some providers have collaborated (formally or informally) with awarding bodies or examination boards (e.g. Agored Cymru or WJEC) and drawn on their expertise in developing tests.</p>	<p>No formal independent quality assurance process is in place for examining whether equivalency test questions and pass marks are at the appropriate level for assessing equivalency to the Grade B GCSE.</p> <p>Test development takes up the time of ITE course tutors. There are costs for providers who have outsourced test development to contractors.</p> <p>Some providers have not drawn on external advice in developing tests.</p>
Test administration	<p>Each provider rotates versions of test papers or have a bank of tests in place. Providers recognise the need to review and refresh the papers and questions periodically.</p> <p>Providers generally offer a range of dates for candidates to sit tests, allowing flexibility to sit (or resit) the test at different points up to the start of ITE courses in September.</p>	<p>Staff in providers are not necessarily refreshing test papers periodically, or spending time developing new questions.</p> <p>It takes time for providers to administer the tests. Some uncertainty is generated for providers in planning for how many candidates with conditional offers will register on the course/test dates.</p> <p>Candidates are not always aware of the Grade B requirement and option to sit an equivalency test as well as the different tests available.</p> <p>Some candidates feel that tests do not truly reflect equivalence to a GCSE Grade B.</p>
Test support	<p>All providers offer some support to candidates to prepare for the test. Some providers offer longer courses to prepare for the tests.</p> <p>Some candidates report that preparing for the test was a helpful refresher that improved their literacy and numeracy skills in advance of their course.</p>	<p>Inconsistency in the support that is available to candidates. Some candidates unaware of support available from providers.</p> <p>Some candidates feel that the courses are designed to 'teach to the test' and therefore do not reflect a GCSE Grade B standard.</p>
Sitting and passing tests	<p>Most candidates report that tests were smoothly run and that test results were provided promptly.</p>	<p>Some candidates report that tests are not always administered under strict exam conditions.</p>

Gaps between current practice and policy

27. The main gaps in current practices are:
- A perceived lack of **fairness** due to inconsistencies in current practices and the lack of a Welsh-language equivalency test;
 - **Credibility** - whether equivalency tests truly address the Grade B requirement;
 - **Proportionality** in terms of the time spent by ITE practitioners on current practices;
 - Lack of **visibility and transparency** around the Grade B entry requirement, the option to sit a test and the pre-test support available;
 - Lack of clarity on the **portability** of tests between providers.

Options considered

28. **Option 1 - Maintain the status quo:** This option would involve maintaining current practice with providers continuing to select and administer equivalency tests in the way they deem most appropriate to meet the Welsh Government's requirements for access to ITE courses.
29. **Option 2 - Provide more guidance to providers:** This option would require the Welsh Government to improve current practice by developing guidance for providers setting out how they should assess whether candidates have achieved a standard equivalent to a Grade B in the GCSE examination in English and/or Welsh and in mathematics. Guidance should set out what is considered to be good practice in relation to the following:
- Test selection, development and administration;
 - Quality assurance;
 - Timing;
 - Support for students;
 - Communication.
30. **Option 3 - Require or encourage providers to use common testing procedures:** Under this option the Welsh Government would either encourage or require (through its commissioning of ITE provision) ITE providers to develop a single test for English/Welsh and maths as well as common procedures for the administration of tests. This would not require legislation. The guidance in Option 2 would be applied to guide the development of common procedures. As a consequence, providers would be required to agree on an independent quality assurance process for validating questions and moderating papers (e.g. involving an examination board).

31. **Option 4 - Introduce a national equivalency test:** This option would involve the Welsh Government leading the development and administration of a national equivalency test that would be compulsory for all ITE candidates without a Grade B GCSE or equivalent qualification. A national test would have a national quality assurance process overseen by the Welsh Government.

Appraisal

32. The option assessment indicates that:
- Option 1 would not address the policy gaps;
 - Option 2 could address some of the policy gaps at relatively low cost. They could be made in the short term to improve the credibility of the equivalency tests;
 - Options 3 and 4 could each address the policy gaps but this would take longer and the costs would be higher. Option 3 has lower costs falling on the Welsh Government as the costs and responsibilities fall on ITE providers. Option 3 could give rise to some of the problems identified with the pre-entry tests developed by ITE providers in collaboration and would be developed at a pace determined by the ITE providers;
 - Option 4 would give rise to development and administration costs falling largely on the Welsh Government but the government might be more assured that the Grade B requirement is met consistently and there are no differences in test administration;
 - Option 4 could enable providers to focus on offering courses that would get candidates up to the standard.

Recommendations

33. Based on the findings of this assessment, these are:
- In the short-medium term (for 2019/20 entry), the Welsh Government should develop guidance for providers relating to recommended good practice in the administration of equivalency testing (Option 2 above) to improve the quality of equivalence testing. This should cover:
 - marketing the availability of equivalency tests and support;
 - test development and selection;
 - pre-test support and guidance;
 - test administration.

- In the longer-term (for 2020/21 entry), the Welsh Government should introduce a national equivalency test (Option 4 above).
 - This option would involve the Welsh Government leading the development and administration of a national equivalency test that would be compulsory for all ITE candidates without a Grade B GCSE or equivalent qualification. A national test would have a national quality assurance process.
 - This should be accompanied by national marketing to raise awareness of the Grade B requirement and the option to sit the national equivalency test and follow a pre-test course. This may obviate the need for any other testing of candidates' literacy and numeracy skills by ITE providers.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 ICF with Arad Research were commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake this study into the use of equivalency entry tests by initial teacher education (ITE) providers in January 2018. This report examines the practice of testing the literacy and numeracy of candidates for entry to ITE courses in Wales, the availability and suitability of tests for testing literacy and numeracy skills equivalent to a Grade B at General Certificate of Secondary Education level (GCSE), and an assessment of future options for equivalency testing.

Background

The need for high literacy and numeracy standards in the teaching workforce

- 1.2 Since 2011, there have been some improvements in literacy (English and Welsh) and numeracy (maths) with higher proportions of pupils achieving the expected levels of attainment, gaps in attainment between advantaged/disadvantaged pupils have reduced, and there has been a general upward trend in English and Maths GCSE grades. However, the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results show that the literacy and numeracy standards of Welsh pupils remain lower than those in the other UK nations¹ and there was a drop in good GCSE passes in 2016/17².
- 1.3 While good pedagogical approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy are being established³, the quality of teaching overall is considered one of the weakest aspects of provision in most sectors according to Estyn, with the number of secondary schools requiring monitoring rising from 35% to 48% in 2015-16⁴.
- 1.4 To address these challenges, it is vital to ensure trainee teachers possess robust literacy and numeracy skills, particularly given that the new curriculum in Wales will mean that literacy and numeracy become cross-curriculum

¹ OECD, 2016. [Programme for International Student Assessment \(PISA\): Results From PISA 2015 – United Kingdom](#).

² Welsh Government: [Examination achievements of pupils in Year 11/aged 15 by year](#)

³ Welsh Government, 2017. [Evaluation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Programme Final Report](#).

⁴ Estyn, 2017. [The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015-16](#).

responsibilities for all teachers⁵ and raising standards in literacy and numeracy remains a strategic priority in education for the Welsh Government⁶.

- 1.5 The target intake for secondary school trainee teachers was missed by a third in 2015/16 – a wider gap than has generally been experienced over the last decade – while the intake for primary school trainee teachers was also slightly below the target⁷. ITE providers must therefore balance overcoming barriers to entry to attract a higher quantity of candidates regardless of their background, whilst also ensuring high standards are met during the selection process to ensure future teachers meet learners’ needs in schools in Wales.

The policy response

- 1.6 Developing a ‘high-quality education workforce’ is central to the Welsh Government’s current education action plan ‘Education in Wales: Our national mission’⁸. Tabberer’s Review of Initial Teacher Training (2013)⁹ identified a range of key concerns with ITE in Wales and Furlong’s Teaching Tomorrow’s Teachers (2015)¹⁰ built on this review to provide a clear set of options for reform.
- 1.7 Building on the findings and recommendations of these reports, recent reforms to ITE, include:
- **New criteria for the accreditation of ITE programmes** to improve quality and consistency¹¹, with accreditation being overseen by the Education Workforce Council’s new board¹². For entry testing, there is a requirement that candidates take part in “aptitude testing” and that

⁵ Welsh Government, 2015. [Qualified for Life: A curriculum for Wales – A curriculum for life.](#)

⁶ Welsh Government, 2016. [National Literacy and Numeracy Programme – A strategic action plan.](#)

⁷ Welsh Government, 2017. [Initial Teacher Education in Wales, 2015/16.](#)

⁸ Welsh Government, 2017. [Education in Wales: Our national mission – Action plan 2017-21.](#)

⁹ Tabberer, R., 2013. [A Review of Initial Teacher Training in Wales.](#)

¹⁰ Furlong, J., 2015. [Teaching Tomorrow’s Teachers: Options for the future of initial teacher education in Wales.](#)

¹¹ Welsh Government, 2017. [Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales.](#)

¹² Williams, K., March 2017. [Written Statement - Progressing our ambitions for initial teacher education \(ITE\).](#)

providers must “satisfy themselves” that candidates have appropriate literacy and numeracy skills¹³.

- **Higher minimum entry requirements for prospective student teachers since 2014** including a standard equivalent to Grade B in the GCSE examinations in English and/or Welsh and mathematics. These are higher than in England (Grade C). ITE providers have agreed guidance on which equivalent qualifications are acceptable.
- **New professional standards for teaching and leadership** setting out rigorous expectations for NQTs and placing a central importance on literacy and numeracy competencies¹⁴.

Purpose of the study

1.8 The Welsh Government was aware that individual ITE providers in Wales use their own equivalency entry tests for ITE candidates who do not meet the minimum GCSE Grade B requirement in English Language and/or mathematics. As part of the Welsh Government’s continued strategy to improve ITE, this study aims to:

- Identify and examine how ITE providers assess potential ITE candidates’ literacy and numeracy competences when they do not hold GCSE qualifications (English/Welsh and maths) at Grade B;¹⁵
- Obtain the views of stakeholders about the current arrangements, alternatives and the potential for national equivalency tests;
- Assess the feasibility of national equivalency tests taking account of, the policy objectives for ITE and their wider context, best practice in other countries, the suitability of tests to assess the standards needed, and the practicalities of implementing change;
- Make recommendations on a way forward for the policy.

¹³ Welsh Government, 2017. [Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales](#). Aptitude tests are used in England as well <https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/how-to-apply/passing-the-skills-tests>.

¹⁴ Welsh Government, 2017. [Professional standards for teaching and leadership](#).

¹⁵ [Requirements for initial school teacher training courses at higher education institutions in Wales](#) (Welsh Government, 2013) includes a requirement for providers to ensure that all trainees have achieved a standard equivalent to a GCSE grade B in GCSE English and mathematics only from 2014/15. The new requirements in [Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales](#) (Welsh Government, 2018) include reference to a requirement for GCSE grade B in English and/or Welsh and maths.

- 1.9 To meet these aims, the study identifies equivalency tests used by ITE providers in Wales and how they are administered. The study also identifies the tests of literacy/numeracy used in other countries for ITE candidates or similar groups. From this it is possible to identify options for appraising their potential use in Wales and to assess these systematically to arrive at evidence-based recommendations.
- 1.10 The following questions were specified in the invitation to tender and subsequent discussions:
- What equivalency tests are used by ITE providers in Wales and for which candidates and routes into teaching; how are tests quality assured by providers and moderated between providers?
 - What other tests of literacy and numeracy are used with all ITE candidates and what purpose do they serve?
 - What are stakeholders' views on the current arrangements for testing and of any areas for improvement to these; what do they see as the benefits and drawbacks of national equivalency tests (Welsh, English, maths), the problems and practicalities of introducing new tests and the competences to be assessed?
 - What equivalency testing approaches have been adopted elsewhere including outside the UK, which would be relevant to assessing ITE candidates' literacy and numeracy skills; how have they been designed and implemented and at what cost?

Method

Assessment framework

- 1.11 The research required was carried out in three logical steps: understanding the current state of play in ITE providers, considering the feasibility of national equivalency tests, and finally appraising options for policy makers in the Welsh Government. Figure 1.1 shows what the study has found out at each step (drawing on the study aims and research questions), what sources were used to obtain the information and what analysis was carried out.

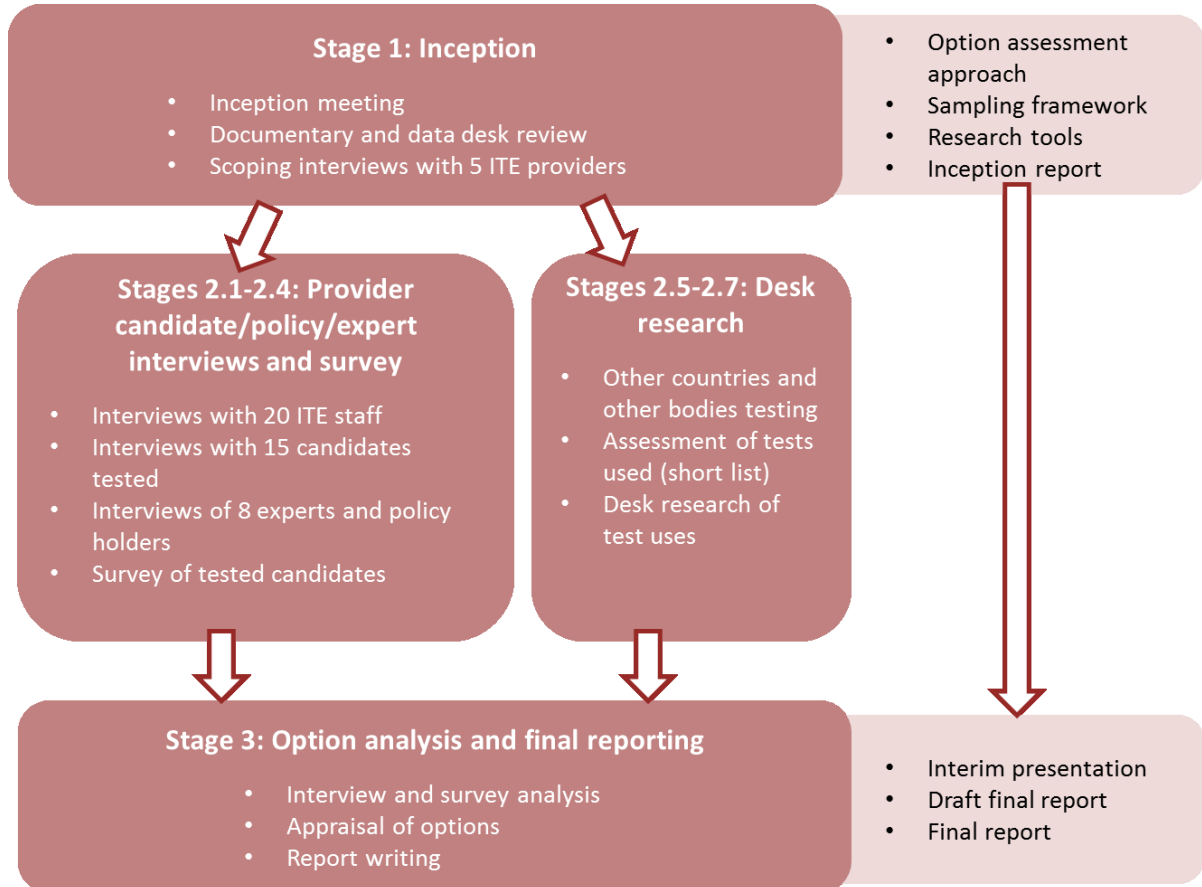
Figure 1.1 Overview of approach to evaluation

	What we want to know	How we will find out	How we will analyse what we find
State of play	<p>Current arrangements for ITE candidates without GCSE Grade B in E/W/M or an acceptable equivalent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial interviews of ITE programme leads; in-depth interviews of programme/course leads, policy holders and a sample of candidates over the last 3-4 years who undertook equivalency tests; Data on ITE applicants, numbers without the minimum qualifications, and numbers taking equivalency tests understood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mapping of tests used and processes followed; comparative analysis of processes; Thematic/triangulated analysis of interviews; Candidates e-survey questionnaire responses.
Feasibility of a national equivalency test	<p>Availability of suitable alternative equivalency tests; stakeholder views on national tests</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In depth interviews with ITE staff about equivalency tests used; ITE practices in other countries with similar selection criteria/testing; Interviews with providers of tests about their applicability and their administration, costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thematic/triangulated analysis of interviews; Appraisal of tests available/used and their usability for ITE candidates.
Appraisal of options	<p>Comparative benefits of one or more options for a national test over improved arrangements by ITEs; preferred option for implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In depth interviews of ITE staff, candidates and policy holders; Collection of standard information on potential national tests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gap analysis; Multi-criteria analysis of options.

Key features of research

1.12 An overview of the research steps is set out in Figure 1.2 below.

Figure 1.2 Overview of research tasks



Description of each phase of the method

1.13 **Documentary review** – we examined material for candidates available online and collected the following from ITE providers:

- Guidance provided to ITE candidates sitting equivalency tests;
- Copies of sample test papers for equivalency tests and pre-entry tests;
- Copies of literacy and numeracy audits undertaken at the start of ITE courses.

1.14 **Stakeholder interviews** – we interviewed the following individuals:

- **Five scoping interviews** with ITE provider staff (one in each provider) to discuss data requirements, involvement in provider fieldwork and arrangements for the candidate survey;

- **Twenty ITE provider staff** covering all the providers delivering ITE courses. Staff included course leads and tutors involved in primary and secondary, undergraduate and postgraduate and GTP routes as well as admissions and testing. Interviews included the following number of staff from each provider:
 - USW (4); Aberystwyth (3); Bangor (4); Cardiff Met (5); UWTSD (3); Teach First (1);
- **Fifteen candidates** taking equivalency tests who indicated in the survey (see below) that they would be willing to be interviewed. This was fewer candidates than initially intended because ITE providers, with one exception, could not provide contact details and few who completed the survey agreed to be contacted (24). However, the interviews covered candidates from all providers and, among the 15, included:
 - Nine secondary PGCE candidates, three primary PGCE candidates and three undergraduate candidates;
 - Candidates studying through the medium of Welsh (2) and English (13);
 - Ten candidates who were currently studying ITE, three working as teachers and two who had left the profession;
 - Twelve candidates who passed tests at their first attempt and three who did not.
- **Eight stakeholders** with an interest in the policy area. This included representatives from:
 - Welsh Government;
 - Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol;
 - University and Schools Council for the Education of Teachers in Wales;
 - Education Workforce Council;
 - HEFCW;
 - University of Oxford's Department of Education;
 - Teacher Recruitment and Retention Advisory Board.
- **Candidate survey:** we received 101 useable responses (out of a total of 114) to an e-survey aimed at candidates who had completed equivalency tests in the last three years. This was distributed by the ITE providers, with the exception of one provider who was able to provide candidate contact details. Candidates were sent an initial invitation email with a link

to the e-survey and were also sent reminders to complete the survey. The survey was open for 6 weeks from mid-March to the end of April 2018.

- 1.15 It is not possible to provide a precise survey population as limitations in the availability of accurate records for candidates and/or data access issues mean we are not able to identify how many current and former ITE candidates the survey reached, how many of their email addresses were valid and how many read the email invitation.¹⁶ Furthermore, reliance on the ITE providers to distribute the survey via email means that current ITE students may have been more likely to respond than former candidates in employment. For these reasons, the survey sample should be considered a convenience sample.
- 1.16 It is possible, however, to make some assumptions to estimate the total number of ITE equivalency test candidates the survey could have reached. This has been estimated using data from two ITE providers on the number of candidates sitting tests and the total number of tests that were undertaken. Data from these providers indicates that the number of candidates sitting either an English or Maths test is 74% of the number of candidates sitting an English test plus the number sitting a Maths test. Using this figure of 74% and the sum of the number of candidates sitting English and the number sitting Maths tests (500) we estimate that around 370 ITE candidates for 2017/18 entry sat equivalency tests. Assuming that the number of candidates sitting tests has remained broadly similar over the last three years, this would give a total number of candidates of 1,110 over the last three years sitting equivalency tests. By making these assumptions, we can estimate that the survey population was around 1,110, whilst recognising that it is likely that the number of candidates who received the invitation was much lower than this. This would indicate that the survey response rate was around 9%.

¹⁶ In four out of the five ITE providers, the survey was distributed on our behalf by the provider. In some providers, the survey was sent to all ITE candidates (including those who had not sat an equivalency test) as more targeted distribution lists for those sitting equivalency tests were not available. The survey included a filter question to exclude those who had not sat equivalency tests. Out of the 114 respondents who provided complete (86%) or partial (14%) responses to the survey, only 104 had sat an equivalency test and were eligible to complete the rest of the survey. Three respondents who were eligible to complete the survey did not continue further, leaving an overall base of 101 respondents.

1.17 Survey responses covered all ITE providers, secondary and primary courses, PGCE/degree courses and are sufficiently large for quantitative analysis, although sub-group analysis should be treated as qualitative data. The profile of the survey respondents is detailed below (N=101 unless stated otherwise).

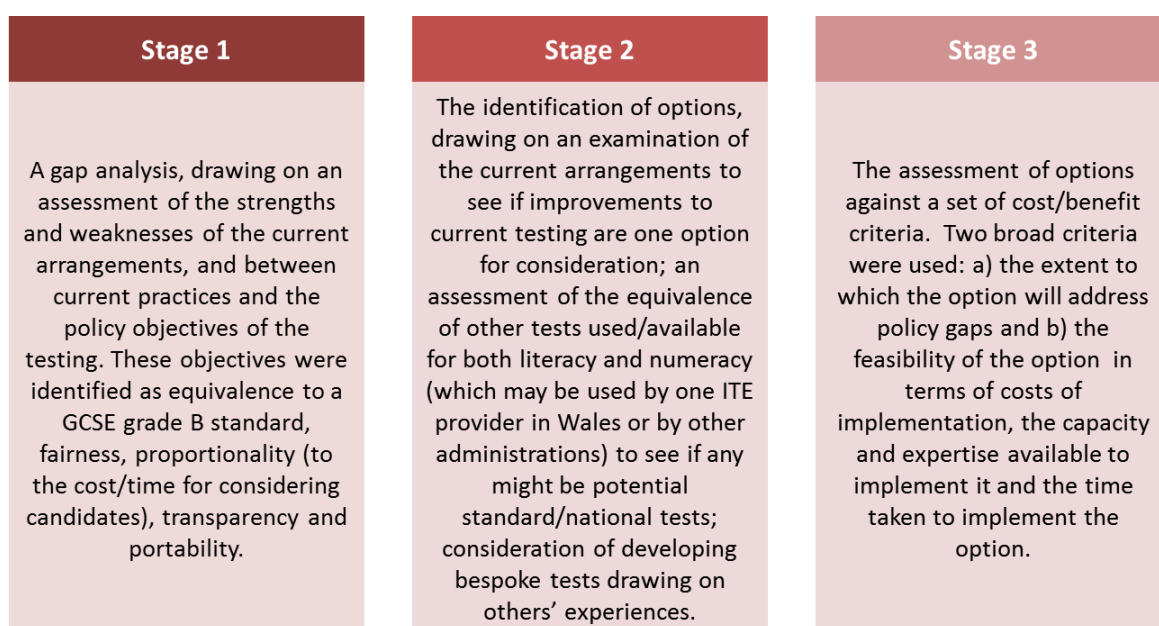
- Most respondents (60%) were ITE students in Wales, followed by 23% who stated they were NQTs or newly qualified teachers. The remaining 17% of respondents were either fully qualified teachers, working as a non-qualified teacher, a student on another course, a current ITE student in England, or working in a different profession;
- Three-quarters (75%) of the respondents had followed or were currently undertaking the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), whilst 25% of respondents were following a degree course (BEd, BA or BSc) which leads to a qualified teacher status;
- A roughly similar proportion of respondents were focused on primary education and secondary education (47% compared to 53% respectively. Secondary candidates with a variety of subject specialisms responded to the survey;¹⁷
- The majority of the respondents followed an English-medium ITE course (86%) with a few respondents following a Welsh-medium route (10%);
- Just over half (54%) funded their ITE course fully through a grant or bursary, with a third (31%) partially funding through grant or bursary and 15% funding it entirely themselves;
- The majority of the survey respondents had sat their first equivalency test at UWTSU (45%) or Cardiff Metropolitan University (40%), with a lower proportion stating they had undertaken their tests at USW (11%), Aberystwyth (4%) and Bangor (2%).¹⁸
- A few (14%) respondents said they had to resit their equivalency test, and all but one respondent passed a resit test. The majority of respondents who had to resit a test (12 out of 13) had to resit the maths/numeracy equivalency test; only one respondent had to resit the English test.

¹⁷ Between one and six respondents each indicated they specialised in the following subjects: Art and Design; Biology with Science; Business; Chemistry with Science; Design & Technology; Drama; English; Geography; History; ICT & Computing; Mathematics; Modern Foreign Languages; Music; Other; Physical Education; Physics with Science; Welsh.

¹⁸ N=91 for the final bullet point as 10 respondents did not complete this question.

- 1.18 **Data gathering:** we obtained data on the number of candidates from HESA/Welsh Government, applications data from UCAS and data on the intake targets from HEFCW. All ITE providers provided data on the numbers of 2017/18 candidates who sat and passed English and Maths equivalency tests. Two ITE providers provided data on candidates without the GCSE Grade B (the others were unable to provide this data). Three providers provided data on the numbers of ITE candidates sitting and passing pre-entry tests that all candidates sit as part of their interview day (one provider reported they did not record this data).
- 1.19 **Desk research:** we undertook searches of government and ITE centre websites as well as websites for providers of literacy/numeracy tests used for entry to qualification courses, jobs and professional bodies. The government and agency websites examined included those for other parts of the UK, European countries (where we understood tests might be used for entry) and other English speaking countries. We followed up information about tests identified with telephone and email enquiries.
- 1.20 **Option appraisal:** to assess the feasibility of options for future policy on testing ITE candidates systematically we followed the process set out in Figure 1.3 below.

Figure 1.3 Option appraisal approach



Structure of this report

- 1.21 Chapter 2 describes ITE applications data and the characteristics of trainees, the equivalency requirements and how applicants are considered by each of the ITE providers. It then sets out the equivalency testing arrangements at each provider, the results of testing and the views of provider staff, candidates and other stakeholders on the process and practice.
- 1.22 Chapter 3 describes the use of equivalency and other tests used by ITE providers elsewhere and for entry to other professions where standards of literacy and/or numeracy are important, and the tests used. Tests which could be considered for use as a national equivalency test are selected for detailed assessment and review. The views of provider staff, candidates and other stakeholders about other options for equivalency testing are described.
- 1.23 Chapter 4 assesses the options for action taking account of the findings of the study to arrive at some conclusions and recommendations for the Welsh Government and ITE providers.

2. ITE candidates and equivalency testing

2.1 In this section we set out our findings about ITE provision, data on ITE applications and the characteristics of trainees, the application and equivalency testing processes in place and the availability of data on candidates and testing. We also set out our findings about other pre-entry tests that candidates sit as part of the application process for ITE courses.

ITE provision

2.2 An overview of the ITE providers and courses available in Wales as well as target intakes, numbers of applications and trainees on ITE courses is outlined below.

ITE providers and courses

2.3 There are three ITE centres for teacher education in Wales and each centre includes two ITE providers. These are:

- North and Mid Wales Centre for Teacher Education and Training (NMWCTET), provided by Bangor University and Aberystwyth University;
- South West Wales Centre for Teacher Education (SWWCTE) provided by University of Wales, Trinity St David at Swansea and Carmarthen;
- South East Wales Centre for Teacher Education and Training (SEWCTET) provided by the University of South Wales and Cardiff Metropolitan University.

2.4 Each centre offers both PGCE and other degree courses (usually a BEd, BA or BSc) leading to qualified teacher status at both primary and secondary levels (although each centre has a few students on other degree courses at secondary level).

2.5 Employment-based schemes for those training to teach are also available in Wales. There are two employment-based routes: the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) and Teach First Cymru.

2.6 In presenting findings from the fieldwork, we describe the processes in place across the six ITE providers rather than the three ITE centres. These are: Bangor University, Aberystwyth University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of South Wales, University of Wales Trinity St. David and Teach

First Cymru. This is because practice varies within ITE centres and it is therefore more appropriate to report by provider.

ITE intake targets

2.7 The Welsh Government set out its intake targets for ITE in the 2016/17 academic year in a letter to HEFCW in December 2015.¹⁹ The total intake target for all centres in 2016/17 was set at 1,630, comprising:

- 1,235 postgraduate and 395 undergraduate trainees;
- 750 primary and 880 secondary trainees.

2.8 Further targets were set for 'target secondary subjects' (Mathematics; Chemistry; Physics; Modern foreign languages; Welsh, ICT (Computer studies) as well as other secondary subjects.

2.9 Based on these overall targets, HEFCW set targets for the three ITE centres in December 2015.²⁰ The target intakes for ITE centres in the 2016/17 academic year are shown in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Target intakes for ITE courses by sector and type of course for 2016/17

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
Primary	300	450	750
Secondary	95	785	880
Total	395	1,235	1,630

Source: HEFCW *Primary and Secondary Initial Teacher Training: Intake targets 2016/17*

2.10 In 2017/18, there were 23 Teach First participants in their first year in Wales and the GTP has a maximum of 90 places allocated as follows:

- 36 places (around 12 per centre) for maintained primary schools;
- 36 places (around 12 per Centre) for secondary maintained schools with a focus on regional priorities and the following subjects: mathematics, physics, chemistry, modern foreign languages, ICT/Computer Science and Welsh;

¹⁹ HEFCW, 2015. [Initial Teacher Education: Intake Targets 2016/17](#).

The most recent targets were set in December 2017 for the 2018/19 academic year. However, these targets cannot be compared with intake data and therefore 2016/17 data is presented in this report.

²⁰ HEFCW [Target intakes for primary and secondary ITE courses](#)

- 18 unfunded places (around 6 per Centre) to meet recruitment shortages.

ITE trainees

2.11 Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) presented in Initial Teacher Education Wales 2016/17 (Welsh Government, 2018) shows there were 1,245 entrants to ITE courses in 2016/17; 700 (56%) on primary school courses and 545 (44%) on secondary school courses. The number of entrants (1,245) missed the target (1,630) by almost a quarter in 2016/17. The number of new secondary school trainee teachers (545) missed the target (871) by over a third in 2016/17 while the number of new primary school trainees (700) was slightly below the target (750).²¹ The data shows that around two-thirds (69%) of entrants onto ITE courses were female and around a third (31%) male. In terms of ethnicity, almost all were white with around 2% from a minority ethnic group. Around a fifth (19%) of ITE students were training to teach in Welsh.

Table 2.2 Entrants on ITE courses by sector and type of degree 2016/17

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
Primary	270	425	700
Secondary	20	530	545
Total	290	955	1,245

N.B. Totals may not sum precisely as data are rounded to the nearest 5 in line with the principals of the HESA rounding strategy.

Source: Higher education student record, Higher Education Statistics Agency

2.12 In addition to the above, there are 29 Teach First trainees in their second year in Wales (i.e. they were 2016/17 entrants) as well as 71 Graduate Teacher Programme trainees in 2016/17.

ITE applicants

2.13 UCAS publishes data on the number of applicants for ITE courses in Wales. Data for 2017 shows that there were a total of 2,020 applicants (UCAS Teacher Training applicants at End of Cycle 2017), of which:

²¹ See [Initial Teacher Education Wales 2016/17](#) The secondary target of 871 presented in this document differs to the target of 880 set out in the HEFCW letter.

- 1,300 (64%) were classified as ‘placed’: applicants who have either firmly accepted an unconditional offer or had their place confirmed after meeting conditions of a conditional firm offer;
- None were classified as:
 - ‘conditional placed’: applicants who have accepted a conditional offer as their firm choice;
 - ‘holding offer’: applicants who are holding an unconditional or conditional offer which has not been replied to;
- 710 (35%) were classified as ‘other’: all other applicants who are not placed, conditionally placed or holding an offer.

Entry requirements

2.14 Interviews with staff at ITE providers and desk research was undertaken to gather data on how equivalency test requirements are implemented by providers. In the section below and those that follow, we describe the processes in place across the six ITE providers rather than the ITE centres: these are Bangor University, Aberystwyth University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of South Wales, University of Wales Trinity St. David and Teach First Cymru.

Considering candidates’ English/maths qualifications

2.15 Five out of six ITE providers have a minimum entry requirement of a GCSE Grade C in English and maths in order for an application to be considered. In these providers, all those sitting an equivalency test therefore must have a GCSE Grade C in English and maths. However, one provider (Cardiff Metropolitan University) does consider applications from candidates with a GCSE Grade D if they are applying for some secondary routes. Interviews with this provider indicated that the purpose of this was to attract more candidates, particularly mature students, for subjects with shortages (e.g. Design and Technology).

2.16 Most providers do not record and store data on the number of applicants for ITE courses without a Grade B in English or mathematics. Some providers said that information on these qualifications is only held for those who register on the ITE course. Three providers were able to provide data on the

number of ITE candidates who did not hold a Grade B in either English or mathematics:

- In USW, 44% of 2017/18 ITE course applicants (183 out of 414) did not have a Grade B in either maths or English;
- In Bangor University:
 - 34% of 2017/18 ITE course applicants (261 out of 760 for whom data was available) did not have a Grade B in maths
 - 29% of applicants (226 out of 771 for whom data was available) did not have a Grade B in English
- Teach First Cymru indicated that around 1 in 25 of their applicants in Wales do not have a Grade B in either English or maths/numeracy.

2.17 Providers, stakeholders and candidates interviewed felt that the Grade B requirement was a barrier to entry for some candidates. Staff interviewed across all providers reported they were aware of a few cases where potential applicants without a Grade B had decided not to proceed with an application after making initial enquiries, or applicants who had withdrawn their application on becoming aware of the Grade B requirement. Applicants in these situations are not counted in the data presented above. Staff in most providers reported they were aware of a few cases where candidates had subsequently decided to apply to ITE providers in England. However, none of the providers had gathered data from these types of applicants or potential applicants to assess the extent to which the Grade B requirement had affected their decisions compared with other factors. Most providers and stakeholders felt that the Grade B requirement had contributed to a fall in the number of ITE applicants in recent years, but they could not point to evidence that would prove this.

2.18 All providers noted that they accepted other qualifications they deemed to be equivalent to GCSE Grade B. A list of other qualifications accepted by providers is set out in Guidelines for equivalence to GCSE English and mathematics B Grade for entry to initial teacher education and training in Wales (South East Wales CTE, South West Wales CTE, North and Mid-Wales CTE, 2018).²² These guidelines note that the list is not exhaustive and

²² Bangor University [Guidelines on equivalency](#)

providers reported during interviews that applicants with other qualifications were considered on a case-by-case basis by academic staff during the application process.

- 2.19 A few candidates with qualifications other than GCSEs said that they had faced challenges in establishing whether their qualifications would be accepted as being equivalent to a GCSE Grade B during the application process. A few candidates felt there was a lack of clarity on whether their qualifications would be accepted by the provider and described delays due to having to contact qualification bodies in their countries of origin. However, these candidates also felt that the equivalency testing process itself was straightforward enough.

‘I had to give evidence that my Maths and English was of a 16 year-old and with enough time and effort I could do that as a foreign language student who was just doing the equivalency tests to replicate and translate my school results... it may not be as easy for those who are struggling to get those results in the first place.’ ITE Candidate interview

‘I was a little bit irked at that point. I sort of fought against having to do the equivalency testing initially. I have a first-class honours degree and I’m a qualified accountant. It seemed a bit belittling really... I’d done a lot of numeracy courses in addition to that through other qualifications. I was not impressed to say the least.’ ITE Candidate interview

Awareness of entry requirements and equivalency testing

- 2.20 Providers, stakeholders and candidates interviewed considered it important to ensure that candidates were aware of the Grade B requirement. All providers understood the Grade B entry requirement and indicated that they communicated this to candidates in a variety of ways. These included the provision of written information (e.g. on application forms) and marketing materials (including provider web pages and paper materials) as well as discussions with candidates at events (e.g. careers fairs). Some providers reported that they now received fewer queries about the Grade B requirement compared with a few years ago and some of these providers suggested that awareness may have increased among candidates.

2.21 Providers reported that they informed candidates without the B Grade of the option to sit an equivalency test as early as possible. This included informal verbal discussions if the opportunity arose. However, all providers also indicated that candidates had to successfully meet all other requirements of the application process before being allowed to sit the equivalency test.

2.22 In spite of the above most providers acknowledged that some candidates remained unaware of the Grade B entry requirements, with providers also indicating that some candidates thought there was some flexibility in the requirement.

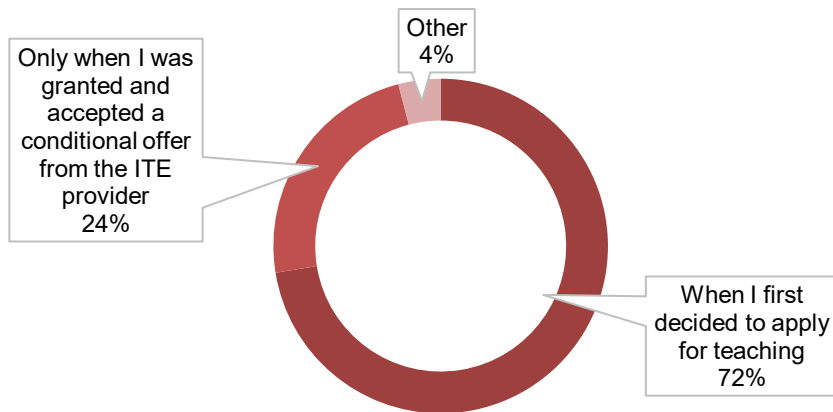
‘...whilst I am aware that considerable effort is put into publicising the requirement every year a significant proportion of applicants still do not appear to be aware of the requirement. Obviously, each year is a new cohort so equal effort needs to be put in each year. Unfortunately, I think applicants think and hope that we have the option to override the requirement (which we obviously can’t).’ ITE provider interview

‘It’s not obvious enough to candidates that they can sit an equivalency test and it’s not conveyed in a way that supports recruitment. It should be more prominent in recruitment fairs.’ ITE provider interview

2.23 Some provider staff (and candidates) reported that a few candidates who are studying full GCSE courses in English or maths choose to sit an equivalency test during their course. Providers and candidates reported that the reason they did this was to avoid having to wait until August for confirmation they would be accepted on the ITE course.

2.24 Candidates were asked when they first became aware that they needed to sit an equivalency test. 0 shows that around three-quarters of respondents (72%, N = 98) stated they became aware when they decided to apply for teaching, whilst 23 respondents said they only became aware when they were granted and accepted a conditional offer from the ITE provider. From the four respondents who specified ‘Other’, three realised when they did not get their Grade B in a GCSE exam resit. There were no large differences by providers or the type of route undertaken.

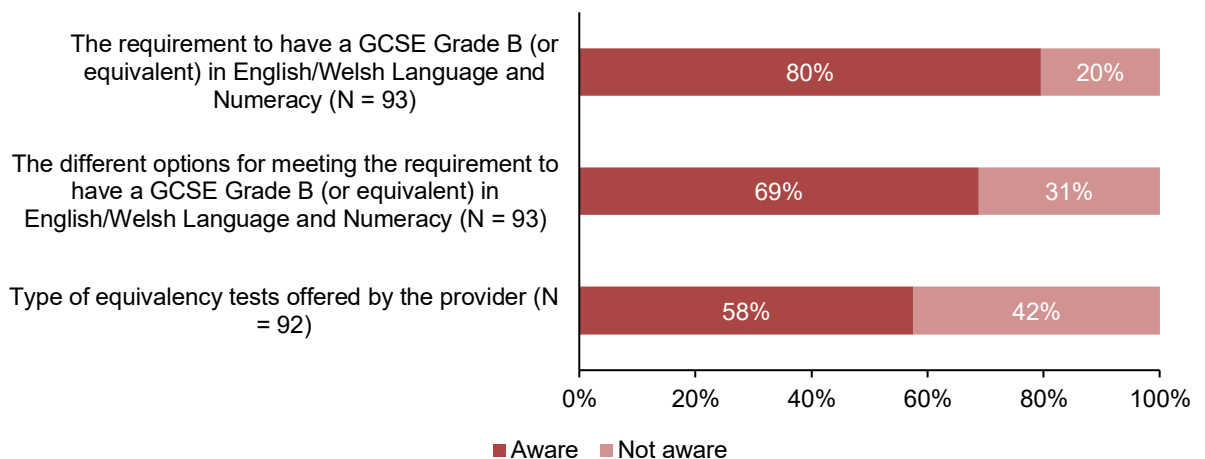
Figure 2.1 Candidates' responses to the question: 'When did you realise that you had to sit the equivalency test(s)?'



Base: Candidate survey respondents who had completed an equivalency test (three non-respondents).

2.25 Candidates were asked about the equivalency test arrangements offered by their provider, and their views of applying for these options. Figure 2.2 shows that while most respondents (80%, N = 93) were aware of the requirement to have at least a GCSE Grade B (or equivalent) to become a teacher, fewer respondents (69%, N = 93) were aware of the different options to meet this requirement or the types of equivalency tests required by the university (58%, N = 92).

Figure 2.2 Candidates' responses to the question 'Thinking about your application process, were you aware of the:'

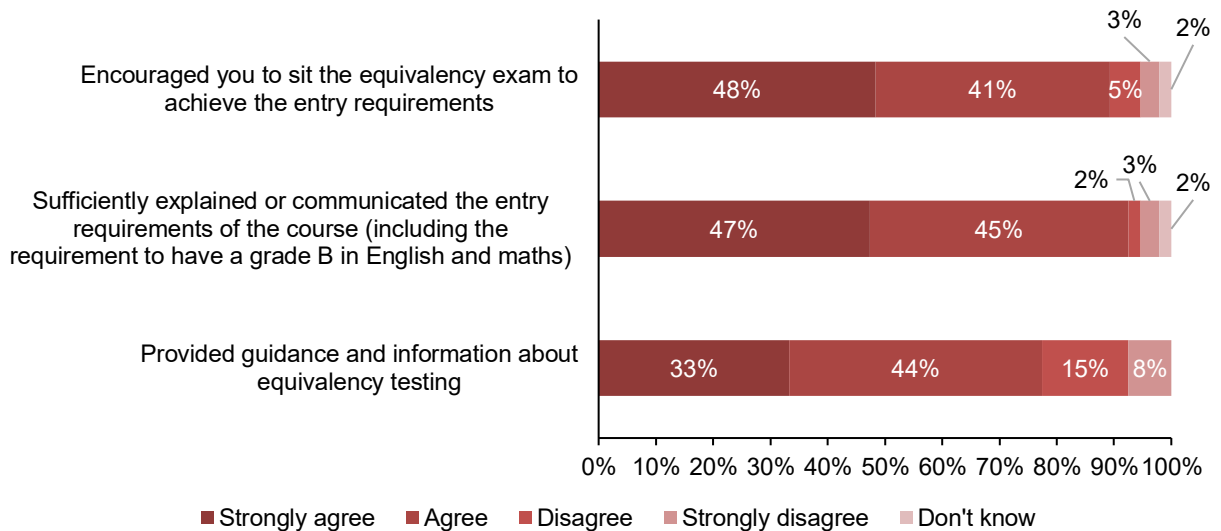


Base: Candidate survey total respondents (non-response excluded).

2.26 Respondents were also asked about the support they received from ITE providers during the application process (Figure 2.3). Most respondents (92%) strongly agreed or agreed that the providers sufficiently explained or communicated the entry requirements of the course and encouraged them to sit the equivalency exam to achieve the entry requirements (89%). However,

fewer respondents (77%) strongly agreed or agreed they provided guidance and information about equivalency testing, whilst 15% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed.

Figure 2.3 Candidates' responses to the question 'Thinking about your ITE provider, to what extent do you agree or disagree that they:'



Base: Candidate survey respondents (Seven non-respondents, N = 93).

Preparing candidates for equivalency tests

2.27 Four of the six providers offer some form of preparatory session(s) to candidates who would like support prior to sitting an equivalency test. However, there are significant differences in the scale and type of support offered by providers to candidates preparing for equivalency tests.

- USW offers a 10-week course (run twice a year and delivered in-house) to prepare for their equivalency tests which includes course work as well as the test. Attending the course is a compulsory part of the testing process at USW although USW do accept the results of tests from elsewhere (e.g. another provider or private sector testing company) if candidates are unable to attend the course;
- UWTSD offers a two-day workshop (delivered by a local FEI as an external contractor) which includes the development of an accredited portfolio (involving an accreditation body - Agored Cymru) as well as preparation for the tests. Candidates are sent a sample paper and some preparatory guidance (list of online materials) before the course. Attending the workshop is a compulsory part of the testing process for UWTSD although tests from other providers are accepted;

- Bangor University offers a preparatory session (delivered in-house) on the day before the equivalency test, although this is not delivered before all test dates. Attending the course is not a compulsory part of the testing process;
- Aberystwyth University offers a 3-hour workshop to candidates (delivered in-house) on the day of the tests. Attending the course is not a compulsory part of the testing process;
- Cardiff Metropolitan University does not offer a preparatory session but (like all the other providers) provides some guidance to candidates including links to suggested websites (e.g. WJEC past papers);
- Teach First do not offer a preparatory session as they signpost candidates without the Grade B to other providers, typically the candidate's nearest ITE provider. However, they do offer candidates a summer school which includes a focus on the Literacy and Numeracy Framework in Wales.

2.28 Most providers report that they provided past equivalency tests papers to candidates as part of the preparation for the test. Providers also noted that they signpost candidates to the WJEC website where GCSE past papers can be accessed.

2.29 Most providers, candidates and stakeholders interviewed indicated they would like to see a preparatory course offered to all candidates sitting equivalency tests. Most of those interviewed supported a more consistent approach to preparing candidates for equivalency tests. Some providers felt that having national literacy and numeracy courses available to all candidates and aimed at developing skills equivalent to the GCSE Grade B would be fairer. Others considered that incorporating specific literacy and numeracy elements into the ITE course itself was a preferable approach.

2.30 Candidates were asked in the survey what support they had to prepare for the equivalency test. From the 89 respondents who provided an answer, 35% (31 respondents) did not receive any support and prepared for the tests themselves or with peers either using past test material obtained privately (11 responses); using test material provided by the ITE provider (six responses); or using other available material such as GCSE guides (12 responses). Two respondents stated they prepared by paying for a tutor.

2.31 Respondents received different forms (and often multiple types) of support (Figure 2.4). Importantly, the most popular form of support was the single workshop; this was selected most by respondents who did their equivalency test at the University of Wales, Trinity St. David (either site). Signposting to course preparation material (e.g. links to website) was identified as the main support for respondents from Cardiff Met (11 respondents), though more respondents (23 respondents) stated they received no support at all and had to prepare for the tests themselves. Only two respondents said they did not prepare for the test at all.

Figure 2.4 Candidates’ responses to the question ‘Did you receive any of the following support to help prepare for the equivalency test(s)?’



Base: Candidate survey respondents (N = 89)

2.32 Candidates were also asked to specify whether their ITE course provider had provided them with the support they had specified; just under three-quarters (74%, N = 62) said that the provider had delivered the pre-test support.

2.33 Candidates provided further opinions about the pre-test support they received during interviews and the survey. Candidates who had attended a course in preparation for the test were had positive views on the content of the course:

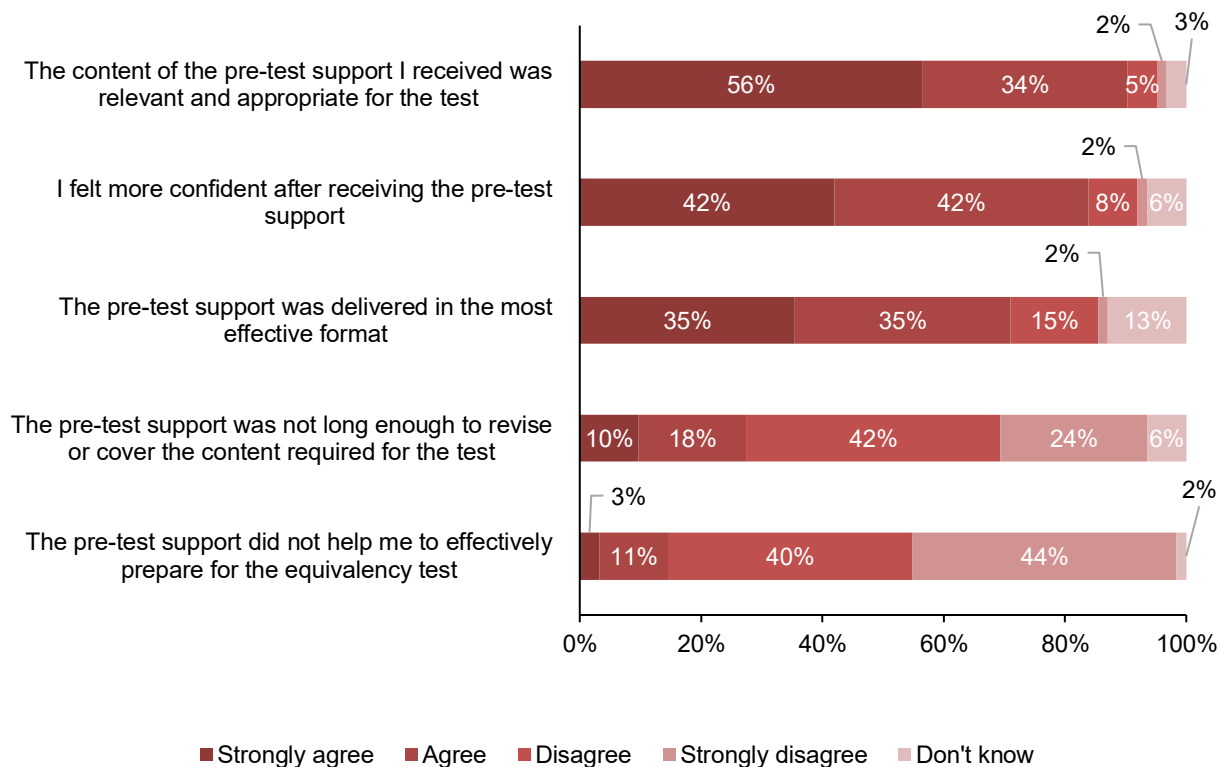
‘The course was good... the classes were all really well-structured, and it meant I really got the opportunity to learn. Of course, it could have been longer as it felt like we crammed in a lot and had homework every week.’
ITE candidate interview

‘...this was the first time I really felt I understood Maths, the teaching was excellent.’ ITE candidate interview

‘There’s such a broad things to revise from and If you’re going from a C to B trying to retain all that knowledge in a short space of time is quite difficult, which is why I opted for the course with support and pay the cost rather than do the free one ... Quite a lot of people at [provider] have done that.’
ITE candidate interview

2.34 Candidate survey results illustrate that the majority were positive about pre-test support, mainly because they felt it was relevant and appropriate for the test; they felt more confident having received the support; and it was delivered in an effective format (Figure 2.5). When asked to respond to ‘negative’ statements, only 28% strongly agreed or agreed that the pre-test support was not long enough to revise or cover the content required, and 14% felt the pre-test support did not effectively prepare them for the test.

Figure 2.5 Extent to which candidates agreed to disagreed with statements on the pre-test support received



Base: Candidate survey respondents who received support, N = 62 (for all statements)

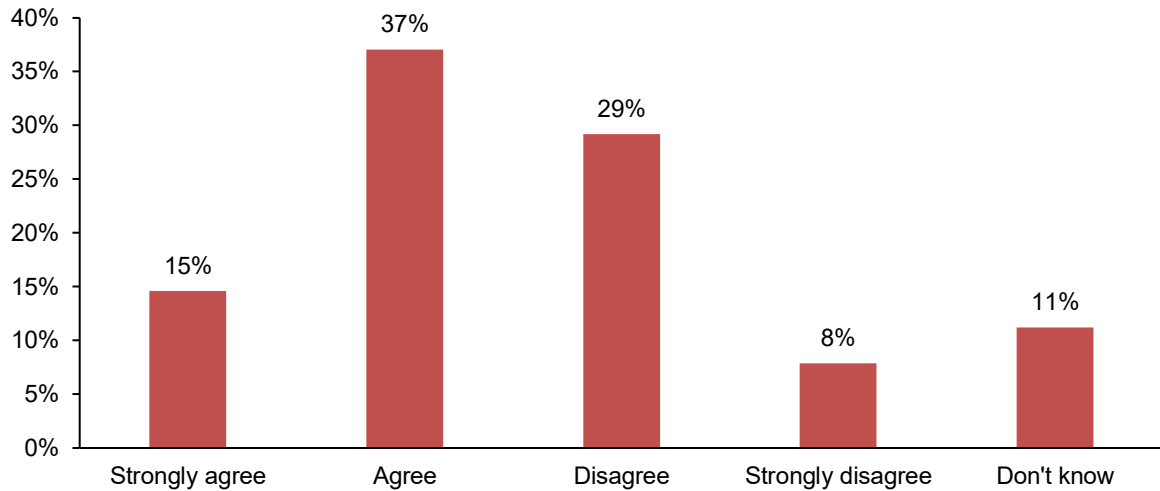
2.35 Candidates were asked to what extent they felt pre-application processes required improvement. 0 shows that just over a half (52%) strongly agreed or agreed that pre-application support arrangements require improvement, while over a third strongly disagreed or disagreed (37%). When asked to specify how arrangements could be improved, the following responses were given by 25 respondents:

- Four respondents felt that there should be more awareness and guidance about the pre-test courses made available, including having to do the test in the first place (before starting the course).
- Eleven respondents felt that there should be more time for preparation or further preparation activities. For example, one respondent said that they should have a “subject knowledge audit before or during pre-test revision... to make the applicant aware of their gaps in knowledge, and therefore make the revision as effective as possible”.
- Two respondents felt they would have benefited from online support, and another respondent also noted that the test and support was difficult to access because of distance; and
- Two respondents felt that the tests and support needed to be improved so they better reflect what is specified in GCSE syllabuses.

2.36 A few candidates interviewed had sat their equivalency test with a private provider. These candidates tended to have less positive views about pre-test support.

‘I didn’t mind paying £50 for the exam but I feel like there could have been online resources for free... The resources I feel were expensive. If I didn’t understand how to get to an answer there was no-one I could call or someone to sit there and explain to me this is what you do... I didn’t have any support with that.’ ITE candidate interview

Figure 2.6 Extent to which candidates agreed or disagreed that pre-application support arrangements required improvement



Base: Candidate survey respondents, N = 89 (12 non-respondents excluded from analysis)

Equivalency testing arrangements

2.37 The section below outlines what equivalency tests are used by each provider and how these were developed or selected. The numbers of candidates sitting tests are outlined along with detail on how tests are administered, including fees charged, length and timing of tests. The evidence is drawn from desk research and interviews with providers and candidates as well as the candidate survey.

Development of tests

2.38 Four out of the six ITE providers (USW, Cardiff Metropolitan, Bangor and Aberystwyth Universities) have developed in-house equivalency tests for English and Maths. UWTSD use an external contractor to deliver the tests and Teach First signpost candidates to their nearest geographic provider rather than providing their own test or using a contractor.²³ Two other providers (Cardiff Met and Bangor Universities) report they used external contractors until fairly recently but had since developed their own tests.

2.39 All providers report that staff or external contractors with experience of teaching and marking GCSE English or maths papers had been involved in the design of their equivalency tests. Provider staff who had been involved in

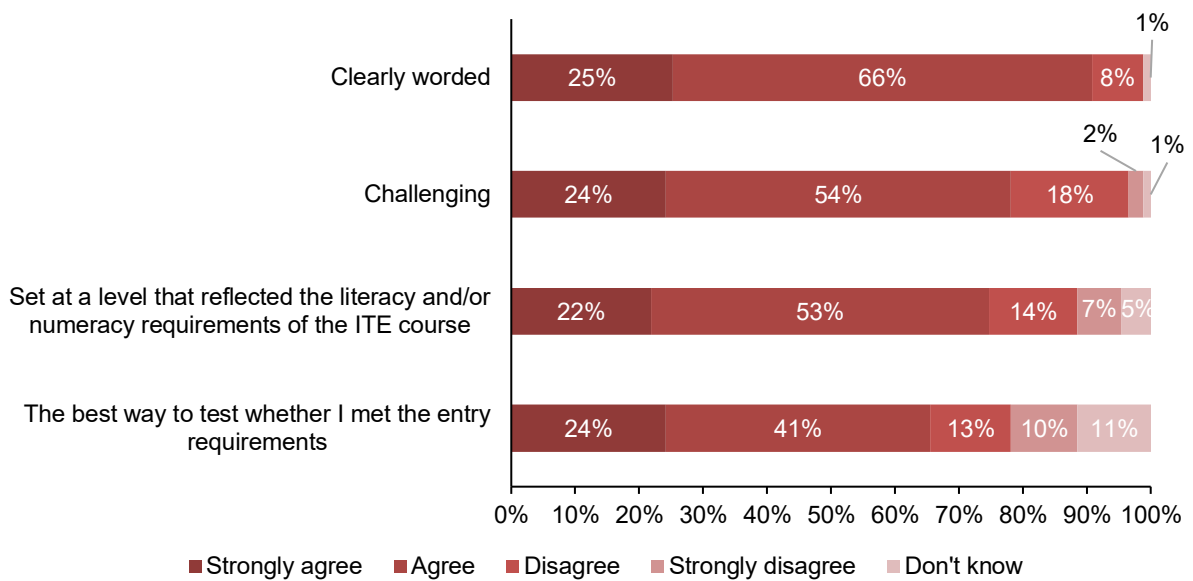
²³ UWTSD use Coleg Sir Gar - a local Further Education Institution who has developed their own tests in-house in response to the ITE provider's needs. Teach First signpost candidates to the nearest geographic provider to candidates.

developing equivalency tests described how they had reviewed GCSE past papers (higher and old intermediate papers), particularly focusing on questions that were aimed at Grade B. Several providers have developed their tests based on the WJEC question bank. One provider (Coleg Sir Gar who administer the tests for UWTSD) had worked with an accreditation body (Agored Cymru) in developing their tests. Another provider noted they had informally sought advice from WJEC in developing their equivalency tests.

‘We modelled the tests on the former middle tier GCSE papers. We used WJEC GCSE maths questions from past papers and removed the higher A/A* questions so we used only those at a B or C grade standard. This gave us a bit of a challenge in setting a pass mark because the pass mark for the higher paper is low – we set our pass mark at 50%.’ ITE provider interview

- 2.40 In general, providers consider that their tests are set at an appropriate level to assess whether candidates have literacy and numeracy skills that would enable them to achieve a GCSE Grade B. However, providers acknowledge there is no formal independent quality assurance to verify that this is the case or to evaluate whether providers’ papers are set at a broadly consistent level.
- 2.41 Candidates were asked their views on the content of the tests in the survey. 0 shows that most respondents also strongly agreed or agreed that the content of the equivalency test(s) they took was suitable, though nearly a quarter (23%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that it was the best way to test whether they had met the entry requirements.

Figure 2.7 Views about the content of the equivalency test(s)



Base: Candidate survey respondents, N = 87 (14 non-respondents excluded from analysis)

2.42 Most candidates interviewed felt the content of their equivalency test was about right in terms of its level of difficulty.

‘I thought it was spot on. A lot of the paper was at a higher level which is what we’ve been doing in teaching practice. The refresher (workshop) was quite helpful. It improved my numeracy as it had been quite a while.’ ITE candidate interview

2.43 A few candidates commented that they felt the tests were not as comprehensive as a full GCSE exam. Some candidates who had sat tests at more than one provider or who had discussed their tests with other candidates felt there was some inconsistency in the tests.

‘From what I’ve heard, the test I sat was a little easier than some of the other tests people have had to do to get on the course... having a standard would be better as it would mean requirements were actually being met as set out by Government.’ ITE candidate interview

‘I struggled to believe that the content of the course and the test would be GCSE B grade, thought GCSE would be significantly harder.’ ITE candidate interview

Number of candidates sitting tests

- 2.44 Data from the ITE providers indicates that 214 of the 2017/18 applicants sat an English equivalency test and 286 sat a maths test. Using UCAS data on the total number of applicants for 2016 (2,090) suggests that around 10% of applicants sat an English equivalency test while around 14% of applicants sat a maths equivalency test.²⁴
- 2.45 Provider data shows that no candidates sat a Welsh equivalency test in 2017/18. Interviews with staff at ITE providers revealed that none of the providers offer a Welsh language equivalency test. A few provider staff involved in delivering Welsh-medium ITE courses felt that the current arrangements could be unfair to candidates without a Grade B in both Welsh and English who want to teach through the medium of Welsh. A few interviewees from ITE providers noted that they would like to see a Welsh equivalency test developed whilst one felt there was no need for a Welsh equivalency test as there were very few applicants for Welsh-medium ITE who did not have a Grade B in both Welsh and English.
- ‘The Welsh-speaking candidates are hit twice as they might not be that confident in their second language. They have to have the B grade even though they’re looking to teach in the Welsh-medium sector.’ ITE provider interview.
- 2.46 The data from ITE providers shows that almost 9 in 10 candidates were successful in passing their English or maths equivalency tests. In total, 86% of candidates sitting English tests were successful, while 89% of those sitting maths tests were successful. Across the providers, success rates did vary significantly: 46%-100% in maths tests; and 56%-97% in English tests. Success rates by provider and test are shown below (Table 2.3).

²⁴ The data for Bangor indicates that around 7% of ITE applicants sat an equivalency test in English and around 8.5% sat an equivalency test in maths. Data for Aberystwyth indicates that around 7.5% of applicants sat a maths test and 8.5% English. Data for USW indicates around 2% sat the English test and around 3% the maths test. UWTS did not provide data on the number of applicants, but their data indicates that around 11.5% of ITE students sat an equivalency test in English and around 19% of students sat an equivalency test in maths.

Table 2.3 Numbers of 2017/18 ITE candidates sitting and successful in equivalency tests

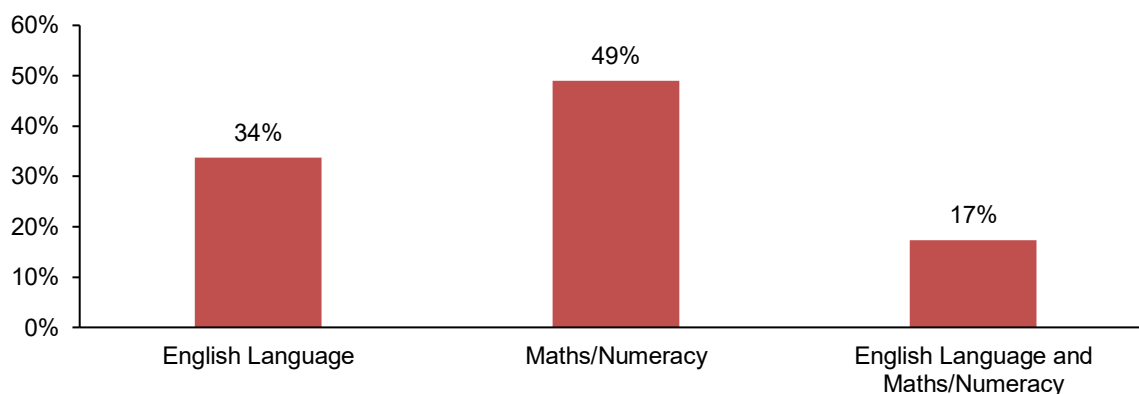
Provider	English candidates			Maths candidates		
	Number sitting test	Number successful	Success rate*	Number sitting test	Number successful	Success rate*
Bangor	65	59	91%	72	69	96%
UWTSD	70	68	97%	109	109	100%
Aberystwyth	17	10	59%	15	13	87%
Cardiff Met	53	48	91%	77	49	64%
USW	9	5	56%	13	6	46%
Total	214	190	89%	286	246	86%

*Success rates include those who have passed resits

Source: Data request to ITE providers and author's analysis

2.47 Candidates surveyed were asked which equivalency tests they had taken. Figure 2.8 shows the equivalency tests which respondents sat. More respondents sat the maths/numeracy tests than the English Language tests, and 17 respondents had to sit both tests. It was not possible to analyse all providers' data in the same way, but analysis of one provider's data (UWTSD) for 2017/18 entry shows a similar breakdown: 19% of candidates sat both English and maths tests, 27% sat only the English test and 53% sat only the maths test.

Figure 2.8 What equivalency test(s) did you sit?



Base: Candidate survey respondents who had completed an equivalency test (three non-respondents).

2.48 It is evident from the survey responses that some candidates (30) took the test at an ITE provider where they did not end up accepting a place (Table 2.4).²⁵

²⁵ N.B. As respondents were only able to report one answer, this does not account for respondents who had to do maths/numeracy and English tests at different providers.

Table 2.4 Which provider did you first sit the equivalency test(s) with?

Course Provider	My course provider	Another provider
Aberystwyth University	4 responses	1 response
Bangor University	2 responses	4 responses
Cardiff Metropolitan University	36 responses	5 responses
Graduate Teaching Programme	2 responses	2 responses
Teach First Cymru	0 responses	1 response
University of South Wales	6 responses	8 responses
University of Wales, Trinity St. David, Carmarthen	10 responses	3 responses
University of Wales, Trinity St. David, Swansea	31 responses	6 responses

Base: Candidate survey respondents (10 non-respondents, not shown)

Fees

- 2.49 Desk research and interviews with providers reveals significant variations in the fees paid by candidates to undertake the tests – ranging from £0-275. Two providers (UWTSD and Cardiff Met) do not charge any fees for sitting their equivalency tests, while Bangor University charge a fee of £35 that is reimbursed if candidates received and accept an offer of a place. Aberystwyth University also charge a fee of £35 while USW charge £275 for attending their 12-week course (they do not offer the option of solely sitting the test).
- 2.50 Survey respondents who had to pay to sit the equivalency test were asked to provide an estimate of the fee they had to pay. Whilst some respondents provided a total estimate of the test and support received (four respondents paid £150 and three respondents paid £250), others only specified the cost of the test. Fees started at £30, and eleven different values were given by 21 respondents.

Table 2.5 Information about ITE equivalency tests offered by equivalency test providers

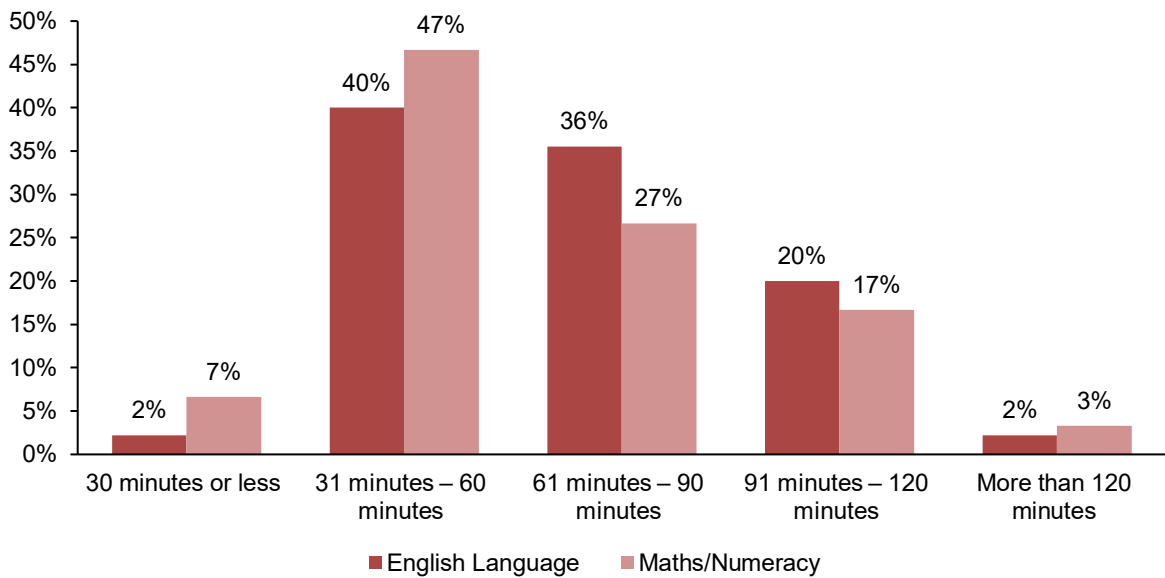
Provider	Number of candidates			
	Had to pay a fee (N = 80)	Had fee reimbursed (N = 28)	Had option to resit (N = 57)	Had option to do the test online (N = 70)
Aberystwyth University	2	0	3	0
Bangor University	2	0	0	0
Cardiff Metropolitan University	8	3	24	0
University of South Wales	4	0	2	1
University of Wales, Trinity St David (Carmarthen)	0	0	4	0
University of Wales, Trinity St David (Swansea)	10	1	15	1
Other ITE Provider	2	0	0	0
Total	28	4	48	2

Base: Respondents who answered questions about the arrangements (noted in table)

Length of tests

- 2.51 Desk research and interviews with providers indicate that the length of time tests take ranges from 90 minutes to two hours. Providers acknowledged that the tests could not cover all aspects of a GCSE English or maths course examination in this time, but that it focused on assessing whether candidates would have the skills to achieve a Grade B in a full exam. Both providers and stakeholders interviewed felt that there ought to be more consistency in the length and content of tests.
- 2.52 Most candidates interviewed felt that tests were about the length they would have expected. However, a few candidates commented that the tests were not as comprehensive as a full GCSE, with one describing the tests as ‘a bit lightweight’.
- 2.53 Most candidate survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the ITE test they sat was the right length (80%, N = 87). Candidates were asked in the survey to estimate the length of the test they sat, as shown in Figure 2.9. This shows that most tests were around 31-60 minutes, with English Language tests generally longer.

Figure 2.9 Candidate estimates of the length of their equivalency tests



Base: Respondents sitting an English Language test (N = 45) and respondents sitting a Maths / Numeracy test (N = 60), excluding non-response.

Timing of tests

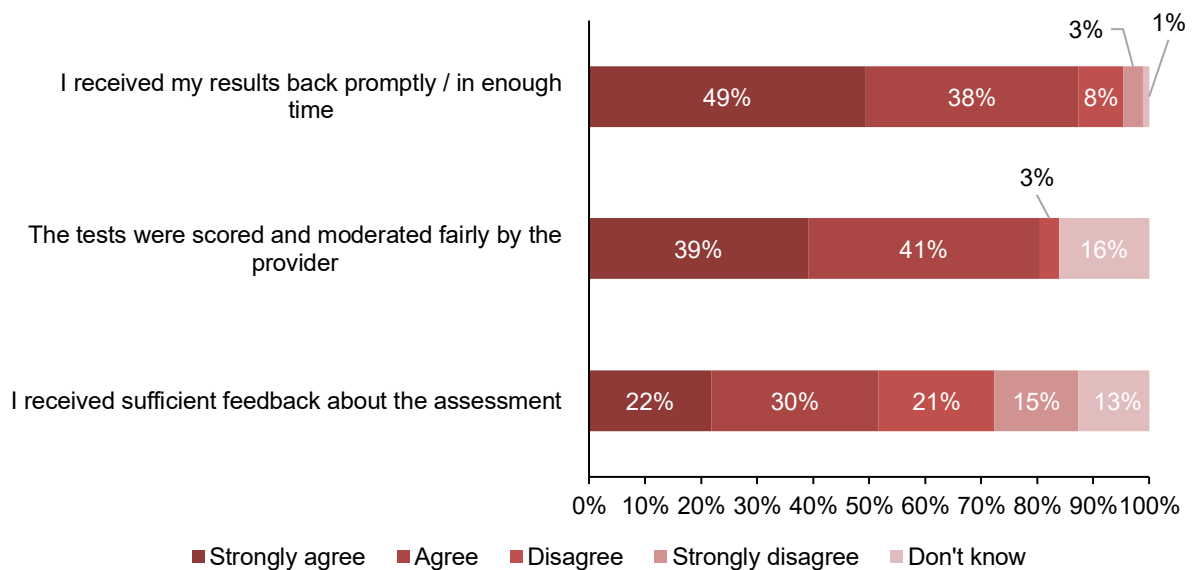
- 2.54 All providers said that they offered multiple dates during the year for candidates to sit equivalency tests. Providers offered between four and eight dates in the lead up to the start dates of the ITE courses in September, with several offering around one date a month from around February onwards. Providers emphasised the need for flexibility in order to attract candidates. Some occasionally offered dates for just one student to sit a test in order to provide this flexibility. Providers generally felt that they offered sufficient flexibility in the timing of tests, with enough opportunities for candidates to sit the tests.
- 2.55 Candidates were asked when they sat their equivalency tests. Two-thirds of candidates indicated they sat their test between April and August, with a quarter of respondents reporting they had undertaken their ITE equivalency test in August, right before the start of the academic year. Candidates who reported they were aware of the option to sit an equivalency test when they decided to apply for ITE were more likely to first sit the test earlier in the year compared to those who only found out about the test when they accepted a conditional offer. Around two-fifths (39%) of those who were aware of the option to sit a test prior to applying for their ITE course sat their test between January and April. This compares with just 13% of candidates who reported

they became aware of the option to sit and equivalency test when they received a conditional offer.

Receiving results of tests

2.56 Providers reported that they typically sent candidates their results within a fortnight of sitting the tests. Providers felt that these arrangements were adequate. Most candidates who completed the survey agreed or strongly agreed that they had received their results back promptly/in enough time. Figure 2.10 highlights that candidates provided mixed responses about the amount of feedback they received after their ITE equivalency test, with 21% disagreeing and 15% strongly disagreeing that this was sufficient. Most candidates strongly agreed or agreed that the tests were scored and moderated fairly by the provider.

Figure 2.10 Candidates' views about the results of the equivalency test(s)



Base: Total respondents, N = 87 (14 non-respondents excluded from analysis)

General views on equivalency testing

2.57 Candidates were asked in the survey to provide additional information about the tests they sat. From the 23 responses, only 19 were relevant²⁶:

- **Eight respondents commented on logistical arrangements.** Two respondents stated they had sat the equivalency test with a company called 'Equivalency Testing', one respondent had sat the test with a company in Bristol University²⁷, and another had undertaken a course (Essential Mathematics for Teaching) in the University of South Wales. One respondent noted they had to take a number of different transport modes to take the test, implying that it was an inconvenience.
- **Six respondents were positive about the purpose and benefits of the test.** Respondents felt the course was well taught and were pleased with the opportunity to do the test and get into their teaching course. One respondent noted that there was excellent preparation and structures in place to do the tests, but also felt that the full range of options had not been made clear to them ("it became clear there were other options that did not cost £250 which had not been made clear").
- **Five respondents were less positive about the equivalency tests.** One respondent stated that it was a "pointless activity" and another also stated it was a "waste of time". Another respondent noted the 'gap' between GCSE standards and equivalency standards, finding the latter easier. Finally, one respondent – who had commented that the tests were set at the right level – found that the arrangements following the test were poor (e.g. they had not received their certificate).

²⁶ Some comments provided (N = 3) noted they weren't able to provide answers to the preceding questions concerning testing arrangements e.g. "I cannot remember how much the test cost". One response stated 'N/A'.

²⁷ For at least one ITE provider, candidates who were unable to attend any of the in-house equivalency test dates hosted on a Welsh ITE provider site were encouraged to make their own arrangements to take an equivalency test with a private company on a different date and at a different location.

2.58 Candidates surveyed were asked if they had any further comments about the comments about the ITE equivalency tests. Responses are summarised below:

- A few respondents were positive about being able to get a chance to do an equivalency test. They saw this as a 'second chance' and a way to ensure that there was consistency among candidates applying to teach.
- However, respondents often felt constrained by the location and logistical arrangements of tests and support; one respondent did not attend the support because of the distance and a number of respondents noted the cost of paying for the tests and support.
- In addition, seven respondents felt that they could have received better feedback following the test, to make it more like a proper and certified test instead of a tick-box exercise. This included knowing their results sooner, providing a better breakdown in terms of results (e.g. not just a pass or fail) and being able to receive better evidence of the grade achieved.
- Some respondents also noted they should be informed about the test sooner in the application process, and also for those who are considering the full GCSE resit. One respondent who completed their ITE training as a 'mature' student noted that the requirement to have a GCSE Grade B or equivalent was more difficult for older applicants and may stop a number of people from applying (especially when they are unaware that they do not have to resit the full GCSE to get onto the course). In addition, one respondent noted:

'The tests seem like an unnecessary obstacle for Welsh universities when degree holding applicants can apply to English universities for the same qualification without the test. This is especially true when the literacy and numeracy skills needed for the profession are already tested through standardised assessments.' Candidate survey respondent

Summary of current practice

2.59 The main findings relating to ITE and equivalency testing arrangements are outlined below:

- All providers (aside from Cardiff Metropolitan University who accept a Grade D for some secondary candidates) require candidates to have a GCSE Grade C in English and/or Welsh and mathematics to be considered for entry, subject to passing an equivalency test;
- Entry requirements for ITE in Wales are well understood by providers and stakeholders but are not always clear to candidates;
- Not all candidates are aware of the Grade B requirement, qualifications that are considered equivalent and the different options for sitting an equivalency test until they have been made a conditional offer by their provider;
- The number of applicants without a Grade B in English and maths is not recorded systematically by providers, although some providers do record this information;
- A total of 214 candidates for 2017/18 entry sat English equivalency tests and 286 sat mathematics equivalency tests;
- All providers, aside from Teach First Cymru (who signpost candidates to the other providers), have developed or commissioned their own English and maths equivalency tests;
- Two providers (Bangor and Cardiff Metropolitan Universities) used private sector providers prior to developing their own tests;
- All providers who have developed their own tests have used staff with previous experience of teaching or marking GCSE papers to do so. Providers report they have drawn on GCSE English and maths past papers at intermediate level in designing their equivalency tests. Some report consulting with staff from examining boards;
- Arrangements for implementing equivalency tests vary across providers in terms of test design and selection, pre-test support, length, timing, costs and resit policies;
- There are significant variations in the pre-test support offered to candidates sitting equivalency tests. The support includes attending a 12-week course (USW), attending a two-day workshop (UWTSD), attending

a shorter (around half a day) preparatory session (Bangor and Aberystwyth) to being provided with written guidance (Cardiff Met);

- The length of equivalency tests used ranges from 90 minutes to 2 hours;
- Providers offer several dates during the year for candidates to sit or resit their tests but the extent of testing dates varies between providers;
- The costs to candidates for sitting (and resitting) equivalency tests vary significantly. These range from free (Cardiff Metropolitan and UWTSD) to £275 (for the course and test at USW);
- Pass rates are variable with several providers having few if any candidates failing;
- Resit policies vary across providers from one resit (Aberystwyth, USW, UWTSD) to three resits (Bangor and Cardiff Metropolitan University) being permitted;
- All providers report that they accept equivalency test results from elsewhere, including private providers and other ITE centres, candidates report that they have chosen which ITE providers' test to sit;
- Candidates had mixed views about the testing arrangements and their experience;
- Providers, stakeholders and candidates perceive the Grade B requirement to be a barrier to recruitment and a contributor to the fall in ITE applicant numbers although the evidence for this is anecdotal.

2.60 Table 2.6 summarises the key features of each provider's equivalency tests.

Table 2.6 Summary of current equivalency testing arrangements in ITE providers²⁸

ITE provider	Equivalency test requirements	Preparatory session to test	Length of tests	Fees	Resit policy	Accepted alternative tests
Aberystwyth University	C-grade	Yes – 3-hour session on the day of the test.	English - 2hrs; Maths 2x1 hr 20mins	£35 per test and resit fee of £35 per test	One resit permitted.	Accept equivalency tests from elsewhere
Bangor University	C-grade	Yes – preparatory session on day prior to test (Not available on all test dates: 4-5 times per year).	English - 90mins; Maths - 90 mins	£35 per test and resit fee of £35 per test (refunded if candidates register for ITE at the provider)	Allow up to three resits	Accept equivalency tests from elsewhere. Previously used a private sector test provider.
Cardiff Metropolitan University	C-grade for PGCE Primary; D-grade for PGCE Secondary.	No course offered	English - 90mins; Maths - 90 mins	No fee for exam.	Allow up to three resits	Accepts a number including USW; National Extension College; Equivalency Testing.
USW	C-grade	12 week course 5.30-7.30 - Maths Mon ; English Tues. Assessment - 50% assignment and 50% exam	2 hours	£275 each module	One resit permitted	Yes, occasionally refer to other ITE providers (usually Cardiff Met) or a private sector tester
UWSTD	C-grade	One day workshop and half day workshop before test. Agored Cymru accredited portfolio and test (only test counts towards entry)	2 hours	No cost for workshop or exam; one resit for each test £75	One resit permitted	Yes, occasionally refer to private testing companies (e.g. if candidates apply late).

²⁸ Teach First Cymru not included as they signpost applicants without a Grade B to their nearest geographic provider.

Other pre-entry testing

Literacy and numeracy tests

- 2.61 All ITE providers described using other literacy and numeracy tests as part of their recruitment and admission processes for all candidates. Aside from Teach First Cymru, who explained that their candidates sit the professional skills tests used in England, all providers use the same tests for testing the Welsh and English literacy and numeracy skills of their candidates.
- 2.62 Staff in several providers indicated that these tests had been in place for around five years and had been developed as part of a coordinated response by ITE providers to the Welsh Government requirements set out in Requirements for initial school teacher training courses at higher education institutions in Wales (Welsh Government, 2013).²⁹ One of the requirements set out in this document relates to the assessment of literacy and numeracy skills:
- ‘All providers must ensure that all trainees are assessed as having functional personal skills in literacy and numeracy applicable in a professional teaching context, appropriate to the phase and subject of study.’ (Welsh Government, 2013)³⁰
- 2.63 In response to the publication of the above guidance, staff from all ITE providers and the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers in Wales (UCET Cymru) worked collaboratively to develop a series of literacy and numeracy test papers that could then be used by providers.³¹
- 2.64 Each of the tests that have been developed by providers take half an hour to complete and are undertaken by candidates on the day of their interview. These are multiple choice tests, with a pass mark of 50%. All providers indicated that candidates had to pass every section of these papers or they

²⁹ See [Requirements for initial school teacher training courses at higher education institutions in Wales](#) (Welsh Government, 2013).

³⁰ New Welsh Government guidance - *Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales: Teaching tomorrow's teachers* (Welsh Government, 2018) - was published in February 2018 and will come into force in September 2019. The new guidance notes that ITE course providers must be satisfied that prospective student teachers ‘are assessed on entry as having the appropriate personal functional skills in literacy and numeracy applicable in a professional teaching and learning context’.

³¹ A few staff who had been involved in the development of these tests described the process as involving groups of staff from each provider coming together for a series of workshops to develop a common set of test papers and guidance.

would not be successful with the application process. The same sample papers are provided on each of the ITE providers' websites. Candidates are permitted one resit per centre, per year.

2.65 Although the same test papers are made available to providers, the administration of the tests, including the selection of dates, test papers, invigilation and marking, is arranged at institution level. Providers noted that they decide how and when to rotate the test papers. An All-Wales Protocol Guidance for Teacher Training Interviews describes how providers should administer the tests.³² Providers indicated that there are around five versions of the tests and they use each version randomly.

2.66 Most providers felt the pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests were testing for different things to the equivalency tests and that it would not be possible to map the tests to a qualification level such as the Grade B. Some providers questioned how well the tests assessed candidates' literacy and numeracy skills while others felt the tests needed to be evaluated.

'The pre-tests are very short, multiple choice and not great for testing candidates' skills or their ability to transfer literacy and numeracy skills to pupils.' ITE provider interview

'A flaw in that process is that those tests have never been evaluated... We weren't test writers, a group of us came together from across Wales and we wrote the tests for interview. That must have been four years ago perhaps. We haven't evaluated those tests and they certainly need updating.' ITE provider interview

2.67 Several providers highlighted the importance of testing all candidates' literacy and numeracy skills, regardless of their previous qualification levels. Some providers mentioned the 'currency' of candidates' qualifications, highlighting the fact that some candidates who met the Grade B requirement may have achieved this a long time ago and their skills may have lapsed.

'Even if they have an A* grade, they may have lost those skills, especially if they're a mature student or even recent graduates if their degree studies weren't focused on developing those skills.' ITE provider interview

³² University of South Wales [All-Wales Protocol Guidance for Teacher Training Interviews](#)

2.68 The views of candidates who were interviewed about the pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests were not uniform. Most candidates interviewed felt that the pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests were easier to pass than the equivalency tests. Some candidates felt that it was unnecessary to have both equivalency tests and pre-entry tests while others felt that the tests were useful in testing different skills.

‘I would say they were testing different things because I felt like the equivalency maths test was about applying rules that you knew, whereas in the numeracy test you just had to make sense of a problem and how to solve it. How to calculate simple problems like two classes of thirty pupils need such and such.’ ITE candidate interview

Pre-entry test data

2.69 Data from three ITE providers (Aberystwyth, USW and Cardiff Metropolitan Universities) shows that 1,047 candidates sat pre-entry literacy tests in 2017, with 85% of these passing at the first attempt and a further 2% passing through a resit.³³ In total, 1,042 candidates sat numeracy tests with 90% passing first time and a further 2% through a re-sit. Across the three providers, pass rates for literacy ranged from 81% to 86%, while ranging from 84% to 92% for numeracy.

Post entry testing and assessment

2.70 ITE provider staff interviewed also described their processes for the formative assessment of candidates’ literacy and numeracy skills during their course. Providers described literacy and numeracy ‘audits’ that took place early in the course and included formative assessment to identify aspects of candidates’ literacy and numeracy that required attention during the course. These assessments were then used for target setting and review during the course. Providers described some of the audit exercises used such as candidates having to mark a written piece and free writing exercises. The audit exercises are marked by course tutors and repeated at the end of the ITE course.

³³ Bangor indicated they did not hold this data as only the results of those who registered to the course were recorded.

‘The initial audit at the start of the autumn term includes an essay and a task to check a letter for linguistic errors. This is a diagnostic audit that enables the provider to identify what skills need improving and what targets should be set for the student to work towards during their course.’ ITE provider interview

‘We use this [literacy/numeracy audit] to identify where the trainee needs support.’ ITE provider interview

Key summary points about other testing

2.71 It is evident that:

- Providers have developed a broadly consistent approach for testing literacy and numeracy skills of all ITE candidates although these are administered by each ITE provider separately including the choice of test;
- Results at three providers are more consistent than those from the equivalency tests;
- Both providers and candidates have mixed views on the value of these tests.

2.72 Further information is summarised in Table 2.7 and Table 2.8 below.

Table 2.7 Numbers of ITE candidates sitting and passing pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests by provider (2017)³⁴

	Cardiff Metropolitan		USW		Aberystwyth		Total	
	Literacy	Numeracy	Literacy	Numeracy	Literacy	Numeracy	Literacy	Numeracy
Number of candidates for ITE sitting the test	734	745	236	220	77	77	1,047	1,042
Number of candidates passing the test at their first attempt	632	682	198	188	62	71	892	941
Number of candidates re-sitting the test	17	9	25	16	0	1	42	26
Number passing the test through re-sit	4	8	21	12	0	1	25	21

Table 2.8 Percentages of ITE candidates sitting and passing pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests by provider (2017)³⁵

	Cardiff Metropolitan		USW		Aberystwyth		Total	
	Literacy	Numeracy	Literacy	Numeracy	Literacy	Numeracy	Literacy	Numeracy
Percentage of candidates passing the test at their first attempt	86%	92%	84%	85%	81%	92%	85%	90%
Percentage of candidates re-sitting the test	2%	1%	11%	7%	0%	1%	4%	2%
Percentage passing the test through re-sit	1%	1%	9%	5%	0%	1%	2%	2%

³⁴ Bangor indicated they do not hold this data as only the results of those who registered on the ITE course were recorded. UWTSU were unable to provide data for the final report.

³⁵ As above.

3. The world of equivalency testing: feasibility of a national equivalency test

3.1 This section examines a range of considerations that should inform an assessment of the feasibility of a national equivalency test, including:

- ITE equivalency and literacy/numeracy testing practices in other countries
- Equivalency and literacy/numeracy testing practices in the UK for entry to other professions where standards of literacy and/or numeracy are important
- Existing tests in Wales which could be considered or adapted for use as a national equivalency test
- Stakeholder views about current arrangements for testing in Wales and areas for improvement to these
- Stakeholders' views on the benefits and drawbacks of national equivalency tests and practicalities of introducing new tests.

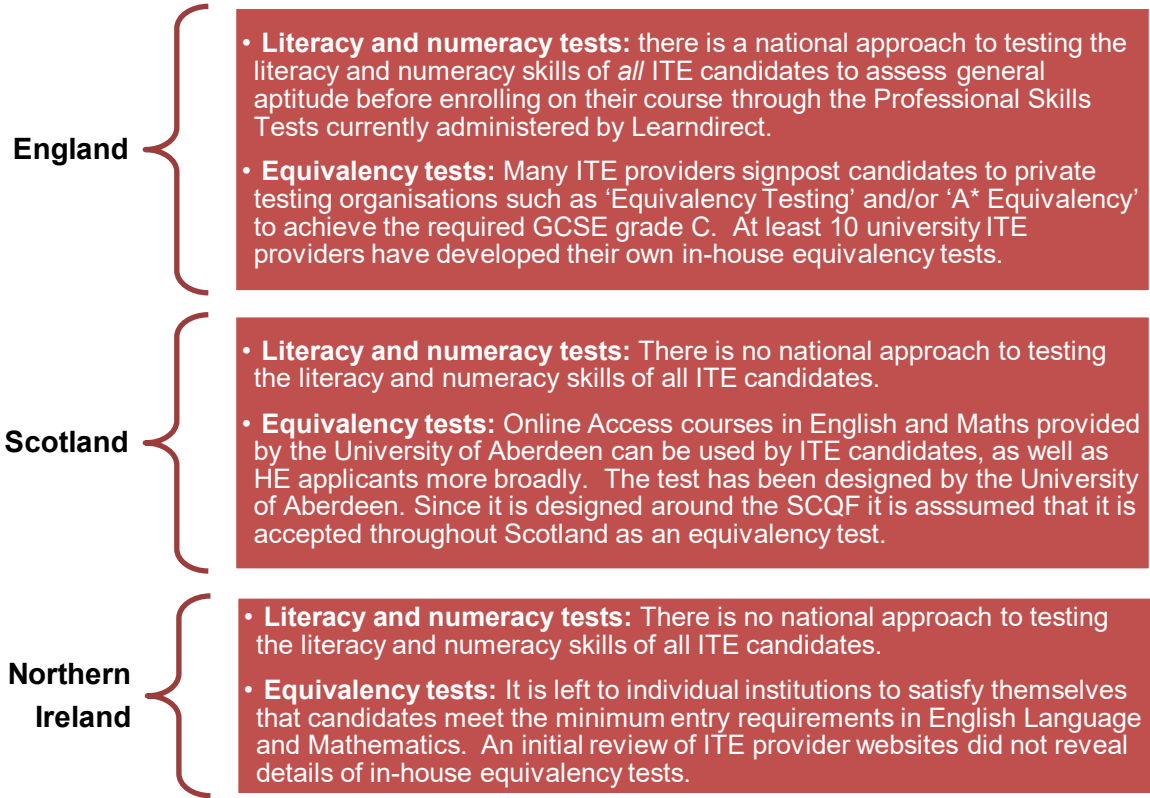
Testing practices in initial teacher education

Practices elsewhere in the United Kingdom

- 3.2 In comparison to Wales, other countries in the UK have less of a need for equivalency tests because they do not have such a high bar for entry into the teaching profession. In England, Scotland and Northern Ireland equivalency tests are mainly sat by international applicants if their overseas qualifications are not recognised. Mature applicants may also sit these tests if there is a strong case that their past qualifications in English and mathematics do not reflect their current literacy and numeracy standards.
- 3.3 Desk research shows that no other UK nation has a national equivalency test in place for ITE candidates who do not meet a minimum required standard in English and mathematics.
- 3.4 Some individual ITE providers have developed in-house equivalency tests but these are not designed to assess candidates' competency at a GCSE Grade B and are used less widely than equivalency tests are in Wales. Ten such in-house equivalency tests were identified with fees for candidates ranging from £50-£90 per subject exam.

- 3.5 ITE providers often signpost candidates to two widely used private equivalency testing organisations in the UK. Fees for candidates range from £120-£154 per subject exam. Pre-test courses and accompanying revision material packages are available for an additional fee.
- 3.6 England has adopted a national approach to testing the professional literacy and numeracy skills of all ITE candidates, irrespective of their prior qualifications, to assess their current general aptitude before they can be enrolled on an ITE course. These 'Professional Skills Tests' are free for candidates.

Figure 3.1 ITE testing practices in other UK countries



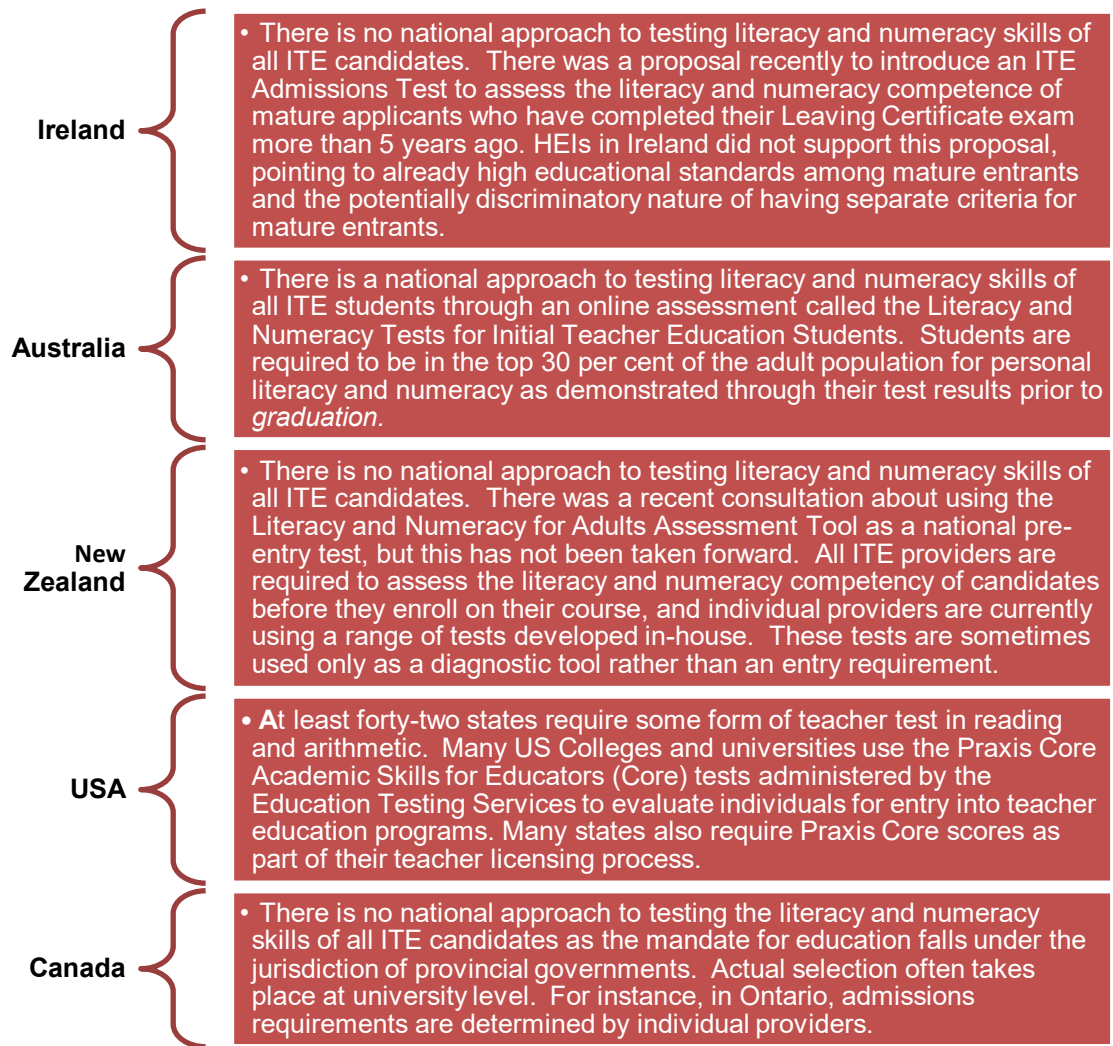
Source: ICF desk research.

Practices elsewhere in other English-speaking countries

- 3.7 Desk research was also carried out into ITE testing practices in countries outside the United Kingdom. It showed that no other English-speaking countries have a national equivalency test in place for ITE candidates who do not meet a minimum required standard in English and mathematics. Broader national tests of *all* ITE candidates' professional literacy and numeracy skills are also uncommon.

- 3.8 In Ireland, a recent proposal to introduce an ITE admissions test to assess the literacy and numeracy competence of *mature* applicants who have completed their Leaving Certificate exam more than five years ago was not taken forward due to resistance from HEIs.
- 3.9 In New Zealand, a recent proposal to use the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool as a national pre-entry test of the literacy capability of all ITE applicants has been taken forward in ITE providers of English medium programmes as a short-term measure to develop an evidence base about the literacy capability of ITE students. The information gathered will be used to inform decisions about whether to set literacy benchmarks, and if so, at what level.
- 3.10 Where ITE literacy and numeracy testing is used the practices differ from those in Wales:
- **Example model 1 - Australia:** a national test to assess the literacy and numeracy skills of all ITE applicants has been introduced but candidates are tested prior to graduation rather than at the point of entry. The 'Literacy and Numeracy Tests for Initial Teacher Education Students' are administered online and candidates must achieve a score within the top 30% of the adult population in order to pass.
 - **Example model 2 – New Zealand:** there has been a national requirement for all ITE providers to assess the literacy and numeracy skills of all ITE applicants before they enrol on an ITE course, but currently individual providers have a degree of autonomy over the choice of tests and how the tests are used for admission. For example, a range of tests developed in-house are used and the assessment results are sometimes only used for diagnostic purposes.
 - **Example model 3 - USA:** most states use core tests administered by a private testing organisation to assess applicants for entry onto ITE courses, but individual states have the flexibility to select the extent of test coverage and the scores candidates need as part of their teacher licensing process. At least forty-two states require some form of teacher test in reading and arithmetic, and many use some form of the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators tests administered by the Education Testing Services, which can be adapted for specific requirements.

Figure 3.2 ITE testing practices in additional English-speaking countries



Source: ICF desk research.

Testing practices in other professional contexts

- 3.11 Desk research found no directly suitable alternative equivalency or literacy/numeracy tests being used in other professional contexts for admission to training and for a licence to practise and registration purposes in the UK. Few relevant professional bodies use equivalency tests or entry tests that focus solely on literacy and numeracy.
- 3.12 Broader screening tests for admission to professional education and training programmes requiring higher level literacy and numeracy skills often include an assessment of verbal and numerical reasoning amongst other testing components (e.g. the BioMedical Admissions Test, the UK Clinical Aptitude Test, the National Admissions Test for Law, the Graduate Management Admission Test, and the British Army Technical Selection Test).

- 3.13 The most comparable profession to teaching is nursing and midwifery in terms of systematic literacy and numeracy testing practices. Individual universities are required by the Nursing and Midwifery Council to test the literacy and numeracy competence of all prospective trainee nurses. This requirement is in addition to standard Grade C GCSE English Language and maths entry requirements. These relatively short and simple tests have a narrower focus on assessing literacy and numeracy skills required in a professional context, broadly at a level 2 standard. The length of these tests can range between 10 and 40 minutes to complete both components.
- 3.14 Some universities have developed in-house equivalency tests for general university admission, often used to assess international HE applicants whose overseas qualifications are not recognised or mature applicants whose past qualifications in English and mathematics may not reflect their current literacy and numeracy standards. In England these tests are usually designed to assess candidates' competency at a GCSE Grade C. Test fees for candidates can range from £50-£100 per subject exam.
- 3.15 Further details of these tests are outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Equivalency and literacy/numeracy tests in other UK contexts

Testing context	Organisations administering/using tests	Level and grading	Coverage	Method of testing	Length	Cost
Popular private companies offering equivalency tests	Services offered by Equivalency Testing, A* Equivalency and Educate Teacher Training (used less widely). Recognized by a range of ITE providers, HEIs and some employers.	Level 2 Full range of GCSE grades	GCSE English Language and GCSE Mathematics Foundation and Higher curriculums	Paper tests at an assessment centre	English: 1 hr 30 mins- 2 hrs Maths: 2 hrs - 3 hrs 30 mins (2 papers)	£120 - £154 per subject exam
Individual ITE providers offering in-house equivalency tests elsewhere in the UK	Brunel University, Kings College London, Leeds Trinity University, Manchester Metropolitan University, St Mary's University Twickenham, University of Aberdeen, University of Hull, University of Leicester, University of Nottingham, University of Southampton, University of York (and others).	Level 2 Typically a pass is deemed equivalent to GCSE Grade C	GCSE English Language and GCSE Mathematics Foundation curriculum?	Paper tests	1 hr 30 mins - 2 hrs 15 mins per subject	£50 - £90 per subject exam
Individual HEIs offering in-house equivalency tests for general admission	University of Brighton, Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Derby, Edge Hill University (and others).	Level 2 Typically a pass is deemed equivalent to GCSE Grade C	GCSE English Language and GCSE Mathematics Foundation curriculum?	Typically paper tests administered at the institution.	English: 2 hrs (Brighton) Maths: 2 hrs 30 mins (Brighton)	£50 - £100 per subject exam
Literacy and numeracy testing for Nursing and Midwifery courses	Individual HEI's are required by the Nursing and Midwifery Council to test the literacy and numeracy competence of all prospective trainee nurses. This is in addition to standard GCSE English Language and Maths entry requirements.	Level 2 (only stated by some HEIs)	Narrower focus on the literacy and numeracy skills required in a professional context.	Usually online tests	10-40 mins total to complete both components	Not stated
Broader professional screening tests (covering related higher level skills such as verbal and numerical reasoning)	E.g. British Army Technical Selection Test (TST), UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKAT), BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT), National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT), Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT).	Minimum of Level 2	Usually a narrower focus on numerical and verbal reasoning skills required in a professional context.	Computer-based tests. Sometimes with computer-adaptive format, adjusting to a test taker's level of ability.	Often several hours, but assessing competencies beyond literacy and numeracy too	Broad cost range

Other literacy and numeracy skills tests in Wales

- 3.16 To support the teaching of literacy and numeracy and raise standards of attainment the Welsh Government has extended its commitment to the National Literacy and Numeracy programme (in 2016) and introduced as part of the 2013-16 programme national skills assessment tools. These are:
- **The National Reading and Numeracy Tests (NRNTs)** designed to formatively assess pupils in Years 2 to 9;
 - **The Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST)** designed as a standardised diagnostic essential skills assessment tool used by all FEIs to support learners in addressing any gaps in their knowledge and skills.

The National Reading and Numeracy Tests

- 3.17 Paper versions of the NRNTs were first introduced in 2013. Following a feasibility study, an external contractor is leading a consortium on the development of new online adaptive National Reading and Numeracy Tests that will be phased in over the next three years. These adaptive tests will have an algorithm that adapts the difficulty of questions based on a pupil's previous answer. It will not only provide information on what a pupil's level is in relation to other learners in their age group but will also generate insights about where an individual's strengths and weaknesses are in relation to the curriculum.
- 3.18 **Purpose of the tests:** They are designed for formative use as a diagnostic tool which can be used by teachers, parents and pupils to track the strengths and weaknesses of individual learners and assess their progress. The test provides information about where learners stand in relation to others of their age, which is quite different to the purposes of an equivalency test.
- 3.19 **Content of the tests:** There are currently three paper tests pupils sit in schools covering reading, procedural numeracy and numerical reasoning. The tests do not assess students' writing skills. As part of a transition to online adaptive testing, the Welsh Government's contractors are generating a large bank of test questions that will need to cover the whole range from the easiest possible questions for a year 2 learner to very challenging questions for a high ability year 9 learner. The Welsh Government have copyright of all

the bank of questions being developed so some of them could be available to be repurposed for another project.

- 3.20 **Method of testing:** Learners currently sit paper tests under exam conditions at their school. Online adaptive tests sat in schools are being phased in over the next three years.
- 3.21 **Test standard and scoring:** The test results provide an age standardised score and a progress measure. The age standardised score is recorded between 70 and 140. The mean age standardised score (for children of the same age, in months) is 100. Two-thirds of pupils get a score between 85 and 115. Scores of below 70 and over 140 are not recorded.

The Wales Essential Skills Toolkit

- 3.22 WEST was developed in 2014 by the Welsh Government in collaboration with Tribal Education Ltd and was rolled out to all further education providers in Wales in 2015. It is a single, on-line essential skills assessment and learning tool providing diagnostic assessments in the essential skills of communication, application of number, digital literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages. The assessments are a mandatory requirement for funded work-based learning, meaning everyone, regardless of any previous training or qualifications, must complete WEST assessments if they undertake any Welsh Government-funded training.
- 3.23 **Purpose of the tests:** The toolkit is a set of online skills assessments that determine a person's levels of ability and understanding in literacy, numeracy and information technology. The WEST assessments are not exams and have no pass or fail criteria. The results of WEST can be used to identify which areas to target in order to support learners through their education or training programme.
- 3.24 **Content of the tests:** The assessments cover Essential Skills in Communication in English and/or Welsh, Application of Number, Digital Literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages. Some programmes only require learners to complete two components: Communication and Application of Number. The learning materials cover all the way from Entry 1 to Level 3. Communication is broken down into the skills required for reading, writing, speaking and understanding both written and spoken

language. Application of Number assesses fundamental mathematical techniques such as basic arithmetic, fractions, percentages, graphs, charts, amounts and statistics.

- 3.25 **Method of testing:** The assessments are undertaken online under supervised conditions, but candidates can complete them over more than one session. WEST is not an exam so there are no set time limits on any of the assessments. Desk research indicates that learners typically take around an hour for each, although timings can vary considerably. The WEST software measures how many correct answers a candidate gives and how long each takes, adjusting the difficulty of subsequent questions accordingly. It may add a further 10 questions if these are needed to get the most accurate possible result.
- 3.26 **Test standard and scoring:** The assessments do not have pass or fail criteria as they are not exams. Each assessment starts at around a pre-GCSE level of difficulty with multiple-choice questions. At the end of each assessment learners are given an overall level indicating their current achievement in the subject area and are presented with their Individual Learning Plan that highlights any gaps in knowledge and skills. Desk research indicates that a learner achieving level 2 at GCSE (A*-C) tends to achieve only a level 1 on the WEST.

Summary of the tests available

Availability of equivalency tests in the market

- 3.27 Desk research and interviews with stakeholders shows that:
- **In-house equivalency** tests have been developed by four out of the six Welsh ITE providers (USW, Cardiff Met, Bangor and Aberystwyth Universities) with the specific purpose of assessing candidates' ability to perform at a GCSE Grade B standard in English Language and Maths. One of the remaining providers (UWTSD) uses an external contractor to deliver the tests (Coleg Sir Gar - a local Further Education Institution who has developed their own tests in-house in response to the ITE provider's needs). Teach First Cymru signpost candidates without the Grade B to the other providers.

- **Commercial tests** offered by EquivalencyTesting.com and A* Equivalency are still being used by some candidates, often when candidates cannot make any of an ITE provider's in-house equivalency testing dates. However, these tests are more expensive than those offered in-house by providers and the administration and invigilation of the tests is sometimes unreliable or unsatisfactory according to providers and candidates interviewed in this research.
- Few **alternative tests from elsewhere** exist that are suitable to meet the B grade requirement, or offer the breadth of coverage and equivalent level required.
 - Existing equivalency tests in other parts of the UK are largely unsuitable for the purposes of an ITE equivalency test in Wales because they are not designed to assess a candidate's competency at GCSE Grade B. Nor are these tests modelled on the WJEC syllabus.
 - Broader literacy and numeracy tests used in other professional contexts also do not meet the requirements of an ITE entry test in Wales sufficiently as they do not typically assess broad subject knowledge in English and mathematics and are usually not designed to assess skills at the same level.
 - National skills assessment tools in Wales are not intended for the purposes of testing ITE candidates and are potentially unsuitable for the purposes of ITE, although certain elements of these tools may be of use for developing a national equivalency test.

A shortlist of tests to be considered further

3.28 In order to produce a shortlist of relevant tests for more detailed examination the following key criteria were applied:

- **Test level** on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Wales);
- **Extent of test grading**, including whether grade thresholds can be clearly set for different levels of attainment required;
- **Breadth of test coverage**: the extent to which a test covers all the competencies of a GCSE;
- **Extent of usage**: the extent to which other ITE providers or bodies are using the test.

3.29 For each of these criteria a score was applied between 2 and 0, with a higher total score indicating greater relevance. Tests with a total score of 5 or more are outlined in the provisional shortlist below.

Table 3.2 Shortlisted tests

Test owner	Literacy test name	Numeracy test name
Aberystwyth University	English Grade B Equivalency Test	Mathematics Grade B Equivalency Test
Bangor University	English Grade B Equivalency Test	Mathematics Grade B Equivalency Test
Cardiff Metropolitan University	In-house equivalency exam for GCSE English Language	In-house equivalency exam for GCSE Maths
University of South Wales	Essential English for Teaching	Essential Mathematics for Teaching
UWTSD/Coleg Sir Gar FEI	GCSE Equivalency Test English	GCSE Equivalency Test Mathematics
Equivalency Testing	English Equivalency Test	Maths Equivalency Test
A* Equivalency	English Equivalency Exam	Maths Equivalency Exam
Welsh Government/Tribal Education Ltd	Wales Essential Skills Toolkit: Communication	Wales Essential Skills Toolkit: Application of Number
Welsh Government/Alpha+ and others	National Reading and Numeracy Tests: Reading	National Reading and Numeracy Tests: Procedural Numeracy <u>and</u> Numerical Reasoning

Source: ICF desk research and analysis.

Assessment of the shortlisted tests

Stakeholder views on current in-house tests used by ITE

Interviews with ITE provider staff, trainee/newly qualified teachers and stakeholders reveal that:

- **ITE Providers** are broadly satisfied with their own in-house tests and current administrative arrangements but acknowledge the need for consistency between ITE centres and are open alternative arrangements.
- **Candidates'** views on the difficulty of the tests they sat vary considerably, particularly depending on which provider they applied to. Many think accompanying support from providers to prepare for the tests is important. Several candidates had resat full GCSE English Language or Maths tests but still had to sit equivalency tests too because they did not have their GCSE results in time for acceptance onto their chosen ITE course.
- **Stakeholders** are less familiar with the details of current in-house equivalency testing arrangements in Welsh ITE providers, but tend to express concerns about consistency and fairness for applicants.

3.30 Most providers, candidates and stakeholders interviewed did not have a sufficient overview or knowledge of equivalency tests developed by different ITE providers to directly compare and contrast their merits and weaknesses with their own experiences. Interviewees' views on other matters are outlined below:

3.31 **Purpose and effectiveness of the tests:** Provider staff largely believe that their own in-house equivalency tests serve their purpose well of assessing a candidate's competency at GCSE Grade B. However, a few interviewees felt that it is difficult to prove whether a student is at a Grade B level or not from the tests used.

'It roots out those who are probably too weak to go through.' Staff member, ITE provider

'It may create a barrier for some people in a way. But at the same time if you can't meet these requirements maybe you're not qualified enough to be a teacher...if your literacy skills aren't good enough maybe you shouldn't teach.' ITE candidate

'I think it [preparing for the Maths test] probably improved my numeracy temporarily and gave me confidence. It didn't really help with the PGCE [Primary] though as it wasn't that relevant to skills I needed in the classroom.' ITE candidate

'What would concern me... is the assessment of literacy and numeracy in-house or based on commercial products but not necessarily agreed to be equivalent to the level of literacy and numeracy that we're actually after.'
Policy expert

3.32 **Standards of the tests:** Candidates' views on the difficulty of the tests they sat vary considerably, particularly depending on which provider they applied to. Several UWTSD candidates interviewed who took tests administered by Coleg Sir Gar thought that the tests were relatively easy, whilst candidates interviewed from Cardiff Metropolitan University tended to think the standard was quite high. Generally, candidates were not sure the in-house equivalency tests they had sat were genuinely comparable to a real GCSE Grade B standard.

'I feel it should be a bit more difficult, it should be on par with GCSE and should relate to the course you are doing. It was a shock that it was not as challenging.' ITE candidate

'It is a lot easier to get the Equivalency Test than the GCSE.' ITE candidate
'The content was nowhere near GCSE standard in the exam... It was basic, it was lower level paper stuff... probably even key stage 3 level.' ITE candidate

'A lot of people on my course didn't pass the Cardiff Met Maths equivalency test first time around. A lot of people, myself included, found the Maths test quite difficult.' ITE candidate

'I have not had sight of the tests so I can't comment on the quality or the difficulty of the tests... I don't think there is anyone else here that has had sight of them. It's certainly something now you've raised it that perhaps we need to have a look at ourselves.' ITE provider

3.33 **Scope of the tests:** A few candidates think that the subject knowledge and skills being assessed in in-house equivalency tests is not as broad as full GCSE exams are. Several candidates had resat full GCSE English Language or Maths tests but still sat equivalency tests too because they did not have their results in time to be accepted for their ITE course. They were therefore well placed to compare the standards and coverage of the tests directly.

‘It is very difficult to find a balance between trying to make sure we are actually providing an equivalent in terms of the content and standard for a GCSE B grade and providing the course in a format that is inclusive to everybody who thinks they would make a good teacher.’ ITE provider

3.34 **Administration of the tests:** A few provider staff believe tests run in-house are more candidate-centred. In-house tests may reduce a potential barrier for potential applicants, particularly when the provider absorbs the cost of the test. Candidates mostly had positive experiences with test administration and did not generally see the fees for tests at some providers as a key barrier to applying for ITE courses. However, a few candidates thought that support for learners before testing should be introduced as standard across all providers, as it is unfair for some people to have advantages just because they can afford to pay more for support or are able to access it due to more flexible working or life arrangements.

‘Where previously we said we think you have potential to come on one of our courses but you need to go away and do an equivalency test... We feel now by providing our own equivalency test we’re providing a more straightforward path through for candidates. So we’re being more supportive in getting them through the process.’ ITE provider

‘Honestly I think it was pretty well done. Normal test conditions, we were well prepared and we were given enough time. It was good, no complaints.’ ITE candidate

3.35 **Quality assurance and moderation:** Some provider staff acknowledge that their centre lacks a formal moderation or quality assurance process and were not always able to articulate the rationale for the pass thresholds set during interviews. Candidates generally thought they had received their test results quickly, but did not think the results correlated closely with what they would have achieved if they resat their GCSE qualification.

'I think with lots of different tests you can't necessarily be 100% sure that the B grade equivalent for one is the same as the B grade equivalent for another one.' ITE provider

'It's difficult to prove whether a student is at a Grade B level or not.'
ITE provider

3.36 **Other ITE provider practices:** While provider staff rarely know the details of equivalency tests offered by any other ITE providers in Wales, they are overwhelmingly aware that testing practices vary across Wales and standards may not be consistent. Findings from expert and candidate interviews also point towards concerns about inconsistent standards between providers. Some survey respondents who had applied to multiple providers noted the differences in the equivalency tests (or information received about the tests), which they noted was confusing and 'unfair' if other ITE candidates did not have to do the same level of assessment. A small number of candidate interviewees reported that they were aware of candidates who had failed an in-house equivalency test at one provider and passed one at another provider shortly afterwards.

3.37 Taking equivalency tests is considered easier than resitting a full GCSE or completing an equivalent qualification. One provider thought their test served as an indicator of whether a candidate could achieve a Grade B at GCSE if they studied for a year, rather than the test being equivalent to a GCSE Grade B itself.

'I'm very aware that it's totally ad hoc and the standards vary hugely. I really do think there needs to be a national standard.' ITE provider

'I know they exist but I don't know individually what they are testing. I don't know whether the construct and domain is valid, whether the tests are reliable and in what ways they are different from each other.' Policy expert

Stakeholder views on alternative tests

Interviews with ITE provider staff, trainee/newly qualified teachers and stakeholders reveal that:

- Most **ITE provider staff** were aware of commercial tests provided by EquivalencyTesting.com, but did not favour them due to high fees for candidates and unsatisfactory administrative arrangements. Staff were not largely aware of alternative equivalency tests or other literacy and numeracy tests that might be suitable for the purposes of assessing ITE candidates.
- **Stakeholders** were also not familiar with many alternative tests that might be suitable to meet the assessment purposes. One stakeholder was able to discuss the National Reading and Numeracy Tests in detail, whilst another mentioned the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit in passing, but neither test was viewed to be particularly relevant for the purposes of an equivalency test for entry to ITE.
- A few **candidates** interviewed had sat commercial tests run by EquivalencyTesting.com, and generally thought that these tests were quite rigorous compared to in-house equivalency tests they had sat. However, some candidates thought that the standard being assessed was lower than actual GCSE exams at Grade B.

a) Commercial equivalency tests

3.38 Provider staff largely thought commercial tests served as a **useful alternative for applicants unable to sit in-house equivalency tests** for whatever reason. More than half of ITE staff are aware of tests provided by 'EquivalencyTesting.com' and either used them before introducing their own in-house equivalency tests, researched them at one time or still directed some candidates to sit them if candidates are unable to attend one of their own in-house test dates. At least one provider uses 'A* Equivalency' as an alternative to an in-house equivalency test if candidates apply late. In these instances, the provider would typically act as a host test centre. However, provider staff generally prefer their own in-house tests.

3.39 The general perception was that commercial tests have **more rigour than some in-house equivalency tests but less than GCSEs**. A few candidates who failed the EquivalencyTesting.com test subsequently went on to pass in-house equivalency tests run by other ITE providers in Wales. However, one candidate thought that the standard of the Maths test designed by EquivalencyTesting.com was lower than the multiple tests required to complete a full GCSE with a narrower coverage of the curriculum.

‘To be honest I didn’t think it was as hard as normal GCSEs. So I think that’s why I must have passed. I think the GCSEs like that in schools were a lot more difficult.’ ITE candidate

3.40 **The content of the tests is not tailored to the Welsh context**. Some ITE provider staff think that the content of these tests is not always in line with WJEC GCSE exams as the private test providers operate throughout the UK. There is also currently no option to sit commercial tests in Welsh.

3.41 **The administration of the tests has not always been satisfactory** according to some staff in ITE providers. Communications about administrative arrangements were sometimes considered to be poor. On one occasion, no test papers arrived and no-one from a private sector test provider turned up to run the tests at an ITE provider. Furthermore, there are usually a fairly limited number of test dates offered in Wales and candidates sometimes have to sit the test at another ITE provider. Candidate feedback was that the test invigilation was poor as people talked during the exam and there was an insufficient number of invigilators to run things smoothly.

3.42 ITE staff interviewed were generally in agreement that the commercial **tests and accompanying revision materials are expensive for applicants** and may act as a barrier, which was the reason some providers moved away from recommending the tests to candidates. The preparation packs sold by EquivalencyTesting.com are deemed to be of little value by some provider staff. One candidate interviewed did not use these materials and used BBC Bitesize GCSE revision instead.

‘I didn’t mind paying £50 for the exam but I feel like there could have been online resources for free... The resources I feel were expensive.’ ITE candidate

b) The National Reading and Numeracy Tests

- 3.43 **Purpose of the tests:** Very few ITE staff and policy stakeholders mentioned the National Reading and Numeracy Tests as a relevant alternative to examine. According to an assessment expert, the purposes of the National Reading and Numeracy Tests are fundamentally different to ITE equivalency tests.

‘It seems to me that what would be happening under the equivalency testing would be quite a different animal to what we’re talking about with the adaptive testing.’ Assessment expert

‘The message that we give out from the Welsh Government is that these tests are for formative use...The information from the tests is for the schools to use so they can assess how their learners are progressing and where there are particular gaps in skills.’ Assessment expert

- 3.44 **Content of the tests:** Some of the questions aimed at high ability year 9 pupils from the item bank currently being developed for the online adaptive national reading and numeracy tests could potentially be reused for a national equivalency test for ITE teachers, although these questions may not be at an appropriate level and may not cover the full set of competencies/GCSE curriculum desired for a GCSE Grade B equivalency test.

‘If any of the material coming out of this project were useful for the ITE project I think it would be... about looking at the content you’ve got in there at the higher end of year 9 and seeing if that could be reconfigured in some way... It’s possible that there may be some content in there that would be at the right level.’ Assessment expert

- 3.45 **Method of testing:** If ITE equivalency tests are to be delivered online in future, there may be lessons about technical elements from developing the online national reading and numeracy tests that could be explored further.

‘It may be that some of the systems that we are developing... could be relevant. Or there might be aspects of this that might be of interest for building up something similar.’ Assessment expert

3.46 **Test standard and scoring:** An assessment expert did not think it was currently possible to relate scores of the Year 9 tests to CQFW levels or GCSE grades. It is not something the Welsh Government and their contractors are currently doing or plan to do as part of the National Reading and Numeracy Tests.

3.47 The following lessons can be learned from the implementation of these tests:

- **Potential IT challenges:** Providers need a standard of infrastructure and sufficient terminals for all candidates to do the tests. They also need to be able to guarantee the reliability of technology when administering tests.
- **Setting realistic timescales for developing an online solution:** they have had a very ambitious timetable to get the online national reading and numeracy project through.

‘I think in terms of a national test there was quite a similar situation before the national [reading and numeracy] test was introduced in that there were different regional models for literacy and numeracy tests that were in schools. Some schools still use various commercial tests too if they want to. Schools were using all sorts of their own tests and commercial tests. There were different practices in different regions so that has brought it all together.’ Assessment expert

3.48 **The Wales Essential Skills Toolkit:** No stakeholders interviewed were particularly familiar with the WEST test or cited it as a relevant test to explore further.

Assessment of the shortlisted tests

3.49 In order to determine the extent to which shortlisted test are suitable for use as a national equivalency test, they have been assessed against four key criteria:

- The purpose and scope of the tests: Is the test designed to assess candidates at a GCSE grade B standard? Does the test assess candidates’ abilities across the full range of skills and knowledge covered in the GCSE curriculum?

- The method of the tests: Is the test of a sufficient length to genuinely be comparable to GCSE exams? Is the format of questions rigorous (e.g. not multiple choice)?
- The administration of the tests: Is there evidence of robust invigilation and moderation practices?
- The standard of the tests: Is the approach to grading and setting a pass mark clear and robust? Does the pass rate demonstrate a genuine level of challenge for candidates?

3.50 Tests have been given a score between 0 and 2 for each of these criteria. A summary assessment of the shortlisted tests is outlined in Table 3.3. It indicates that none of the shortlisted tests could be considered as potential national equivalency tests.

Table 3.3 Suitability of the shortlisted tests

Test	Test purpose/scope	Test method	Test administration	Test standard	Combined score
Cardiff Metropolitan University in-house tests	1	1	1	1	4 out of 8
	Key considerations: Designed to assess competency at a level equivalent to a GCSE grade B but some stakeholders think the coverage of the tests is not as broad as sitting full GCSE exams. Test questions similar to GCSE exams but test length of the test is shorter (English - 90mins; Maths - 90 mins). Stakeholders did not raise concerns about invigilation but there is no clear and robust moderation process in place. The test is simply pass or fail and stakeholders think the standard of the tests may be lower than a real GCSE grade B. Moderate to high success rates: 91% for English (n=53) and 64% for Maths (n=77).				
Bangor University in-house tests	1	1	1	1	4 out of 8
	Key considerations: Designed to assess competency at a level equivalent to a GCSE grade B but some stakeholders think the coverage of the tests is not as broad as sitting full GCSE exams. Test questions similar to GCSE exams but the length of the test is shorter (English - 90mins; Maths - 90 mins). Stakeholders did not raise concerns about invigilation but there is no clear and robust moderation process in place. Stakeholders think the standard of the tests may be lower than a real GCSE grade B. High success rates: 91% for English (n=65) and 96% for Maths (n=72).				
Aberystwyth University in-house tests	1	1	1	1	4 out of 8
	Key considerations: Designed to assess competency at a level equivalent to a GCSE grade B but some stakeholders think the coverage of the tests is not as broad as sitting full GCSE exams. Test questions similar to GCSE exams but the length of the test is a little shorter (English - 2hrs; Maths 2x1 hr 20mins). Stakeholders did not raise concerns about invigilation but there is no clear and robust moderation process in place. Stakeholders think the standard of the tests may be lower than a real GCSE grade B. Moderate to high success rates: 59% for English (n=17) and 87% for Maths (n=15).				
University of South Wales in-house tests	0	1	1	1	3 out of 8
	Key considerations: Designed to assess competency at a level equivalent to a GCSE grade B but test is part of a broader 'B grade equivalence module' with a 12-week course and assessment is comprised of 50% coursework. Test questions similar to GCSE exams but the length of the test is a little shorter (English – 2 hrs; Maths – 2hrs). Stakeholders did not raise concerns about invigilation but there is no clear moderation process in place. Stakeholders think the standard of the tests may be lower than a real GCSE grade B. Moderate success rates: 56% for English (n=9) and 46% for Maths (n=13).				
University of Wales Trinity Saint David/ Coleg Sir Gar in-house tests	1	1	0	0	2 out of 8
	Key considerations: Designed to assess competency at a level equivalent to a GCSE grade B but stakeholders overwhelmingly think the coverage of the tests is not as broad as sitting full GCSE exams. The Maths test does not include high mark questions that require more complex problem-solving. The length of the tests is a little shorter than full GCSE exams (English – 2hrs; Maths – 2hrs). Tests are administered at a partner FE college (Coleg Sir Gar) and interviews suggest UWTS D staff have limited awareness or oversight of these tests. Stakeholders did not raise concerns about invigilation but there is no clear moderation process in place. Stakeholders think the				

Test	Test purpose/scope	Test method	Test administration	Test standard	Combined score
	standard of the tests is much lower than a real GCSE grade B. Very high success rates: 97% for English (n=70) and 100% for Maths (n=109).				
Equivalency Testing English Language and Mathematics tests	1	1	0	2	4 out of 8
	Key considerations: Designed to assess competency at any GCSE grade (used widely in England for GCSE grade C equivalency) but the content of the tests not fully in line with WJEC syllabus. Test questions similar to GCSE exams but the length of the test is shorter. Welsh ITE centres have used the company before but there are often less dates available for applicants and the service is costly. External invigilation of the tests is sometimes unreliable or unsatisfactory according to stakeholders. Papers are externally moderated. There is a clear approach to grading and the tests are accepted widely by ITE centres and Higher Education institutions in England.				
A* Equivalency English Language and Mathematics tests	1	1	0	2	4 out of 8
	Key considerations: Designed to assess competency at any GCSE grade (used widely in England for GCSE grade C equivalency) but the content of the tests not fully in line with WJEC syllabus. Test questions similar to GCSE exams but the length of the test is shorter. Welsh ITE centres have used the company before but there are often less dates available for applicants and the service is costly. External invigilation of the tests is sometimes unreliable or unsatisfactory according to stakeholders. Papers are externally moderated. There is a clear approach to grading and the tests are used widely by ITE centres and Higher Education institutions in England.				
Wales Essential Skills Toolkit	0	0	0	1	1 out of 8
	Key considerations: Designed to assess essential literacy and numeracy skills but not at a GCSE grade B standard. Does not cover the GCSE curriculum. There are multiple choice questions which is not comparable to GCSEs and the length of each component is typically much shorter than GCSE exams. Assessments are not taken under exam conditions. The assessments do not have pass or fail criteria. Each assessment starts at around a pre-GCSE level but increases in difficulty.				
National Reading and Numeracy Tests	0	0	0	0	0 out of 8
	Key considerations: Designed to formatively assess reading, procedural numeracy and numerical reasoning skills of Year 2 – Year 9 pupils so not at a GCSE grade B standard. Does not cover the GCSE curriculum or assess writing. The format of the questions is largely multiple choice and the length of the tests is considerably shorter than GCSE exams. Tests are taken in schools and will soon become online adaptive tests. There is not pass or fail grade. Tests provide an age-standardised score rather than a grade that can be linked to GCSE grades.				

Source: ICF analysis

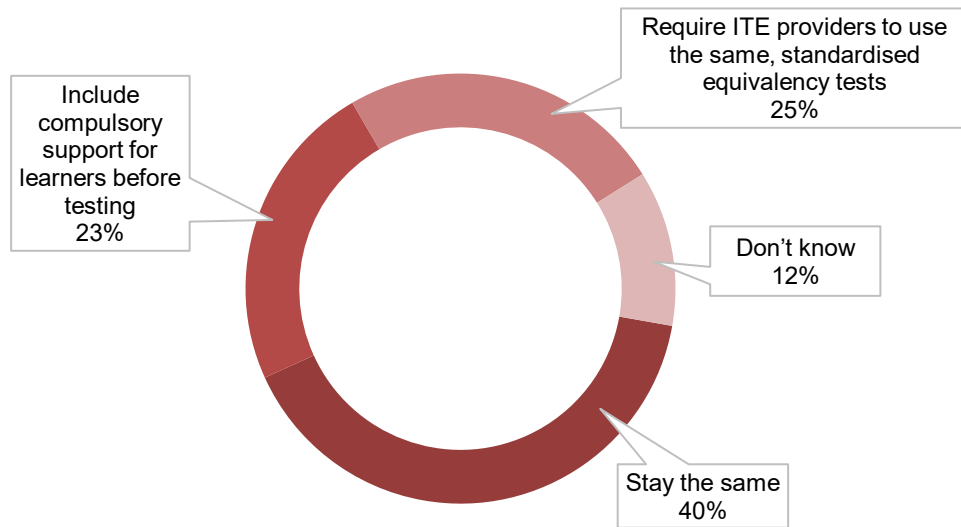
Stakeholder views on a national equivalency test

Interviews with ITE provider staff, trainee/newly qualified teachers and stakeholders reveal that:

- Almost all **ITE provider staff** are in favour of introducing some form of national equivalency test because they recognise the need for consistency between providers and the benefits of robust quality assurance. However, there were less fully formed opinions on the most appropriate nature of the format, competencies to be assessed and administration of the proposed national equivalency tests.
- **Stakeholders** also acknowledge the need for consistency and think a national equivalency test should be considered, but some stressed proportionality in the context of teacher recruitment challenges. Some stakeholders emphasised the importance of considering the full range of options to deliver the policy aim, such as testing for equivalency at the point of exit rather than entry to an ITE course as a requirement for qualified teacher status.
- **Candidates** who had sat multiple equivalency tests at different providers would welcome a national test as it would have been more convenient. In some cases, candidates have spent large sums of money on multiple courses and tests to reach the required standard.

3.51 Survey results show that tested candidates had mixed opinions about what future testing arrangements should look like. A quarter of candidates responding felt that ITE providers should use the same, standardised equivalency tests (25%). More respondents felt that arrangements should stay the same (40%), though no respondents from Aberystwyth University and the University of South Wales selected this option.

Figure 3.3 Candidate opinions on future testing arrangements



Base: Total respondents, N = 94 (seven non-respondents excluded from analysis)

- 3.52 A range of potential key benefits and challenges of introducing a national equivalency test have been identified from an analysis of the stakeholder interviews, as outlined below.

Potential benefits

- 3.53 **Fairness and consistency across providers:** Most ITE provider staff interviewed were in agreement that a national equivalency test would ensure that assessment is fair and consistent for all ITE applicants across Wales. They said that external marking and quality assurance would ensure no providers are interpreting the Grade B requirement differently or are incentivised to design easier tests or mark leniently in order to secure high ITE recruitment numbers for their centre.

‘It would make a much fairer playing field within Wales. At the moment I don’t know what other providers see as equivalent or not and it’s open to interpretation.’ ITE provider

‘If it was national, you would get a greater reassurance of the validity, that it is relevant to Welsh Government policy, and the reliability that two people sit the test and give the same answers they would get the same marks.’ School improvement expert

'If you've got a national test that everyone is doing there's no skipping around pre-requisites or picking the easier option. Plus it means there's a level playing field for universities where one university is playing fair and another is not playing fair.' ITE candidate

'Different universities are playing different games. I think it's an opportunity to make money for some people. Perhaps they bend their rules a bit sometimes. I was quite surprised that a couple of applicants who failed our tests quite poorly... a week later passed a test at another university.' ITE provider

3.54 **Transparency, clarity and convenience for applicants:** A national test could help raise the profile of the GCSE Grade B requirement and make the application process clearer and simpler for candidates, according to a few ITE staff members. Under current arrangements, some candidates applying to more than one ITE provider in Wales may need to sit different equivalency tests at different centres in addition to the pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests all candidates are required to sit.

3.55 One candidate described how more than one provider they applied to was unclear whether their in-house equivalency tests would be accepted elsewhere. Introducing one national test would therefore be more convenient for applicants and reduce potential barriers to entry. It may also be more equitable if there was one fixed national test cost for all applicants across Wales. However, providers may still potentially offer differing levels of pre-test support at different costs.

'I think it would stop some students feeling that they are less welcome to the profession or that there is an insurmountable barrier to crawl. I think it would give a perception of being more on an equal playing field with everyone else and I think that would be helpful. It would stop them seeing the B as a barrier.' Higher education expert

'A national test would be a good thing. It would make sure it was the same standard everywhere.' ITE candidate

'From what I've heard, the test I sat was a little easier than some of the other tests people have had to do to get on the course... having a standard would be better as it would mean requirements were actually being met as set out by Government.' ITE candidate

‘In terms of being able to sell or market it to the Welsh population, that might be easier. We could get the message out to the colleges and universities that there is just one national test and everyone would know where we stand.’ ITE provider

- 3.56 **Reduced workload for provider staff:** A few staff interviewed thought a national equivalency test could alleviate some of the additional workload of designing and marking in-house tests, which was sometimes in addition to an ITE lecturer’s normal workload. There are clearly also costs associated with staff time in each provider to write, arrange, administer, invigilate and mark their individual tests.

‘All this in-house stuff generates a lot more work for some key members of staff at times of year when they are involved in teaching rather than administering tests and marking them. I think it [a national equivalency test] would be a really good thing.’ ITE provider

‘If it was administered away from the providers, it would alleviate a big workload from us so I think it would be a positive thing’. ITE provider.

‘Personally I would favour a national system where everyone knows where they are, where it’s not our responsibility to do this. This is an additional thing on top of my workload that I’ve been given to deal with.’ ITE provider

- 3.57 **Currency and recognition in the profession:** A few provider staff and stakeholders thought a national equivalency test might have more credibility and recognition amongst school head teachers once trainees enter the profession after their training.

‘I think there’s a value of a national test to give the system reassurance that the intake is of a high quality...I think there’s something about sending signals to the system of the expectations of the new intake that it does lift the esteem of teachers and hopefully make people work harder to become a teacher. I think there is value in that.’ School improvement expert

‘Drawing parallels between what you’re looking at here for the equivalency test there would be a national understanding of what the level is. It has a standing and gives more of an authority of where things are.’ Assessment expert

Potential barriers and challenges

- 3.58 **Inflexibility of administration arrangements:** Most ITE provider staff thought that a national equivalency test would need flexibility in terms of locations, timings, dates and accessibility or it could risk being a barrier for some potential applicants. Test centres would need to be strategically placed throughout Wales.
- 3.59 A few interviewees thought providers would need to retain some level of involvement in the test administration. The timing of the tests needs to be considered carefully in terms of whether applicants would be required to sit the tests before applying to ITE providers or once they have an offer with passing the test a condition to be met before acceptance.
- 3.60 **Cost of development and administration:** Staff in ITE providers typically felt unable to comment on the potential cost efficiency of a national test, although a few staff thought that there would probably be higher costs associated with the development and administration of national tests. Providers' willingness to support a national equivalency test may depend on the extent of any Welsh Government funding made available and the cost implications for them. However, one expert thought a national test may prove to be more cost efficient in the long term. Providers would want clarification about whether there would be central support for the administration of the tests.

'There are costs to ensuring that the system operates properly and the marking [of the tests]... We process quite a lot of people through this so nationally for all the courses I would think there would be quite a cost implication.' ITE provider

'My instinct would be that it would be more cost efficient, but my experience of the Reading and Numeracy Tests in the early days... was that some institutions still used their own tests because they were familiar with them and it gave them the information that they wanted in the way that they wanted it. It would only be more cost efficient if all the relevant institutions in Wales agreed that it was fit for their purpose.' School improvement expert

3.61 **Costs for candidates:** A few ITE staff thought that a national equivalency test would probably need to involve a fee for candidates, which could prove to be a barrier for entry into ITE. One staff member wanted to have the option of continuing to run their own free in-house tests to avoid the issue. The costs associated with running the tests could be higher in some areas of Wales if there is less demand from applicants to sit the tests, but providers were clear that it would be unfair to expect candidates in those areas to pay more.

‘I would say a national test would have to carry a charge with it. I suppose we don’t charge because this is part of us trying to be competitive with applicants. I would suggest that there probably would be a charge for a national test but I don’t know how much that would be.’ ITE provider

3.62 **Agreement on the competencies to be assessed:** Providers were generally in agreement that all the Welsh ITE institutions should be involved in developing a national test. A few staff mentioned involving WJEC or a private contractor in developing and administering a national test to avoid any conflicts of interest. However, achieving a consensus amongst teacher education lecturers on what forms of literacy and numeracy skills teachers in the 21st century need and therefore what the test should assess could be challenging. A few provider staff were concerned that in order to design a national test that satisfies everyone its content is likely to be quite simplistic and only assess a narrow set of competencies.

‘I think if we are going to introduce a national equivalency test we probably need to decide for ourselves what the purpose is and what we want out of it. I think the important thing is to get the level right.’ ITE provider

‘It’s whether you want to be quite mechanistic about it and test grammar, punctuation and spelling – that kind of literacy. Or whether you want to assess problem solving through literacy, political literacy, financial literacy - It depends on your view of literacy I suppose. Whether you want it to be 21st century literacies which is much more than grammar spelling and punctuation, or whether you want to stick to the fundamentals of the written language.’ ITE provider

‘It worries me that we focus on ways teachers need to improve their literacy, without integrating what literacy means.’ ITE provider

3.63 **Lower candidate pass rates:** A few ITE staff thought that introducing robust national equivalency tests could result in higher failure rates and a temporary drop in the number of applicants being accepted onto initial teacher education courses in Wales, which could result in a short term recruitment issue.

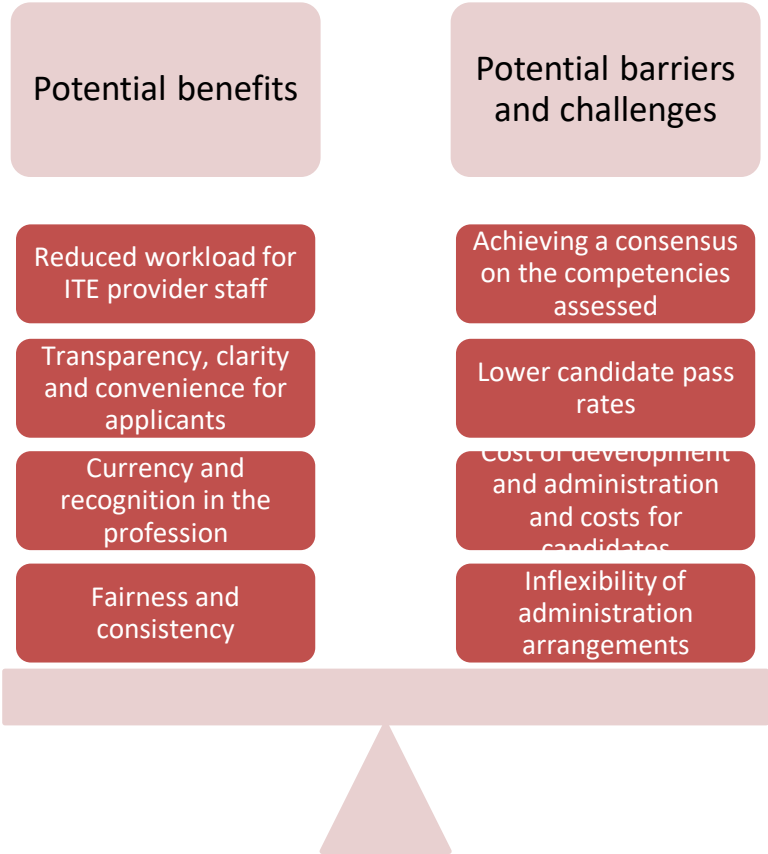
‘I suspect we might find that less candidates would pass a national test than a local test because of the variety of standards that there are. I suspect that a national test would initially have a lower pass rate.’ Higher education expert

‘I’m speculating but I suspect that if we have a national test our candidate success rate may be slightly lower than it is currently.’ ITE provider

‘There are some people who can get the grades very easily to get on the course, but this does not mean they are necessarily going to be better than someone who struggles to get that grade B requirement but understands the concepts really well.’ ITE provider

3.64 The benefits and challenges are summarised in the Figure 3.4 below.

Figure 3.4 Benefits and challenges of introducing a national equivalency test



Source: ICF analysis of ITE provider staff, expert and candidate interviews.

Further practical considerations for introducing a national equivalency test

- 3.65 **Method of delivery:** A few ITE staff thought that online equivalency tests would be better than existing paper-based tests as they may reduce some administration and would make marking quicker and more reliable. A bank of digital questions could also enable multiple versions of a test to be generated, increasing the shelf life of the tests. However, other stakeholders and provider staff noted that online tests tend to lend themselves to multiple choice questions that can be more simplistic, and do not easily let candidates show their workings. Paper-based tests may therefore encourage more deep thinking and complex problem solving. There is also the risk of providers experiencing technical issues when administering online tests.

‘I suppose I would recommend something online just because it’s more straightforward to run.’ Higher education expert

‘Paper tests tend to encourage slower and deeper thinking than computerised tests... One of the reasons why we didn’t initially introduce computerised [national reading and numeracy] tests is because evidence shows on computerised tests people tend to answer more intuitively and quickly... whereas with paper tests people tend to stop, think and do some workings and checking before they give an answer.’ Assessment expert

‘I would be cautious of using computerised testing because you might not get the full range of someone’s ability; they might be encouraged to answer quickly.’ School improvement expert

‘I like paper format because you have time to do your workings out as well.’ ITE candidate

- 3.66 **The inclusion of assessed coursework:** some competencies, such as writing and listening, can be better assessed from coursework than an examination. A few ITE staff thought that a two-part assessment including coursework is key to ensuring ‘equivalency’ as it enables students to have equal opportunities to do well, when they haven’t done so well based on traditional formats of assessment (e.g. a number of students are anxious due to time constraints).

‘The university policy is to incorporate a range of assessment methods, and some thinking behind this is inclusivity, and to make sure we are not disadvantaging somebody if they have difficulties with one form of assessment... utilising the two different forms of assessments provides people with the opportunity to build their confidence and apply maths in a different way, and I wouldn’t want that to change.’ ITE provider

- 3.67 **Competencies to be assessed:** Many ITE staff interviewed were not able to articulate in detail what they believed a national equivalency test should assess, or what key areas of weakness typically emerge from the results of in-house equivalency tests.

‘I haven’t done an analysis of the papers yet to have a look at what the key skills are they are slipping up on really. That would probably be useful thing for me to do... I really ought to do that.’ Test developer, ITE provider

‘Rather than one online national equivalency test, if there were better national guidelines on what the equivalency tests should cover... that would provide some form of parity across the courses.’ ITE provider

- 3.68 ITE lecturers and stakeholders interviewed suggested that common weaknesses in trainee teachers’ **literacy abilities** are writing skills including accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as phonics and the metalanguage of English. Some ITE staff and stakeholders thought that current testing arrangements are not assessing applicants’ writing skills rigorously enough, and in some cases these skills are assessed through coursework rather than an equivalency test under exam conditions.

- 3.69 ITE lecturers and stakeholders interviewed suggested that common weaknesses in trainee teachers’ **numeracy abilities** are a basic knowledge of fractions and percentages. A few interviewees thought calculator tests involved deeper and more complex mathematical problem solving.

‘In terms of literacy I would encourage people to look at the levels of reading and writing and oracy as opposed to just a reading exam which just tests one subset. We know that writing is the weakest part of the literacy and language skills of learners in Wales...I think it would be neglectful to not incorporate that.’ School improvement expert

3.70 **Scope of the assessment:** There were broadly two schools of thought among all stakeholders on what a national test should be assessing:

- Assess full subject knowledge at a GCSE Grade B equivalent; or
- Assess functional literacy and numeracy skills required in a professional context.

3.71 Most ITE staff and some stakeholders thought that all teachers need a sufficient grasp of the overall English Language and Mathematics curriculums to teach them at a GCSE standard, particularly given that secondary school teachers are sometimes asked to cover lessons in English or mathematics even if they are not an English or mathematics teacher by training. Some advocates of this approach thought that a national equivalency test should be based on the WJEC GCSE curriculums and take consideration of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework.

‘There has been debate about functional skills being recognised as an alternative to GCSEs, but they are very different things. GCSEs provide knowledge, whereas functional skills show you can apply it in a real world context... any equivalency tests need to examine both, as you need to have some broad knowledge but also the ability to apply it’. Policy expert.

‘When we brought in the Grade B for GCSE we knew it was a proxy for good literacy and numeracy but it was helpful in setting a benchmark for the standard.’ School improvement expert

3.72 A few ITE staff and stakeholders did not think the broad coverage of the GCSE and English and Maths syllabus is as important as assessing the core literacy and numeracy skills required in a professional context, particularly given that prospective trainee English and mathematics teachers should have a very high standard of English and Mathematics anyway. Some stakeholders thought that primary school teachers and secondary school teachers of other subjects largely only need functional literacy and numeracy skills required in a professional setting. The all-Wales literacy and numeracy tests already serve this purpose, although some interviewees thought they needed updating.

‘I think it would be less about analysing pieces of poetry or whatever and much more about having the right standards. Probably more professionally focused would be the way forward.’ Policy expert

‘For primary student teachers my personal view is that I would want them to be as numerate and literate as they can be. I’m not personally that concerned that an art teacher has a very good academic background with a grade B in maths for instance’. Staff member, ITE provider.

‘Equivalence should also be sought for functional skills or essential skills, which would broaden access.’ Policy expert

3.73 Testing candidates at the end of training not before they start: Several ITE provider staff and stakeholders mentioned exploring the possibility of administering Grade B equivalency tests or tests of literacy and numeracy skills at the **end** of an ITE course as a requirement for achieving qualified teacher status, rather than at the point of application given the broader teacher recruitment challenge in Wales.

3.74 This ‘test on exit’ model is used when assessing the literacy and numeracy skills of all ITE candidates in Australia. The approach could give candidates the opportunity to develop their literacy and numeracy skills to meet the required standard over a sustained period with support provided during their ITE course, rather than sitting a standalone test before entry. However, one staff member expressed concern that such an approach would distract from the delivery of the core ITE course.

3.75 Communicating the Grade B requirements early and effectively: Providers were in agreement that there is a need to communicate the GCSE Grade B requirements more effectively at an early stage to schools so that students can retake their GCSEs whilst still in education if they need to in order to enter the teaching profession. Most provider staff thought that retaking a full GCSE course where possible is preferable to sitting a standalone equivalency test.

‘I think the preferred option is getting people on GCSE programmes as quickly as you can... You can make this one more and more rigorous, but if it doesn’t count as a GCSE equivalent qualification on a job application then it’s still only a temporary fix because the real problem is that people will need that GCSE in the long term.’ ITE provider

‘If the GCSE grade B issue is sorted out in schools then it negates the issue from the start. If students know about the grade B requirement early then they have the option to retake their GCSE in year 12 or year 13. If we could find a way to convince students that these skills are important all of the time then we wouldn’t have a problem.’ ITE provider

‘Students are angry that they didn’t know. That’s a general theme.’ ITE provider

Key summary points

Equivalency testing practices elsewhere

3.76 Key findings were that:

- No other English-speaking countries have national equivalency tests in place for ITE candidates who do not meet a minimum required standard in English and mathematics. Some individual ITE providers in other parts of the UK have developed in-house equivalency tests but these are not designed to assess candidates’ competency at GCSE Grade B level and are used less widely than equivalency tests are in Wales.
- ITE providers often signpost candidates to two leading private equivalency testing organisations in the UK that are used by applicants who do not meet the minimum entrance requirements in literacy and numeracy.
- There are no directly suitable alternative equivalency or literacy/numeracy tests being used in other professional contexts for admission to training and for a licence to practise and registration purposes in the UK. In terms of systematic literacy and numeracy testing practices, the most comparable profession to teaching is nursing and midwifery. However, these relatively short and simple tests have a narrower focus on assessing literacy and numeracy skills required in a professional context, broadly at a level 2 standard (Grade C).
- National pre-entry tests of *all* ITE candidates’ professional literacy and numeracy skills are also not generally common practice in English-speaking countries. England’s ‘professional skills tests’ are an exception to this, and a supplier currently manages the development and delivery of these national tests.
- Alternative models currently being used internationally when testing the literacy and numeracy skills of all ITE candidates include sitting national tests prior to graduation, setting a national requirement to assess literacy and numeracy upon entrance but leaving providers with some autonomy, and using tailored versions of a commercial test.

Current arrangements and tests available in Wales

3.77 Strengths:

- Provider staff largely believe that their own in-house equivalency tests serve their purpose well of assessing a candidate's competency at GCSE Grade B.
- Provider staff generally believe tests run in-house are more candidate-centred. In-house tests may reduce a barrier for potential applicants, particularly when the provider absorbs the cost of the test. Candidates mostly had positive experiences with test administration.

3.78 Areas for improvement:

- Many candidates think accompanying support from providers to prepare for the tests is important and should be standardised, but the nature and extent of support currently available varies between centres.
- Providers acknowledge the need for consistency between ITE centres and are open to alternative arrangements. Stakeholders tend to express concerns about consistency and fairness for applicants.
- Candidates' views on the difficulty of the tests they sat vary considerably, particularly depending on which provider they applied to. Generally, candidates were not sure the in-house equivalency tests they had sat were genuinely comparable to a GCSE Grade B standard or had as broad a coverage of the curriculum.
- Some provider staff acknowledge that their centre lacks a formal moderation or quality assurance process and were not always able to articulate the rationale for the pass mark thresholds set during interviews. No staff interviewed described a formal evaluation process for their in-house equivalency tests.

3.79 Suitability of existing tests:

- An assessment of existing tests shows that none are suitable for the purposes of national equivalency tests in their existing form. Providers' in-house equivalency tests have several weaknesses, including short lengths, high pass rates and a lack of robust moderation. Other national literacy and numeracy assessment tools in Wales serve quite different purposes.

Views on introducing a National Equivalency Test

3.80 General views:

- Almost all ITE provider staff are in favour of introducing some form of national equivalency test. Stakeholders also acknowledge the need for consistency, but a few stressed proportionality in the context of teacher recruitment challenges. Candidates who had sat multiple equivalency tests at different providers would welcome a national test as it would have been more convenient.

3.81 Benefits and challenges:

- The benefits of introducing a national equivalency test might include: greater fairness and consistency across providers, stronger currency and recognition in the profession, a reduced workload for ITE provider staff and more transparency, clarity and convenience for applicants.
- The barriers and challenges to introducing a national test might include: the cost of test development and administration as well as costs for candidates, inflexibility of administration arrangements, achieving a consensus on the competencies to be assessed and lower candidate pass rates.

3.82 Practical considerations:

- There were mixed views about the method of delivery. Online tests might reduce some administration and make marking quicker and more reliable. However, paper-based tests may be more appropriate for assessing candidates' writing skills and encouraging deeper thinking and more complex mathematical problem solving.
- There were also mixed views on the competencies that should be assessed. Some stakeholders thought that the test should be modelled on the WJEC syllabus. Findings from interviews with ITE staff suggest that key areas of weakness among current trainees include writing skills, grammar, spelling and punctuation in English; and basic knowledge of fractions and percentages in mathematics.

4. Appraisal of options

4.1 An appraisal of the options for future equivalency testing arrangements is outlined in this section. Firstly, we present the strengths and weaknesses of current arrangements in the form of a gap analysis. Secondly, we identify the options for appraisal and finally we present our assessment of each option.

Gap analysis

4.2 Below we summarise the strengths and weaknesses of current equivalency testing arrangements under four themes:

- Test development and selection;
- Test administration;
- Test support; and,
- Sitting and passing tests.

Table 4.1 Strengths and weaknesses

Theme	Strengths	Weaknesses
Test development and selection	<p>All providers have used practitioners experienced in teaching and marking GCSE maths and English papers to develop questions for equivalency test papers.</p> <p>All providers have used GCSE papers to develop the questions for their own in-house tests.</p> <p>Some providers have collaborated (formally or informally) with awarding bodies or examination boards (e.g. Agored Cymru or WJEC) and drawn on their expertise in developing tests.</p>	<p>No formal independent quality assurance process is in place for examining whether equivalency test questions and pass marks are at the appropriate level for assessing equivalency to the Grade B GCSE.</p> <p>Test development takes up the time of ITE course tutors. There are costs for providers who have outsourced test development to contractors.</p> <p>Some providers have not drawn on external advice in developing tests.</p>
Test administration	<p>Each provider rotates versions of test papers or have a bank of tests in place. Providers recognise the need to review and refresh the papers and questions periodically.</p> <p>Providers generally offer a range of dates for candidates to sit tests, allowing flexibility to sit (or resit) the test at different points up to the start of ITE courses in September.</p>	<p>Staff in providers are not necessarily refreshing test papers periodically, or spending time developing new questions.</p> <p>It takes time for providers to administer the tests. Some uncertainty is generated for providers in planning for how many candidates with conditional offers will register on the course/test dates.</p> <p>Candidates are not always aware of the Grade B requirement and option to sit an equivalency test as well as the different tests available.</p>

Theme	Strengths	Weaknesses
		Some candidates feel that tests do not truly reflect equivalence to a GCSE Grade B.
Test support	<p>All providers offer some support to candidates to prepare for the test. Some providers offer longer courses to prepare for the tests.</p> <p>Some candidates report that preparing for the test was a helpful refresher that improved their literacy and numeracy skills in advance of their course.</p>	<p>Inconsistency in the support that is available to candidates. Some candidates unaware of support available from providers.</p> <p>Some candidates feel that the courses are designed to 'teach to the test' and therefore do not reflect a GCSE Grade B standard.</p>
Sitting and passing tests	Most candidates report that tests were smoothly run and that test results were provided promptly.	Some candidates report that tests are not always administered under strict exam conditions.

4.3 Below we analyse the gaps between policy objectives, expectations and current practice in relation to recruiting and selecting high quality candidates for ITE, and arrangements for applicants without GCSE Grade B in English or maths.

Table 4.2 Gap between policy and practice

Policy objective	Expectation	Current practice
Equivalence to GCSE Grade B standard	Tests should demonstrate that candidates have competences equivalent to those passing GCSEs (or accepted equivalent examinations) at Grade B	<p>Most providers believe their own tests assess competencies equivalent to the GCSE Grade B standard, but some are unsure and believe this is difficult to 'prove'.</p> <p>Some candidates believe that the equivalency tests are at a lower level than the full GCSE qualification.</p> <p>Tests and success rates vary between providers. Some candidates report that tests are easier in some providers than others.</p>
Fairness	The process should be fair and equitable without adversely affecting any group of candidates. It should also be accessible	<p>There are inconsistencies in processes and practices between providers; different fees, test lengths, resit policies, preparation courses and support offered by providers.</p> <p>There is no Welsh-language equivalency test for candidates without a Grade B in both Welsh and English.</p>
Proportionality	The process, including the costs and time involved by providers and candidates, should be proportionate to the importance of the Grade B standard as one of the essential competences	<p>Most providers consider the amount of time spent on developing and administering the tests to be disproportionate to the benefits.</p> <p>Some provider staff and candidates do not understand the rationale for having both equivalency tests for candidates without the Grade B and pre-application literacy and numeracy tests for all candidates.</p>

Policy objective	Expectation	Current practice
	required of candidates to be accepted	
Transparency	The Grade B requirement, equivalent qualifications and the option to sit an equivalency test should be clear to all candidates	The requirement is made clear by providers as far as possible although some candidates are unclear on the requirements. Some candidates unaware of the options to sit an equivalency test at point of application. There is guidance on equivalent qualifications although some candidates report lack of clarity on what qualifications are equivalent.
Portability	Tests should enable candidates to study ITE at any Welsh University	Providers report that they accept equivalency tests from elsewhere although some candidates report that this is not always the case.

4.4 Based on the above analysis, the main gaps in current practices are:

- A perceived lack of **fairness** due to inconsistencies in current practices and the lack of a Welsh-language equivalency test;
- **Credibility** - whether equivalency tests truly address the Grade B requirement;
- **Proportionality** in terms of the time spent by ITE practitioners on current practices;
- Lack of **visibility and transparency** around the Grade B entry requirement, the option to sit a test and the pre-test support available;
- Lack of clarity on the **portability** of tests between providers.

Option identification

4.5 Based on the gap analysis above, we have identified the following options for the Welsh Government to consider further:

- Option 1: Maintain the status quo
- Option 2: Provide more guidance to providers on testing procedures
- Option 3: Require or encourage providers to use common testing procedures
- Option 4: Introduce a national equivalency test

4.6 Each of these options is described in the sub-sections below with an assessment of each presented in section 4.3.

Option 1: Maintain the status quo

- 4.7 This option would involve maintaining current practice with providers continuing to select and administer equivalency tests in the way they deem most appropriate to meet the Welsh Government's requirements for access to ITE courses. This option would not address the policy gaps highlighted above but would not incur additional costs to the Welsh Government and providers. However, this option would incur opportunity costs in terms of the time providers will spend in future on further developing, refreshing and validating their own equivalency test papers separately. There may also be opportunity costs from providers continuing to have separate administration arrangements.

Option 2: Provide more guidance to providers

- 4.8 This option would require the Welsh Government to improve current practice by developing guidance for providers setting out how they should assess whether candidates have achieved a standard equivalent to a Grade B in the GCSE examination in English and/or Welsh and in mathematics. Guidance should set out what is considered to be good practice in relation to the following:

- **Test selection, development and administration:**
 - Tests should cover all the skills and competencies expected at Grade B in English/Welsh and maths;
 - Each ITE provider should have multiple versions of their equivalency test papers;
 - ITE providers offering Welsh-medium ITE should offer a Welsh-language equivalency test;
 - There should be a clear, documented process for selecting which version of equivalency test papers are used on a particular testing date (e.g. test papers should be used on a rotating basis or selected at random by a member of staff from the provider);
 - Providers should refresh their equivalency test papers on a regular basis (e.g. every three years) by amending the questions, taking into account changes to GCSE examination questions;

- Equivalency tests should be the same length in each provider (e.g. two hours).
- **Quality assurance:**
 - Each provider should have an external quality assurance process for validating that equivalency tests assess competencies at a standard equivalent to a Grade B in the GCSE examination;
 - Each provider should have a moderation process in place to ensure consistency and accuracy in the marking of equivalency test papers;
 - The grading/pass mark should be specified in advance and should be externally validated.
- **Timing:**
 - ITE providers should offer candidates the opportunity to sit the equivalency tests at multiple points during the year (e.g. on a bimonthly/monthly basis from February-August);
- **Support for students:**
 - ITE providers should ensure that the Grade B requirements and options to sit an equivalency test are prominent in recruitment and marketing materials;
 - All candidates asked to sit an equivalency test should be offered support to prepare for the test in the form of a course or workshop. This support should be available to candidates sitting the tests at different times of the year. There should be a recognition that providers may choose to offer different levels of support and that this may mean variations in the costs to candidates.
- **Communication:**
 - ITE providers should provide guidance to candidates on what the equivalency tests will involve. The guidance could draw on some of the principles set out in the *All-Wales Protocol Guidance for Teacher Training Interviews*,³⁶
 - All candidates asked to sit an equivalency test should be offered several sample papers to help them prepare for the test.

³⁶ University of South Wales [All Wales Protocol for Skills Tests](#)

Option 3: Require or encourage providers to use common testing procedures

- 4.9 Under this option the Welsh Government would either encourage or require (through its commissioning of ITE provision) ITE providers to develop a single test for English/Welsh and maths as well as common procedures for the administration of tests. This would not require legislation. The guidance in Option 2 would be applied to guide the development of common procedures. As a consequence, providers would be required to agree on an independent quality assurance process for validating questions and moderating papers (e.g. involving an examination board). This option would provide consistency in the standard of questions asked in tests, the length of the tests as well as the arrangements for candidates (e.g. sample papers, support). Providers would need to refresh the questions in the equivalency test papers on a regular basis.
- 4.10 Under this option, providers could choose to collaborate on developing a single test for English/Welsh and maths in a similar vein to their approach to developing the pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests. Alternatively, they could agree that one provider would develop the tests to be used nationally or jointly commission an external organisation to develop tests. Providers could remain responsible for administering the tests, or jointly commission an organisation to administer common testing procedures on their behalf.
- 4.11 If providers were to retain responsibility for administering tests, this option would require providers to collaborate and agree an approach to selecting which version of equivalency test papers are used on a particular testing date. This could be done within the provider (as is the case with the pre-entry literacy and numeracy tests) or through a common approach (e.g. agreeing to rotate test papers in the same way).
- 4.12 This option could involve providers having the same testing dates across Wales and offering a single preparation course for the tests.

Option 4: Introduce a national equivalency test

- 4.13 This option would involve the Welsh Government leading the development and administration of a national equivalency test that would be compulsory for all ITE candidates without a Grade B GCSE or equivalent qualification. A

national test would have a national quality assurance process overseen by the Welsh Government.

- 4.14 The development (and potentially administration) of a national test could be procured externally by the Welsh Government as was done with the National Reading and Numeracy Tests and the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit. Alternatively, the Welsh Government could consider developing tests themselves using the expertise of ITE providers (i.e. the Welsh Government managing a similar process to the development of the pre-entry tests).
- 4.15 A national test could be paper-based (with multiple versions of papers rotated as described in Option 2 above) or administered online, using a bank of questions developed and rotated appropriately. The Welsh Government would need to ensure that the administration of a national test retained enough flexibility to enable candidates to sit the test at different times of year and at different locations. If the tests were paper-based, providers could still be involved in the administration of the testing process, for example by providing locations for testing and/or staff to invigilate tests.

Option assessment

- 4.16 In order to reach a conclusion on the preferred option, each of the four options outlined in section 4.2 are assessed against two broad criteria:
- The extent to which the option will address the policy gaps identified in section 4.1; and
 - The feasibility of the option:
 - Costs of implementation
 - The capacity and expertise available to implement it
 - The time taken to implement the option.

Table 4.3 Option assessment

Option	Criteria			
	Extent to which option will address policy gaps	Feasibility of option		
		Costs	Ability to implement	Timing
1: Status quo	Will not address any policy gaps	<p>Low short-term financial costs to the Welsh Government and providers.</p> <p>Ongoing opportunity costs of doing nothing for providers who will continue to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and refresh their equivalency test papers separately – duplication of work; • Have separate administration arrangements – potentially losing out on efficiencies from having common procedures (e.g. single sample paper). <p>Opportunity costs to candidates from a continuing lack of transparency and perceived unfairness (for some) resulting from inconsistency of current arrangements (e.g. different test content, length, amount of support provided).</p>	No action required.	No timing implications.
2: Provide more guidance to providers	Likely to address some policy gaps (fairness, credibility and transparency) depending on provider willingness to implement guidance and Welsh Government ability to encourage compliance.	<p>Relatively low cost to the Welsh Government (compared with Options 3 and 4).</p> <p>Potential duplication of costs across providers if all undertake similar activities separately.</p> <p>Cost to providers would vary depending on changes to be implemented. Potential costs incurred through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further developing and refreshing their tests, including developing Welsh-language tests; • Developing or formalising their validation and quality assurance processes; • (For some) providing more support to candidates – not all deliver a course or workshop. 	<p>Expertise exists to implement improvements within providers.</p> <p>Implications for providers in terms of capacity – additional staff time required to implement changes in the short-term – and external validation.</p> <p>High risk that not all providers will implement all aspects of the guidance.</p>	<p>Could be implemented in short-medium term. Guidance could be prepared and responded to in time for 2019/20 entry.</p>

Option	Criteria			
	Extent to which option will address policy gaps	Feasibility of option		
		Costs	Ability to implement	Timing
3: Require or encourage providers to use common testing procedures	<p>Likely to address most policy gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairness (to an extent although some variation in administration could still exist); Equivalence and credibility (through validation), Portability (through being recognised across providers), Transparency (through single test and consistent guidance). <p>Dependent on Welsh Government ability to monitor and enforce requirement.</p>	<p>Low financial costs to Welsh Government beyond monitoring and ensuring implementation.</p> <p>Higher short-term costs to providers in moving towards common procedures (e.g. cost of joint commissioning or time associated with test development through provider collaboration).</p> <p>Cost efficiencies in medium-term from having:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common tests – providers share the burden of refreshing and validating papers; Common sample papers and guidance for candidates (instead of separate ones for each provider); More consistent course/workshop content. 	<p>Expertise exists in the sector.</p> <p>Providers have undertaken a similar process with pre-entry tests.</p> <p>Would require involvement of independent quality assurance organisation (e.g. examination board).</p>	<p>Longer-term implementation (for 2020/21 entry). Risk that ITE providers will not meet timescale.</p> <p>New arrangements unlikely to be ready to implement in time for recruiting 2019 intake (i.e. ready by January 2019).</p>
4: Introduce a national equivalency test	<p>Likely to address most policy gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairness (through a consistent test for all candidates); Equivalence and credibility (through external validation), Portability (through being accepted by all providers), Transparency/visibility (national awareness raising). 	<p>Higher costs to Welsh Government – developing a specification for the test, procurement, commissioning and management, consultation with providers, oversight and quality assurance.</p> <p>Reduced costs to providers from not having to develop, refresh and validate tests. Potentially lower costs depending on provider involvement in administration.</p>	<p>Expertise and capacity exists in the education and private sectors.</p> <p>Testing arrangements would still require collaboration with providers (signposting of candidates, use of HE locations for testing).</p>	<p>Longer-term implementation (for 2020/21 entry). Risk that resourcing would not be available to meet timescale.</p> <p>New arrangements would not be ready to implement in time for recruiting 2019 intake (i.e. ready by January 2019).</p>

Other policy considerations arising

4.17 In addition to the above options, some providers, stakeholders and candidates discussed other potential options that fall outside the scope of current Welsh Government policy. These included:

- Testing candidates on exit, rather than on entry to ITE
 - Some providers, stakeholders and candidates felt this could reduce the extent to which the Grade B requirement was a barrier to entry. Some providers considered that candidates could develop their literacy and numeracy skills during their ITE course, with the literacy and numeracy audits and pre-entry tests identifying areas for improvement;
 - However, other provider staff felt this could distract candidates from the content of their course and create confusion around the qualified teacher status of candidates without the Grade B;
- Using other aptitude testing instead of equivalency testing
 - Some providers and candidates felt that the pre-entry tests as well as literacy and numeracy audits could be further developed to assess whether candidates were at the required level for entry to the ITE course.
 - However, other providers and stakeholders felt that pre-entry tests were serving a different purpose to the equivalency tests.

Conclusions

4.18 Based on the analysis above and the following considerations:

- Some improvements outlined in Option 2 ought to be made in the short term to improve the credibility of the equivalency tests;
- Option 3 could fill the policy gaps but give rise to some of the problems identified with the pre-entry tests developed by ITE providers in collaboration and would be developed at a pace determined by the ITE providers;
- Option 4 would give rise to development and administration costs falling largely on the Welsh Government but the government might be more assured that the Grade B requirement is met consistently and there are no differences in test administration;
- Option 4 could enable providers to focus on offering courses that would get candidates up to the standard.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

- 5.1 The Welsh Government requirement for ITE students to have a GCSE grade B or equivalent in English and/or Welsh and maths on entry means that effective arrangements need to be in place to enable candidates to reach this standard whilst also ensuring a sufficient supply of high quality ITE candidates.
- 5.2 This research has shown that whilst entry requirements for ITE candidates are well understood by providers and stakeholders, these requirements are not always perceived to be clear, transparent and fair to candidates. Interviews with ITE provider staff and candidates have illustrated that some applicants are unaware of the Grade B requirement and of the qualifications that are considered equivalent until they apply for an ITE place.
- 5.3 Candidates' are not always aware of the option to sit an equivalency test, rather than resit a full GCSE and often do not become aware of this option until they receive a conditional offer of an ITE place. Furthermore, candidates are not always aware of the different options they have for sitting and preparing for an equivalency test through ITE providers or private sector testing organisations.
- 5.4 Data from providers shows that 214 candidates for 2017/18 entry sat English equivalency tests and 286 sat mathematics equivalency tests. However, the number of applicants affected by the Grade B requirement is not fully clear based on the data available. Not all providers collect data on the number of applicants without a Grade B in English and maths and none of the providers track those applicants without a Grade B who make enquiries but do not submit an application for an ITE place. This means it is not possible to fully understand the extent to which the Grade B may or may not be a barrier to entry for some applicants.
- 5.5 Providers seek to employ good practices in designing or selecting and administering equivalency tests. However, there are inconsistencies in the current arrangements with variations across providers in terms of test design and selection, pre-test support, length, timing, costs and resit policies. There is greater consistency in other pre-entry literacy and numeracy testing of ITE candidates although both providers and candidates have mixed views on these tests.
- 5.6 Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches has identified gaps between current policies and practice. These relate to the transparency,

portability, fairness and proportionality of existing approaches. To address these gaps, four potential options for future equivalency testing arrangements have been identified in Section 4 and each has been assessed in terms of the extent to which it addresses these gaps.

5.7 Based on the findings of this assessment, we recommend the following:

- In the short-medium term (for 2019/20 entry), the Welsh Government should develop guidance for providers relating to recommended good practice in the administration of equivalency testing (Option 2 above) to improve the quality of equivalence testing. This should cover:
 - marketing the availability of equivalency tests and support;
 - test development and selection;
 - pre-test support and guidance;
 - test administration.
- In the longer-term (for 2020/21 entry), the Welsh Government should introduce a national equivalency test (Option 4 above).
 - This option would involve the Welsh Government leading the development and administration of a national equivalency test that would be compulsory for all ITE candidates without a Grade B GCSE or equivalent qualification. A national test would have a national quality assurance process.
 - This should be accompanied by national marketing to raise awareness of the Grade B requirement and the option to sit the national equivalency test and follow a pre-test course. This may obviate the need for any other testing of candidates' literacy and numeracy skills by ITE providers.

Annex A: Data Tables (survey responses)

Profile and background

1. Have you sat an equivalency test as a result of not meeting ITE course entry requirements to have a GCSE grade B (or equivalent qualification) in English, Welsh, Maths or Numeracy?

Yes	104	91%
No	10	9%
Total	114	

2. What is your current (employment) status

Fully qualified teacher	1	1%
NQT / New teacher	23	23%
Working as a non-qualified teacher	4	4%
Student on another course	3	3%
Current ITE student in Wales	61	60%
Current ITE student in England	1	1%
Working – Other	4	4%
Other (Please specify)	4	4%
Total	101	

3. In what year did you complete your Initial Teacher Training?

September 2015 – August 2016	3	6%
September 2016 – August 2017	22	47%
None of the above	22	47%
Total	47	

4. Please specify the ITE provider(s) you have applied to:

Bangor University	6	6%
Aberystwyth University	5	5%
University of Wales, Trinity St David (Swansea)	37	37%
University of Wales, Trinity St David (Carmarthen)	13	13%
University of South Wales	14	14%
Cardiff Metropolitan University	47	47%
Graduate Teacher Programme	4	4%
Teach First Cymru	1	1%
Other (Please specify)	3	3%
Total	130	

5. What ITE course/route did you / are you currently following?

Postgraduate Certificate in Education	76	75%
A degree course (BEd, BA or BSc) which will lead to a qualified teacher status	25	25%
Total	101	

6. Please specify further details about your ITE course/route:

Level		
Primary Education	47	47%
Secondary Education	54	53%
Total	101	
Language		
Welsh-medium	10	10%
English-medium	87	86%
Bilingual	4	4%
Total	101	
Funding		
Fully-funded by grant or bursary	55	54%
Partially funded by grant or bursary	31	31%
Entirely self-funded	15	15%
Total	101	

7. Please specify your subject specialism:

Art and Design	3	6%
Biology with Science	2	4%
Business	2	4%
Chemistry with Science	1	2%
Design & Technology	5	9%
Drama	3	6%
English	3	6%
Geography	1	2%
History	4	7%
ICT & Computing	6	11%
Mathematics	2	4%
Modern Foreign Languages	8	15%
Music	4	7%
Other	1	2%
Physical Education	4	7%
Physics with Science	1	2%
Welsh	4	7%
Total	54	

Experience of the ITE equivalency test

8. When did you realise that you had to sit the equivalency test(s)?

When I first decided to apply for teaching	71	72%
Only when I was granted and accepted a conditional offer from the ITE provider	23	23%
Other (Please specify)	4	4%
Total	98	

9. In what month and year did you first sit the equivalency test(s)?

Month		
January	3	3%
February	8	8%
March	9	9%
April	12	12%
May	8	8%
June	10	10%
July	13	13%
August	24	25%
September	8	8%
November	1	1%
December	1	1%
Total	97	
Year		
2018	1	1%
2017	52	53%
2016	36	37%
2015	8	8%
2014	1	1%
Total	98	

10. What equivalency test(s) did you sit?

English Language	33	34%
Maths/Numeracy	48	49%
English Language and Maths/Numeracy	17	17%
Total	98	

11. Which provider did you first sit the test(s) with?

Bangor University	2	2%
Aberystwyth University	4	4%
University of Wales, Trinity St David (Swansea)	31	34%
University of Wales, Trinity St David (Carmarthen)	10	11%
University of South Wales	6	7%
Cardiff Metropolitan University	36	40%
Graduate Teacher Programme	2	2%
Total	91	

12. Did you pass the equivalency test(s) on your first attempt?

Yes	83	86%
No	14	14%
Total	97	

13. What equivalency test(s) did you resit or are you expecting to resit?

Welsh Language	0	0%
English Language	1	8%
Maths/Numeracy	12	92%
Total	13	

14. Have you passed your resit equivalency test(s)?

Yes – I have passed the resit(s)	12	92%
No – I did not pass the resit(s)	1	8%
Total	13	

Views on ITE provider application

15. Thinking about your application process, were you aware of the:

	Aware	Not aware	Total
The requirement to have a GCSE Grade B (or equivalent) in English/Welsh Language and Numeracy? The different options for meeting the requirement to have a GCSE Grade B (or equivalent) in English/Welsh Language and Numeracy?	74	19	93
The different options for meeting the requirement to have a GCSE Grade B (or equivalent) in English/Welsh Language and Numeracy?	64	29	93
Type of equivalency tests offered by the provider?	53	39	92

16. Thinking about your ITE provider, to what extent do you agree or disagree that they:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
Sufficiently explained or communicated the entry requirements of the course (including the requirement to have a grade B in literacy and numeracy)?	44	42	2	3	2	93
Provided guidance and information about equivalency testing?	31	41	14	7	0	93
Encouraged you to sit the equivalency exam to achieve the entry requirements?	45	38	5	3	2	93

ITE equivalency test arrangements

17. Thinking about the ITE equivalency test offered by your provider, do/did you:

	Yes	No	Total
Have to pay a fee to sit the test?	28	52	80
Have the option to resit the test at least once?	48	9	57
Have the option to do the test online?	2	68	70

18. Was this fee (or will it be) reimbursed?

Yes	4	14%
No	24	86%
Totals	28	

19. How many times can you/were you able to resit the test?

27 times
6 times
3 times
1 time
1 time

20. Please specify how much you had to pay for the test:

£0.00	1 response
£30.00	2 responses
£34.00	1 response
£35.00	2 responses
£44.00	1 response
£45.00	1 response
£50.00	2 responses
£70.00	1 response
£80.00	2 responses
£150.00	4 responses
£200.00	1 response
£250.00	3 responses

21. Please indicate the length of the test:

	30 minutes or less	31 – 60 minutes	61 – 90 minutes	91 – 120 minutes	More than 120 minutes	Total
English Language	1	18	16	9	1	45
Maths/Numeracy	4	28	16	10	2	60

Views on pre-test courses, guidance and support

22. Did you receive any of the following support to help prepare for the equivalency test(s)?

Structured teaching course	18
A single workshop	31
Personal tuition	7
Personal tuition only when requested	6
Signposting to course preparation material (e.g. links to websites)	19
No support provided – I prepared for the test myself	31
No support provided – I did not prepare for the test	2
Other (Please specify)	3

23. Did your provider deliver this support?

Yes	46	74%
No	16	26%
Total	62	

24. To what extent do you agree or disagree:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
The content of the pre-test support I received was relevant and appropriate for the test	35	21	3	1	2	62
The pre-test support was not long enough to revise or cover the content required for the test	6	11	26	15	4	62
The pre-test support did not help me to effectively prepare for the equivalency test	2	7	25	27	1	62
I felt more confident after receiving the pre-test support	26	26	5	1	4	62
The pre-test support was delivered in the most effective format	22	22	9	1	8	62

25. What preparation activity did you undertake prior to sitting the test(s)?

I revised by myself or with peers using past test material obtained privately	11	35%
I revised by myself or with peers using past test material provided by the ITE provider	6	19%
I revised by myself or with peers using other material (e.g. GCSE revision guides)	12	39%
Other (Please specify)	2	6%
Total	31	

Views on the equivalency tests

26. Thinking about the length of the equivalency test(s) you took, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the test(s) is/were:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
Longer than expected	3	7	61	8	7	86
Too short to accurately reflect my knowledge	6	8	49	13	10	86
The right length	16	54	10	2	5	87

27. Thinking about the content of the equivalency test(s) you took, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the test(s):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
Clearly worded?	22	57	7	0	1	87
Challenging?	21	47	16	2	1	87
The best way to test whether I met the entry requirements?	21	36	11	9	10	87
Set at a level that reflected the literacy and/or numeracy requirements of the ITE course?	19	46	12	6	4	87

28. Thinking about the results of the equivalency test, to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
The tests were scored and moderated fairly by the provider	34	36	3	0	14	87
I received my results back promptly / in enough time	43	33	7	3	1	87
I received sufficient feedback about the assessment	19	26	18	13	11	87

29. In your opinion, should future testing arrangements:

Stay the same?	38	40%
Include compulsory support for learners before testing?	22	23%
Require ITE providers to use the same, standardised equivalency tests?	23	24%
Don't know	11	12%
Total	94	