Headteachers and the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership: An Evaluation of Development and Practice

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Abstract

This study explores the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTLs) 2018 within the context of the professional learning policy discourse in Wales. It specifically analyses headteachers' professional learning and development in relation to their understanding and use of the PSTLs for themselves and their school teaching staff.

This study adopted a three-phased mixed-method exploratory design: Phase One consisted of expert interviews (n=5); Phase Two involved a national online survey of Welsh headteachers (n=80) and Phase Three involved headteacher interviews (n=16). This study found that a lack of clarity in relation to the role of the revised PSTLs reflected the lack of precision and coherence within the middle tier of Welsh educational policymaking. The findings indicated that headteachers' awareness and use of the PSTLs was affected by the timing of their release and their positioning within the wider reform agenda: many headteachers saw them as a standalone policy in a series of educational reforms rather than a catalyst for the systemic reform agenda in Wales. Headteachers' understanding and use of the PSTLs was primarily grounded in meeting performance management requirements, with a small minority recognising the broader role of the PSTLs in relation to the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) agenda and the Curriculum for Wales (CfW).

The study explored broader discussions of Welsh professional practice, with a particular focus on the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL). Established in 2018 to enhance leadership capacity and promote leadership development, the NAEL has been pivotal in the professional learning policy discourse in Wales. The study identified two main debates: the NAEL's role as a cohesive entity within the middle tier and its function within the PSTL framework. The study concludes that the effective use of the PSTLs is crucial for the professional learning and development of headteachers. It recommends the following: fostering a stronger culture of self-evaluation to enhance internal accountability; providing clear guidance on the role of PSTLs within the performance management system; clarity within the middle-tier partnerships of professional learning and development; alignment of the CfW, the SLO agenda, the NAEL's objectives and the PSTLs within the National

Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) agenda for a cohesive approach to professional learning and development.

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List of Abbreviations

Acronym	Term
ACCAC	Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CELT	Consortium for Educational Leadership Training
CBC	county borough council
CfW	Curriculum for Wales
CPD	continuing professional development
DCELLS	Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
EWC	Education Workforce Council
FE	Further Education
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
GTCW	General Teaching Council for Wales
HEI	Higher Education Institute
INSET	in-service educational training
ITE	initial teacher education
ITT	initial teacher training
LA	local authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
LPSH	Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers
MEP	Master's in Educational Practice
NAEL	National Academy for Educational Leadership
NAfW	National Assembly for Wales
NAPL	National Approach to Professional Learning
NHDP	National Headship Development Programme
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
NQTs	newly qualified teachers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PHIP	Primary Headship Induction Programme
PLP	Professional Learning Passports
PLCs	Professional Learning Communities
PSTLs	Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership

PRD	Practice Review Development
RC	regional consortia
SD	staff development
SEF	School Effectiveness Framework
SLO	Schools as Learning Organisations
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Study
TPL	Teachers Professional Learning Study
WISERD	Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data
WG	Welsh Government

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale

Surfing the Waves of Professional Learning as a Headteacher in Wales

At the age of thirty-four, I was a mature student at the University of Wales, Newport, graduating as a newly qualified teacher in 1996. Even at this early stage in my teaching career my aspirations extended beyond the classroom, and it sounds a bit clichéd, but I really wanted to make a difference to children's learning. My desire to make a difference has been the driving force behind my teaching career. This aspiration took me from the classroom as a teacher to step into leadership roles, allowing me to have a more profound impact on children's lives. Professional learning has always been at the heart of this journey.

When I first became a headteacher in 2003, I quickly realised that effective leadership is not just about being good at your job. Much like surfing, it requires lifting your head out of the day-to-day operations to see the bigger picture, requiring strategic thinking and a broad vision to ride the bigger waves. I was particularly drawn to exploring how professional learning could make an impact through innovation and networking with educators both in Wales and internationally to drive school improvement.

However, this was a challenge in practice because I understood that external factors such as local authorities, regulatory bodies and government policies heavily influenced internal school dynamics. To tackle bigger waves, you need to expose yourself to them more frequently and spend as much time as possible pushing to the upper limits of your capabilities, but without overdoing it. In reality, it was constant 'duck diving' as I learned new techniques to get past the wave, and I often felt voiceless, with expectations to accept policy changes without question. This motivated me to undertake this study, providing headteachers with an opportunity to have their voices heard objectively and to influence future Welsh Government (WG) professional policy and practice.

My journey from being a Welsh student in initial teacher education to becoming a headteacher mirrors the professional learning policy discourse within the Welsh education system – what this study will frame as 'three waves'. Starting my teaching career pre devolution (before Wave 1) and concluding it in Wave 3, I have navigated my professional learning journey through various surf conditions, riding the swells

and facing the challenges presented by each wave. Beginning in Wave 1 with its breakaway strategies from Westminster, I then faced the choppy waters of heightened accountability in Wave 2 and eventually experienced the smoother, more co-constructive, collegial approach to policymaking in Wave 3.

During this time, I also experienced differing approaches to headteachers' professional learning and development. In Wave 1, I participated in the National Headship Development Programme (NHDP), the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) and the Primary Headship Induction Programme (PHIP). I was also among the first cohort of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), held in Cardiff. I found the NHDP programme a solid wave for connecting with fellow headteachers and building my network, but at the time it felt like I was riding a one-size-fits-all surfboard which did not fit my specific educational setting. On reflection, the NPQH was more about the theory than the practical application I needed for the real headship ride. However, it was the gateway for me to apply for future headship roles.

During my first headship under Jane Davidson's tenure as Minister for Education (Wave 1, 2000–2007), the introduction of the Foundation Phase early years programme felt like paddling out into turbulent waters. This period brought significant pressures related to training, budgeting and staffing, with limited professional learning for headteachers about the rationale behind this initiative. The expectations to effectively implement the Foundation Phase while visiting pilot schools in other authorities often felt overwhelming and lonely. It was a period where I needed to assess the surf conditions to maintain a balanced stance by keeping a good head position. Fortunately, in my early years, I had an experienced headteacher as a mentor, providing invaluable support as I navigated these challenging waves.

In Wave 2, riding the surfboard was all about balancing on the crest of school categorisation while meeting end-of-key-stage standards set by the WG, which all overshadowed the innovative aspects of headship. This constant focus on staying upright meant there was little time to catch my own waves of professional growth. Instead, I focused on nurturing and training my school staff to senior leadership roles as it was hard to read the swell with all the changing policy winds. In this wave, the aim was to stay on the surfboard without falling off, keeping your legs moving back

and forth to help keep your balance. This reflected the challenge of steering my school community effectively while also navigating the performative demands of WG policies, always aiming to position myself correctly ready for further manoeuvres.

At this point in my career, I was appointed to my second headship, responsible for amalgamating two schools into one large primary school, which later transitioned into a federation of schools within the local high school catchment area. For the first time in my headship career, I found myself as a lead player, negotiating with external influences such as the local authority (LA), regional consortia and the WG, a role which I relished. However, despite these interactions, as a headteacher I still felt at times voiceless as the expectation was to accept policy changes as an inherent part of the headteacher's role without question, which often resulted in feelings of frustration and compliance.

In Wave 3, there was a major new swell with the launch of the National Mission a three-year strategic educational plan in 2017, signalling a shift towards a co-constructive, more collegial approach to educational policymaking. Riding this fresh wave, I successfully applied and got on board as an associate in the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL), joining its first cohort. This experience was the ultimate ride in professional learning during my headship, driving me to elevate educational standards not just in my own school, but on a local, regional and international scale.

Being a NAEL academic associate was like hitting the perfect wave for networking and collaboration with peers who had navigated similar waters and were committed to refining leadership practices in their schools. This collaborative ride included national and international visits, interviews, networking and joint efforts at both school and government levels, further igniting my passion for professional learning and development. A standout moment was being involved in international research, commissioned by the WG and funded by the British Council, which explored existing leadership practices in Wales and included visiting and researching the educational system in Finland. The published report, 'Our Call to Action' (NAEL 2019), made waves with its recommendations to enhance professional learning, well-being, and pupil outcomes for headteachers in Wales.

My interest in this study stems from my seventeen years of riding the waves as a headteacher, coinciding with the three major waves of Welsh educational policymaking. Reflecting on my early days in the line-up, my professional learning and development was mostly limited to external courses chosen from a course book, dependent on available school budgets. These courses had minimal impact on my teaching style or alignment with school or national priorities. Staff meetings were what I call ‘dates and diary meetings’, with little focus on professional learning and development. Back then, my experience with professional standards for teaching was part of the Performance Management Appraisal Process, a checklist of competencies that had to be ticked off twice a year with the headteacher, seen as separate from improving my classroom practice. Professional learning during this period mainly focused on whole-school priorities and collective staff training rather than individualised development, which for me lacked purpose and clear direction.

This study explores how the evolving waves of professional teaching and leadership standards have shaped the professional learning agenda in Wales. It also investigates the NAEL’s role as a crucial middle-tier partner in influencing this professional learning journey for headteachers. Positioned within the third wave of policymaking, this study specifically examines the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTLs) and their impact on the professional development of headteachers.

By examining the perspectives of headteachers in Wales, I hope to contribute to future discussions where the PSTLs (2018) become a key part of the professional learning and development for headteachers and their school teaching staff, helping them catch the right waves to advance their professional practice. I hope that my experiences navigating the three waves in my headship, academy associate roles and now in research will help shape this knowledge.

Study Overview

This study will explore the professional learning and development of headteachers in Wales in relation to the revision of the PSTLs (2018) and the establishment of the National Academy of Educational Leadership (2018). It is structured into nine chapters, with each chapter contributing to the overall exploration of the topic. The literature review is split into two chapters: pre and post devolution.

Chapter 2, the first of the literature review, begins by exploring the history of Welsh school education for several key reasons. Firstly, it underscores the unique characteristics of the Welsh education system that shape the relationship between teachers and the government, influencing policy development and implementation. Secondly, this historical overview sheds light on the evolving dynamics between the government and headteachers, a crucial factor in understanding how professionalism is conceptualised, which is central to this thesis.

Chapter 3, which completes the literature review, explores the theoretical and empirical research from the field of education on headteachers' professional learning and development and the PSTLs (2018). This chapter draws out key themes regarding the orientation of the PSTLs within the wider context of the educational reform agenda in Wales. This includes the role of the NAEL as a middle-tier partner and the implementation of national initiatives such as the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) agenda (2018) and the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) (Donaldson 2015).

Chapter 4 outlines the epistemological and ontological perspectives that underpin this study, providing a rationale for the chosen research design. This chapter outlines the methods used to address the research questions, including the justification for the mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data to answer the research questions. This approach was designed to guide and inform the subsequent data collection and analysis.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the findings from the study, organised into three phases. Phase One involved expert interviews, providing insights from individuals with a deep understanding of the inception and regulatory and non-regulatory frameworks of the PSTLs and their implementation. Phase Two consisted of an online survey of headteachers throughout Wales, capturing a broad perspective on headteachers' engagement with and understanding of the PSTLs across different regions and school settings. Phase Three focuses on interviews with headteachers, offering in-depth, qualitative insights into their experiences and challenges in using the PSTLs in their professional practice, both for themselves and their school teaching staff.

Chapter 8 synthesises the key findings from the three phases of data analysis, discussing the central issues that emerge from the study. This chapter integrates the findings with the existing studies identified in the literature review, providing a critical discussion that reflects on the implications of the research for both theory and professional practice. This chapter also reflects on the study's limitations and suggests recommendations for future study where more investigation is needed, particularly in understanding the long-term sustainability of the PSTLs and the varying levels of engagement with PSTLs among headteachers and their school teaching staff across different geographical and educational settings. Additionally, the NAEL's role as a middle-tier partner is crucial in supporting these future recommendations.

Finally, Chapter 9 concludes this study by summarising the key contributions of this research from the three findings chapters and offering recommendations and the next steps for educational policy and practice in Wales.

Chapter 2: History of School Education in Wales Pre Devolution

2.1 Introduction

This literature review is organised into two chapters covering the periods prior to and following devolution in Wales. The first chapter begins with a historical account of Welsh school education. There are three reasons for this: firstly, as will be illustrated, there are unique aspects of the Welsh education system that frame the relationship between teachers and government, and which affect the formulation and enactment of policy relating to teaching. Secondly, it will provide an overview of the relationship between government and headteachers, which is a key element in how professionalism is understood and is central to this thesis. Thirdly, the historical analysis will highlight how educational policymaking was an attempt to meet the interests of groups with vested interests. The series of compromises and 'muddles' which emerged has helped create the overlapping layers of bureaucracy that later in this chapter are identified as the 'messy meso' within the Welsh policy landscape (Connolly et al. 2018). A key aspect of Wales's reform agenda is the commitment to improving teaching quality to raise educational standards. The PSTLs, along with other Welsh Government initiatives such as funding the GTCW, revisions to initial teacher education, the introduction of a new curriculum and changes to professional learning, all play a crucial role in this process.

Chapter Three of this study, which addresses the post-devolution period in Wales, will be divided into three distinct waves: Wave 1 (1999–2009), Wave 2 (2009–2014) and Wave 3 (2014–present). This structure aligns with the political orientations of the three key ministers responsible for education in Wales: Jane Davidson (2000–2007, Wave 1), Leighton Andrews (2009–2013, Wave 2) and Kirsty Williams (2016–2021, Wave 3), all of whom played significant roles in the professional learning and development of headteachers and teachers in Wales post devolution. The reporting of the literature review in three waves was adopted after finding that some researchers have previously articulated Welsh educational policy development post devolution into three core phases (Egan 2017; Connolly et al. 2018; Titley et al. 2020; Evans 2022). Observers have highlighted how each phase has had its own set of characteristics (Evans 2022). Although these phases are not watertight, they do

act as a useful reference point to illustrate the professional learning and development discourse in Wales over the past two decades.

As will be discussed in this review, there are contested perspectives in relation to headteachers' professional learning and development. These perspectives are often expressed in language: staff development (SD), continuing professional development (CPD), in-service educational training (INSET) and, more recently, a shift towards the interchangeable use of 'professional development' and 'professional learning' which has become commonplace in professional practice discourse (Jones 2015).

According to Timperley (2011) there are discernible distinctions between the terms 'professional development' and 'professional learning'. The former is characterised by a more formalised approach involving organised activities including workshops, courses or conferences aimed at addressing specific learning objectives, often driven by institutional requirements and closely aligned with 'organisational professional practices' (Evetts 2011). In preference, 'professional learning' is perceived as active and transformative, fostering inquiry-based approaches which encourage critical reflection for individual continuous professional growth (Timperley 2011), and it is seen as more aligned with occupational professional practices (Evetts 2011).

While both 'professional development' and 'professional learning' share the aim of enhancing professional practice, they do differ in focus, a distinction which is relevant to this research. There have been several articulations of these differing approaches to teacher learning and development reflected in the semantic difference between 'development' and 'learning'. The classic distinction is Hoyle's (1974, p. 318) distinction between 'restricted' and 'extended' models of teacher professionalism. The restricted model aligns more with a traditional, bureaucratic view of teaching, consistent with 'professional development', while the extended model supports a more dynamic and autonomous approach to the teaching profession more in keeping with 'professional learning'. While this study will reference Hoyle, it will draw extensively on the typology of Evetts (2011) to frame different approaches to professional work generally and teaching specifically. The study will argue that Hoyle's 'restricted' category is aligned to Evetts' (2011)

organisational practice model, which corresponds to ‘professional development’, while the ‘extended’ category is aligned to Evetts’ understanding of occupational professional practice, which is more in line with ‘professional learning’. Therefore, this study has adopted a pragmatic stance and employed the term ‘professional learning and development’ to emphasise a balanced consideration of organisational and occupational practices (Evetts 2011).

2.2 History of Early School Education in Wales

Although formal education was not introduced by the Westminster government until the late nineteenth century, there were informal types of education which did exist in Wales prior to state education, run by the denominational and non-denominational sectors and mainly aimed at providing free schooling to support the poorer working classes (Griff 2002). An example of this was the Ragged School movement developed from the early work of John Pounds in 1818. By the 1860s, this movement had established schools in five of the main Welsh towns and cities: Cardiff, Wrexham, Carmarthen, Swansea and Newport, as well as other areas in Wales (Clark 1988). Children who attended this type of voluntary schooling were taught by church members, many of whom were unqualified, with teaching often in buildings in need of repair and with limited classroom and teaching resources (Mann 1854; Rich 1870).

These schools aimed to address social issues but were often perceived as amplifying them and creating tension between the upper classes and the poor working class. The higher social classes blamed voluntary schooling for the high crime rates and poverty (Mann 1854; Rich 1870), with some arguing that the voluntary schools were just ‘training institutions for criminals’ (Rose 1991, p. 117). Therefore, it was not surprising that the social and moral conditions of the poor were a recurring theme in early school inspection reports (Grigg 2022). The first report of the inspectorate for England and Wales (1840) highlighted that schools were in disrepair, focused more on disciplining than teaching, and children endured filthy conditions (Grigg 2022). As a result, many parents opted to send their children to work instead, with 85% of children in Wales aged five to fifteen not attending school (compared to 70% in England). According to Grigg (2022), while industrialisation had overall improved living standards, it had also led to overcrowding and a decline in social and moral values, for which the poor were perceived as responsible.

Schooling was seen as crucial for maintaining law and order, especially in the rural, ‘wild parts’ of Wales (Grigg, 2022, p. 23).

These tensions surrounding voluntary schooling (Mann 1854; Rich 1870; Rose 1991) contributed to a shift in thinking in Westminster, UK from its previous ‘laissez-faire’ non-intervention approach of education (Taylor 1972) to the emergence of a more formal type of education system (Middleton 1970; Armytage 2010). The intention of formalising the education system was a government strategy to ‘rectify social disorder’ in England and Wales (Parker and Freathy 2020, p. 199), and getting children to attend school was considered a possible solution.

The implementation of the Elementary Education Act (1870), more commonly known as Forster’s Education Act (1870), was a key policy in educational development in England and Wales. It mandated, for the first time, compulsory schooling for all children aged five to twelve at elementary school level (Armytage 2010). While it is often reported that the Act (1870) instituted mandatory schooling, it created a system of intermediary bodies, known as school boards, to oversee the implementation of schooling in local areas and generate funding through taxation (this is the first introduction of the middle tier in Welsh educational policymaking which will be discussed in detail throughout this thesis). Subsequently, Westminster introduced a localised level of governance designed to operate at arm’s length yet be responsive to local communities. Many of the elected school board members were from the denominational groups, who sought to ensure that they were well represented to influence public spending towards their own Anglican church schools (Murphy 1971). An additional problem was that not all school boards adopted the legislation in England and Wales (Forster’s Act, 1870), which resulted in inconsistencies in localised governance practice (Jones and Roderick 2003).

The Aberdare Committee (1881) followed the Forster Education Act (1870); while sharing similar goals of improving education, it focused on enhancing intermediate and higher education specifically in Wales. It was considered on the one hand as the ‘educational charter for modern Wales’ (Roderick 2001, p. 243) and on the other, ‘tempered by lost opportunities,’ (Evans 1988, p. 9). The committee’s recommendations were seen as favouring the higher and middle classes, aligning more with England’s education system rather than addressing the needs of the

poorer working classes of Wales. This perception, according to Evans (1988), arose partly because the earlier Forster's Education Act (1870) on 'compulsory schooling' was considered to meet the needs of the poorer working classes. Therefore, any aspirations for the poorer working classes to pursue intermediate or higher education could be fulfilled through scholarship opportunities. However, despite these limitations the Aberdare Report (1881) did advance education in Wales (Evans 1988).

One of the most significant educational policy changes in the early 1890s was the formalisation of the existing localised governance structure. This was achieved by transforming the county borough councils (CBCs), within which school boards operated, into Local Education Authorities (LEAs). This was implemented through the enactment of the Education Act of 1902 across both English and Welsh counties (Jones and Roderick, 2003)

However, this localised power by the new LEAs continued to create a conflict of interest with the existing school board system, which led to it eventually being abolished (Watson, 1905). Many Welsh CBCs opposed the dissolution of school boards for various reasons. Firstly, they believed that their intermediate schooling system was under threat because the Education Act (1902) did not make provisions for some existing grammar schools. Secondly, concerns arose regarding proposals related to the organisation of faith-based schools. However, the primary contention revolved around the maintenance and financing of elementary school buildings, with conflicts arising between school board managers and LEAs (Barlow 1905). The lack of clarity regarding the delegation of responsibilities in this domain, as stipulated in Section 7 of the Education Act (1902), exacerbated tensions between the two parties. To address this issue, Westminster introduced the Local Authorities Default Act (1904) to provide clarity and to help alleviate the situation. However, this initiative resulted in many schools becoming unfit for purpose due to inadequate maintenance (Jones and Roderick 2003).

Simultaneously, with the establishment of the LEAs in 1902 there was a shift in political power in Westminster, UK from the Conservatives to the Liberal Party (1905). This transition facilitated a move towards Welsh-specific education policymaking, culminating in the establishment of the Welsh Office in 1964. Although

administratively linked to the Department of Education in Westminster, this development marked a significant advancement for Wales. The issue around localised governance arrangements and the debate surrounding the 'messy meso' partnerships will be discussed later in this chapter (see also Section 3.7.2 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales Wave 2).

The debate around secondary-level schooling was far more complex and was determined with the introduction of the Education Act (1944), more commonly known as the 'Butler Act' after Rab Butler, a radical Conservative (McCulloch 2001). Butler (1944) sought to introduce what is known as a 'Tripartite System' of schooling. It was a three-level system aimed at pupils aged eleven years and onwards. The introduction of the Education Act (1944) created three types of state-funded secondary schooling: grammar, technical and secondary modern. It was intended to provide a fairer system by breaking down class barriers by offering a range of types of schooling, with inbuilt scholarships to support those pupils who were academically capable but could not afford to attend the fee-paying grammar schools (Trueman 2015).

The three diverse types purportedly reflected academic ability: the grammar type aimed at the more academic pupils, the technical for those wanting a more vocational route and the secondary modern for those who were more practical (Simon 1991). However, critics argued that the system replicated class inequality (Trueman 2015), and the peak of intelligence should not be fixed at eleven years as children developed at different rates (Parker and Freathy 2020), while others said that the Act represented a way forward in education (Evans 1988). All children aged eleven years had to pass an exam at the end of their primary schooling which would determine whether they would enter a grammar or secondary modern type of schooling. This was perceived by many as unfair and prejudiced against the working classes (Chitty 1989). The responsibility for implementing the 'Tripartite System' fell to Local Authorities (LAs), resulting in significantly higher pass rates for the eleven-plus exam in some areas, including South Wales.

Implementing the Tripartite model in Wales, particularly in rural areas, posed significant challenges. In the Welsh cities and urban areas, the model saw greater success, although its technical aspect faced challenges due to inconsistent provision

attributed to lower enrolments for technical education (Foreman-Peck and Smith 2004). Consequently, the original Tripartite model (Simon 1991) underwent modifications, evolving into a Bipartite model consisting of secondary modern and grammar schooling (Jones 1990). By 1960, the number of Welsh pupils attending grammar school exceeded that in England, with 58,000 pupils in grammar schools and a total of 88,000 pupils attending secondary modern schooling (Jones 2002).

Another significant development during this period was the relocation of the Welsh Department for Education, which had previously been overseen from Westminster. It moved to operating from Cardiff in 1952. The Welsh Office was set up in 1964 and the Secretary of State for Wales oversaw administrative responsibility for education in Wales. There was not a Minister of Education with full responsibility for education until devolution in 1999.

Although the Tripartite model was not sustained in England and Wales, it laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive approach to education (Lowe 1991; Jones 2002). Subsequently, a change in government to the Labour Party in 1965 enabled some politicians to move away from the Tripartite System towards a more inclusive 'comprehensive type' of schooling. The introduction of the comprehensive education system aimed to create a more equitable education framework by eliminating the divide between academically selective grammar schools and secondary modern schools which catered to pupils who did not pass the grammar school selection exam (Benn and Chitty 1996).

The concept of comprehensive schooling is described by Benn and Chitty (1996, p. 14) as 'giving equal values to all learners and all forms of learning'. A significant pre-devolution discourse centred on the adoption of the comprehensive schooling system, which was officially adopted as government policy in 1965, with the main debates focusing on matters of democracy and inequality. While concerns have been raised subsequently about the outcomes of the system (Reynolds and Murgatroyd 1990; Gorard 1998), it was perceived within Wales as an academic accomplishment due to its steadfast commitment to providing high-quality education to all pupils regardless of their socio-economic background (Walford 2001), and its universalist principles have remained a cornerstone of post-devolution education policy in Wales (Power et al. 2019). Holyhead (1949) was the first comprehensive school in Wales

and set the standard for state secondary education, although formalisation of this model came much later (Jones and Roderick 2003). Even at this early stage, efforts were made to create a less fragmented education system in Wales compared to England, where a patchwork of provision emerged. Wales, on the other hand, leaned towards a more comprehensive schooling model. As a result, all Welsh LAs eventually adopted it in 1975, signalling the end of grammar schooling in Wales.

One of the key moments in reframing the state's relationship with education was the famous 'Ruskin Speech' in 1976. This was made by James Callaghan, Cardiff West MP and Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party at the time, who started what is known as the 'Great Educational Debate', which was to influence educational policy well into the 1980s and 1990s (Phillips and Harper-Jones 2002). Its delivery at Ruskin College was seen as a 'wake-up call' by Callaghan (1976) to the teaching profession that they needed to be more accountable to the educational system as a public service body. His mandate included more partnership working, better links with industry and more involvement by parents, whom he felt had previously been neglected in the educational decision-making process (Phillips and Harper-Jones 2002). This raised concerns over pupil achievement and trust in the teaching profession, creating a shift towards a more 'centralised, managerial approach' to teachers' professional development (Egan and Grigg 2017, p. 3) that only served to undermine teachers' autonomy (Little 1993; McLaughlin 1994, cited in Egan and Grigg 2017, p. 4). One of the consequences of this centralisation of government was an increase in focus on performance management as a strategy for school improvement (Egan and Grigg, 2017). Other strategies were the individualised approach to professional learning and development, as exemplified by the introduction of 'Baker Days'. These days involved five INSET days for staff training while pupils were not in school (Estyn 2013). Critics argued that although INSET was beneficial for professional learning and development in effective schools, many schools did not adequately evaluate its impact on staff performance and pupil outcomes. Critics called for better use of professional learning and development time (Hargreaves 2012). These days eventually evolved into CPD, marking a shift from individualised efforts to whole-school change in relation to professional learning and development (Egan and Grigg 2017).

The Education Reform Act (HMSO 1988) marked a significant shift in Westminster's policymaking, replacing the previous Education Act of 1944. This was the period which saw a fundamental realignment in relation to the 'professional mandate' between government and the teaching profession. Reforms in this period moved away from the laissez-faire approach adopted since the nineteenth century. The Act (HMSO 1988) reinforced a shift in political thinking by altering power dynamics in education and shifting control from LEAs to a centralised government, thereby reducing levels of teacher autonomy (Grigg 2002). (See Section 3.5 Theorising Professional Work for further discussion on the autonomy debate.)

A more centralised approach to policymaking became apparent with the introduction of the 1988 National Curriculum (HMS0 1988 cited in Donaldson 2016, p. 8), a national system of education which gave a common entitlement of education for all children in England and Wales (Donaldson 2016). Prior to the Education Reform Act (HMSO 1988) the curriculum in Wales and England was mainly determined by teachers, which according to James (2022, p. 120) often resulted in a 'lack of progression and continuity in students learning'. In some instances, this was also influenced by the LEAs, which led to inconsistencies and variations in practice (Donaldson 2016). To assist in the establishment of a National Curriculum in Wales and modifications to statutory assessment arrangements (HMSO 1988), 'The Curriculum Council for Wales' was set up (1993); a Welsh version of the curriculum was published a year later which included reference to the Welsh language and heritage.

The move towards devolution in Wales gained momentum after a narrow victory in the 1997 referendum, resulting in the creation of the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) through the Government of Wales Act (1998), which granted the assembly legislative powers. The concept of devolution in Wales, described by Jones (2006, p. 266) as a 'creeping devolution', evolved over time, marked by several milestones. These included the approaches taken by the Welsh Office, created in 1964, to help meet the policy needs of Wales, which remained under Westminster, UK jurisdiction. For example, the establishment of 'quangos' – arm's length government organisations – such as the Qualification, Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACCAC), which was later absorbed into the Welsh Government (Rees 2002). Other more significant divergences were the implementation of the National Curriculum in

Wales (HMSO 1988). Additionally, the creation of cultural institutions like the National Library of Wales and the National Museum of Wales contributed to this divergence of policies between England and Wales (Jones 2006). However, both Rees (2002) and Egan (2022) argued that the capacity for independent Welsh policymaking pre devolution was limited mainly due to the infrastructure of the Welsh Office (1964), which became more apparent leading up to devolution.

In 1999, Alun Michael was appointed as the first Secretary of the Welsh Assembly Government, formalising the leadership structure of the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW). However, Michael's tenure was short-lived; he was replaced less than a year later after a vote of no confidence proposed by Plaid Cymru. His successor, Rhodri Morgan, served as First Minister until 2009. In his inaugural address in 2002, Morgan made a lasting impact with his 'clear red water' speech, emphasising Wales's determination to create its own social policy tailored to its unique communities (Morgan 2002, p. 3).

As Rees (2002) stated, devolution did not begin with the creation of the National Assembly as policy divergence had evolved from England long before this, as already mentioned. However, devolution created the circumstances for Wales to create its own distinct education policies more attuned to meet the needs of the Welsh society, an approach that would have been highly unlikely under the previous Welsh Office regime (Rees 2002). This 'Welsh route' was highly evident in the NAfW's first terms of office, which Egan (2022, p. 189) described as' radical changes', marked initially by an increase in educational representation including headteacher and teacher professional bodies. This shift in focus also included greater emphasis on headteacher and teacher professional learning as a strategy to raise standards rather than the pre-devolution centralised performativity strategies adopted in England (Rees 2002).

Chapter 3: History of School Education in Wales Post Devolution

3.1 Introduction

The post-devolution period of policymaking in Wales has seen increasing policy divergence of Wales from its larger neighbour (or more accurately, as Rees (2002) argues, England has diverged from the educational policies within the rest of the UK). The following section will use the metaphor of 'waves' as a reference point to discern three phases of post-devolution policymaking (Wave 1 1999–2009, Wave 2 2009–2014, Wave 3 2014–present) as outlined in Chapter 1. While this is far from 'watertight', it acts as a useful reference point. In Wave 1 there was a clear change in policy direction and an adoption of what is considered a raft of breakaway strategies from Westminster, UK (Connolly et al. 2018). These breakaway strategies were the beginning of the educational reform agenda in Wales which continued into Waves 2 and 3 (see Section 3.7 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales for further discussion).

3.2 Wave 1 (1999–2009)

This first wave of policymaking is most closely associated with the first Welsh education minister, Jane Davidson. Davidson was a Labour politician who was recognised for her pioneering approach to gain international recognition through a series of what are described as 'distinct policies to meet the needs of Wales' (Rees 2002, p. 10). The key policy driver within this wave was the Learning Country (National Assembly for Wales 2001, p. 44) described as a 'landmark document' (Jones and Roderick 2003, p. 112) and viewed by Dixon (2016) as a justification of the recent devolution and departure from Westminster policymaking. An example of the attempt to distinguish Welsh policymaking, which both Dixon (2016) and Jones (2023) argued was overambitious, was the implementation of the Foundation Phase. Inspired by early years research from Scandinavia, Reggio Emilia and New Zealand, this programme was innovative for Wales due to its play-based learning approach for children aged three to seven years (WG 2018). Its key WG policy objective was to raise the achievement of children experiencing poverty and narrow the attainment gap. One of the key tensions identified in the early Foundation Phase evaluation pilot was that while the WG had shown a commitment to the Scandinavian model, it

needed to be supported by a national training policy to ensure schools had the necessary expertise and training (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2005). This view was reinforced several years later by WISERD (2013), which highlighted that a lack of direction and support from the WG had hindered the Foundation Phase's progress. Further criticism emerged that the ambition of narrowing the poverty attainment gap was not realised (Davies et al. 2013; Egan 2017; Power et al. 2019) and that the initiative did not have a long-term impact on schools (Dixon 2016)

Davidson faced additional criticism when Wales participated in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2006, marking its first involvement since devolution. Although Wales achieved a science mean score comparable to the OECD average, it significantly lagged behind in mathematics and reading. The OECD report (2006) attributed this underperformance to a lack of pupils excelling at higher levels. In response, Welsh policymaking shifted focus towards international school improvement strategies to elevate educational standards, leading to the development of the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) (Welsh Assembly Government 2008). According to Egan (2017), the SEF aimed to balance support for schools and teachers in improving pupil outcomes with increased accountability for headteachers, school governing bodies and LEAs (See Section 3.7.1 Headteachers' Professional Learning Wave 1 for further discussion).

Davidson's (2000- 2007) term of office ended a year later, with her successors – Carwyn Jones (2007) and Jane Hutt (2007- 2009) – holding relatively short terms as Ministers of Education following the 2007 elections and a newly formed coalition government (Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru). It was Jane Hutt who continued with Davidson's legacy by building on the Foundation Phase programme with the implementation of a New Skills Framework and 14–19 Learning Pathways (Dixon 2016) before she was succeeded by Leighton Andrews (2009), who dominated educational policy within Wave 2 (2009–2014).

3.3 Wave 2 (2009–2014)

Wave 2 is considered a period of educational reform characterised by increased accountability within the teaching profession, heavily influenced by performativity and compliance (Evans 2022) and driven by the impact of international data.

The perceived shortcomings in Welsh Government policies, such as the Learning Country (2001) implemented in Wave 1, became more evident with the release of the second round of PISA results in 2009. These results were lower across all three assessment areas (reading, mathematics and science) compared to the 2006 PISA results. These results were seen as a turning point in Welsh education (Evans 2022), contributing to a narrative of the failure of the Welsh education system and acting as the catalyst for educational reform in Wales (Keane 2011). This marked, according to Egan (2017), a shift away from the 'made in Wales' approach to policymaking adopted in the Learning Country (2001).

It was also a signal to Andrews (2011) that the teaching profession was 'falling short' and 'not delivering' (Baldwin 2022, p. 7), which influenced the policy direction in Wave 2. It could be argued that one of the reasons for embarking on a system of higher accountability in Wales was the 'global fixation' with other high-performing education systems (Harris and Jones 2017b) in pursuit of international recognition in the PISA ranking tables. This policy shift resulted in an era of increased accountability, performance testing and national assessment targets (Connolly et al. 2018) and marked a return to the accountability-driven and performance management culture which existed in Westminster, UK before devolution (Egan and Grigg 2017). However, while PISA results have been used to compare the educational performance of different education systems, they have also acted as a driver for educational reform in numerous countries including Wales (OECD 2016).

A major criticism of using PISA rankings tables as a measure of a country's performance is that the generic standardised tests fail to consider socio-economic disparities between countries. This limitation has raised concerns about the reliability of PISA, prompting some to question the role of the OECD as a global authority in educational governance (Meyer and Benavot 2017). Although the OECD's primary objective has been to shape global economic policies (Swaffield 2017), it has also faced criticism for its influence on the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) agenda. In Wales this was seen predominately in Wave 2, where the focus of reform was on standardisation, accountability and competition as government strategies for educational improvement (Sahlberg 2011). Ironically, despite Wales' intention to move away from this approach, it ended up implementing similar accountability

measures in Wave 2. The educational strategies adopted by the WG in Wave 2 have had lasting ramifications for headteachers, which remain evident in Wave 3.

During Andrews' tenure as Minister for Education (2009–2014), two significant policies were commissioned. The first, the Thomas Report (2011), was tasked with evaluating existing service structures and governance arrangements in education, determining which services should be administered at national, regional and local levels. The second, the Hill Report (2013), recommended greater regional collaboration through the implementation of a new regional school improvement consortia model (Andrews 2012). (See Section 3.7.2 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales Wave 2 for further discussion.)

The recommendations outlined in the Thomas Report (Welsh Assembly Government 2011) were translated into a twenty-point strategic plan by Andrews (2011) with a renewed emphasis on higher standards, increased accountability and stronger school leadership (Evans 2022). Critics expressed concerns that increased accountability measures would impose unnecessary bureaucratic and administrative burdens on headteachers and the teaching profession (Reid and Tanner 2011; Connolly et al. 2018). This plan included various initiatives, including a review of the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) to manage and oversee pupil attainment and performance results through a school standards unit (Evans 2022). This back-to-basics approach had some similarities with England (Power 2016) in terms of educational and accountability expectations (Evans 2022).

Later, Andrews (2011) introduced 'Qualified for Life' (WG 2014), a comprehensive five-year educational strategy for pupils aged three to nineteen in response to the recommendations outlined in the OECD report 'Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective' (2014). The 'Qualified for Life' plan (WG 2014) aimed to enhance educational excellence by fostering leadership development at all levels and improving teaching quality through an engaging curriculum and international credible qualifications (Evans 2022). To support these reforms, the Welsh Government restructured local and regional arrangements (Hill 2013), allowing greater involvement of schools and school leaders in a process described by Egan and Keane as 'co-construction' (Egan and Keane 2018a, p. 4). This approach enabled headteachers and teachers to determine the professional learning and

development they required based on a collaborative school-to-school model (Egan and Grigg 2017). Hugh Lewis, who succeeded Andrews as Minister of Education (2013), invited Graham Donaldson (2015), the former Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland to review Wales' curriculum and assessment arrangements. This later manifested into 'Successful Futures' (Donaldson 2015), which became the foundation for the ongoing educational reform efforts in Wave 3 (see Section 3.7.3 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales Wave 3).

3.4 Wave 3 (2014–present)

The third wave of educational policymaking saw a marked shift towards a more co-constructive approach to working with headteachers and the educational workforce led by Kirsty Williams (2016–2021), the new Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning. This approach was opposed to previous policy implementation observed in Waves 1 and 2 being delivered 'to' rather than 'with' the education workforce (Connolly et al. 2018). The key policy driver within Wave 3 was the National Mission, a three-year strategic educational plan (WG 2017) which contained the following four enabling objectives: developing a high-quality education profession; inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards; strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being; and robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system. Three key policy drivers which influenced this wave and frame this study were the Donaldson Report (2015), the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) agenda (2018) and the revised Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTLs) (2018). (See Section 3.7 Headteachers' Professional Learning and Development in Wales for further discussion).

The implementation of a new Curriculum for Wales (CfW) recommended by the report 'Successful Futures' (Donaldson 2015) highlighted the existing curriculum's shortcomings, describing it as 'overloaded, complicated and outdated' (Donaldson, 2015, p. 11). Central to the new CfW are four core purposes, aiming for all children and young people to become: ambitious, capable learners; enterprising, creative contributors; ethical, informed citizens; and healthy, confident individuals (WG 2020). One of the key principles behind the CfW is that offering learners a bespoke curriculum tailored to their individual needs, delivered by highly knowledgeable and expert teachers, is a method of 'levelling the playing field' (Kelly 2004, p. 217). Given

that over a third of pupils in Wales live in poverty (Stone 2022), the challenge for the Welsh Government, according to Evans (2023), is to achieve consistent practice across diverse socio-economic settings through the CfW.

The 'Successful Futures' report (Donaldson 2015) also emphasised the necessity for a high-performing educational system to shift from a centralised government direction seen in Waves 1 and 2 towards the capacity building and professional engagement at a school level seen in Wave 3. Donaldson (2015) outlined two key recommendations: firstly, the collaboration of partners within the middle tier – Estyn, regional consortia (RC), Education Workforce Council (EWC) and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) – as part of a revised national infrastructure establishment; and secondly, the establishment of an 'arm's length structure to carry out day-to-day leadership' (Donaldson, 2015, p. 118), which included the establishment of a new National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL).

The role of the NAEL is to develop leadership and build leadership capacity across the Welsh education system (Fullan 2004; Dunford 2005; Higham and Hopkins 2007). A significant component of the Welsh education reform agenda has been the establishment of the NAEL, which Egan and Keane (2018a, p. 3) describe as 'a major milestone in the history of education'. The role of the NAEL as a middle-tier partner is a significant aspect of the professional learning debate on professional standards explored in this study (see Section 3.7 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales for further discussion).

3.5 Theorising Professional Work

As illustrated in the historical discussion above, approaches towards teaching as a profession in Wales evolved through differing historical and political periods. There have been various theoretical perspectives on teachers' and headteachers' professional work and identity, from the classic account of Hoyle (1974) through Sachs' (2003, 2016) conception of the activist teacher to more recent works such as Whitty (2014), which have identified the changing nature of teachers' professional work. The most emotive articulation and strongest critique of recent changes in deprofessionalisation has been expressed by Ball (2003, 2015). Before considering the professional work of teachers generally, this section will outline some key debates in relation to how the teaching profession as an occupational category is

understood and theorised. The fundamental element within this is the relationship of the professions to government: what is known as the professional mandate. Under the professional mandate the government, in effect, provides certain socially valuable occupations or professions with a mandate to practise which is beyond normal market relations.

In its idealised version (Freidson 2001) the professions were given a mandate from the government to monopolise an occupation due to that occupation having a wider social good. From a benign perspective this was seen as serving a vital social function (Freidson 2001); from a malign account they were viewed as exploiting a market monopoly or being a strategy of self-interested occupational closure (Larson 1977). In the idealised form they were organised through collaborative and non-hierarchical work structures with high degrees of occupational autonomy. However, there has been criticism of what has been viewed as encroachments into professional work by the logics of market, bureaucracy and the state (Freidson 2001). This has resulted in the claim that teachers are being deprofessionalised. The most strident advocate of a deprofessionalisation thesis in education is Ball (2003, p. 215), who talks of the terror of performativity and the loss of the soul of the teacher. According to Ball (2015) deprofessionalisation of the teaching profession is representative of neoliberalist government policies, sacrificing, according to Mockler (2022, p. 168), agency and identity of the teaching profession through its ‘demand type’ (Evans 2011, p. 861) form of governance. One of the influences of neoliberal (Ball 2003) reform has been an emphasis on standardisation, competition and accountability as key strategies for educational improvement, a trend which Ball (2003) argued has not advanced teaching professionalism but has only served to undermine it. This has been applied to the work of teachers and, more recently, headteachers (Collet-Sabe 2017).

There have been opposing views which have criticised this deprofessionalisation narrative and have argued that professional work has merely changed and that new forms of professional practice are emerging. These perspectives reflect a deprofessionalisation/reprofessionalisation dynamic. For instance, Noordegraaf (2011, 2014) defined this with his ‘pure’ and ‘hybrid’ models of professionalism. The ‘pure’ professionalism model is characterised by an institutionalised system of regulation where professionals adhere to ethical codes of conduct. In contrast, the

'hybrid' model incorporates all the traits of the 'pure' model while also highlighting the role of headteachers as reflective practitioners in the decision-making process.

However, there is a tendency to represent accountability and autonomy as opposites, with the former being 'good' and the latter 'bad'. Cribb and Gewirtz (2007) argued that this binary view does not advance the teacher professionalism debate as autonomy does 'not exist within a vacuum' (Cribb and Gewirtz 2007, p. 210). The autonomy debate is more complex, involving two key factors: autonomy limited within a regulatory framework and the practical limits that the extent of regulation can be enacted (Hoyle and John 1995). These limitations can be influenced by various regulatory mechanisms such as professional standards and codes of professional conduct (Forde and McMahon 2019). Therefore, while the idea of a new professionalism is appealing, it is essential to explore the balance between autonomy and regulation to raise educational standards (Forde and McMahon 2019).

How 'teacher professionalism' is understood has been central to discussions on professional learning and development, with various interpretations and applications of the term (Hargreaves 1994; Freidson 2001; Evetts 2011; Noordegraaf 2011, 2014; Sachs 2016). One of the key debates around 'teacher professionalism' revolves around the differences in political and professional expectations (O'Sullivan et al. 1988; O'Brien and Jones 2005). The political view is characterised by external influences (O'Sullivan 1986) imposed on the teaching profession through the implementation of political policymaking rather than the professional learning and development needs emerging from teaching professionals themselves (O'Brien and Jones 2005).

3.5.1 Occupational and Organisational Professional Practice Models

The binaries in these perspectives have moved away from the later work of Julia Evetts (2009, 2011), who outlined two contrasting models of professional practice: occupational and organisational professionalism. The former model, identified as an occupational model of professionalism, promotes collegiality and self-regulation and fosters agency and autonomy. By contrast, the second, organisational model, which emphasises standardisation, regulation and high levels of accountability is close to Hoyle's account of 'extended' teacher professionalism. Evetts (2009) argued that the former places importance on relationships and the latter relies on the external

environment as a way of exerting control. Sachs (2003), for example, highlighted how different forms of professionalism can shape teacher identities with occupational models fostering collaboration and activism, while organisational models tend to encourage compliance.

Critics of the organisational model argue that this narrows professional discretion and autonomy (Anderson and Cohen 2015, p. 5) because it forces the position of the members to be compromised due to an enforced culture of performativity, competition and efficiency (Freidson 2001; Ball 2015). The impact of this type of culture is a mistrust of the system because of a constant need for the members of the organisation to compete to meet the high demands for increased regulation, bureaucracy, transparency and excessive accountability (Reed 2006). These perspectives (Reed 2006), from a critical perspective such as Ball (2004), only serve to undermine the teaching profession. The emergence of high accountability education systems focused on school leadership has been a feature of education systems throughout the world in the early decades of the twenty-first century. This emerged from not only national governments but through ‘globalised media governance’ associated with the international PISA tests carried out by the OECD (Grey and Morris 2022). While Wales was largely insulated from what has been represented as a ‘Global Education Reform Movement’ or ‘the GERM’ (Sahlberg 2011, cited in Egan and Keane 2018a), there were, as discussed above, moves towards greater centralised accountability within Wave 2 of post-devolution policymaking.

While the organisational model has been widely criticised, Evetts (2011) argued there is no evidence to substantiate that a decline of professional values such as trust, confidence and equality accompanies that of a hierarchical, bureaucratic type of institution. According to Evetts (2011), if occupational value is to be upheld as a model of professionalism, agency and autonomy must be central to the system.

While external environments play a crucial role in shaping teacher agency, Priestley et al. (2015, p. 135) argue that although government policy can ‘exercise agency’, it can also restrict teaching professionals from achieving true agency and autonomy. They argue that government initiatives intended to raise educational standards by enhancing teacher quality through professional learning have merely intensified the

policy discourse on teacher agency and autonomy. According to Priestley et al. (2015), these efforts have generally concentrated on reforming national curricula, with teachers being positioned as central to driving curriculum change in order to promote agency. Examples of this are Scotland and the new CfW in Wales (Donaldson 2015). However, this approach is fundamentally flawed because 'back door' regulations still exist (Priestley et al. 2015, p. 315) within government structures such as school inspections and the use of attainment data to measure pupil progress (Kuiper et al. 2013). Focusing on individual teachers as the path to achieving agency rather than on the support and resources available has only exacerbated the issue. Therefore, Priestley et al. (2015) suggest a shift in government policy towards addressing the cultural and structural factors that shape teachers' work.

Sachs (2016) argues that the environment should maintain a fluid balance between clear political objectives and the expectations placed on the teaching profession. She suggests that performance cultures are traditionally ingrained in political policies and practices, with accountability being a central aspect. While accountability is essential, it pertains to both the organisational and occupational models of professionalism. One of the implications is that Sachs' view of external accountability systems is short term (2016, p. 419), and the opportunity for developing professional practice and improving systems is limited if headteachers and teachers are perceived purely as 'technicians' to serve governments. According to Sachs (2016, p. 415), accountability is a 'two-sided sword'. On one side there is the teaching profession and on the other, the government, with each side holding contrasting perspectives on accountability. Sachs (2016) suggested that both views should be aligned.

Despite these debates, there exist aspects within both professional models (organisational and occupational) that could complement each other to the advantage of both types of organisations (Evetts 2011, p. 418). One potential way was to pinpoint areas within the occupational model where organisations could collaborate on policymaking and the introduction of new policy initiatives. Evetts (2011) contends that the first-hand experiences of professionals could prove highly beneficial for both parties.

The challenge, as highlighted by Evetts (2011), lies in evaluating how well professionals comprehend the evolving concept of 'occupational professionalism', which is critical for determining the necessary expertise and knowledge to bridge the gap between occupational and organisational models of professionalism. Additionally, Friedson (2001) highlighted that professional work is unique and stems from rigorous education, training and experience, all of which are essential for building trust in professionals' judgement. Hoyle (1974) similarly argued that a lack of clarity about professional requirements among both practitioners and their associated institutions can lead to conflicts in policy. Together, these perspectives stress the importance of a clear and shared understanding of professional teaching standards to avoid misalignment and discord between occupational roles and organisational expectations.

3.5.2 Freidson's 'Labour Markets'

An alternative approach to theorising professional work is Friedson's (2001) analysis of how models of work are organised and controlled by either: the free labour market, bureaucracy or the occupationally controlled labour market. He characterised these linkages as internal labour markets, in comparison to an external labour market shaped by a country's economy. In the first realm, the 'free labour market', regulation is minimal and there is limited investment in staff training, with productivity relying primarily on existing skills and knowledge among its members. The second world, the 'bureaucratic labour market', perceives members directly controlled by their organisation. Lastly, the 'occupationally controlled' world is characterised by members of the organisation managing and organising their own work, facilitated by clearly defined roles and responsibilities. In this world, staff are adequately qualified for their respective roles, and training is accorded high priority. Recruitment is predicated upon set criteria of skills and qualifications tailored to meet the demands of individual or group occupations.

Freidson's (2001) concept of the 'bureaucratic labour market' can be associated with the organisational professional model, while the 'occupationally controlled world' aligns with Evetts' (2011) occupational professional model. However, Evetts (2009, p. 248) notes that both professional models serve as 'ideal types', with reality falling somewhere in the middle. This implies a potential conflict in policymaking as members strive to reconcile the demands of both professional models. Historically,

there has been an imbalance between the levels of accountability which allows professionals in leadership positions to develop their roles and those of their staff (Evetts 2011). On the other hand, Sachs (2016) argues that a professional balance can be achieved, one that serves the political agenda as well as the teaching profession.

This was not the case in Wave 2 in Wales, where high levels of accountability and short-term focuses engendered low levels of trust and reduced levels of agency and autonomy. If we apply Evetts' model (2011), it becomes clear that during Wave 2 there were attempts by the Welsh Government (WG) to steer teaching towards a more occupationally oriented approach to educational policymaking (Connolly et al. 2018). Ideally, both performativity and professional roles should be aligned, with the WG being accountable for implementing policies and headteachers being accountable for enacting government policy priorities. While policy reform is recognised as crucial for enhancing educational outcomes (Reynolds 2008), there is also recognition, as Sachs (2016) described, that it can become 'ritualised', serving governance needs and inducing 'reform fatigue' among headteachers (OECD 2017, p. 44; Baldwin 2022). This notion is supported by Ravitch (2010), who argued that an effective accountability system should incorporate the professional judgement of its educators and not rely solely on test scores, as 'high surveillance' (Webb 2005, p. 190) may lead to accountability overload (Levitt et al. 2008, p. 16).

This tension between an occupational understanding of professional work (even if idealised, as in the deprofessionalisation perspective) and the 'encroachments' from the market and bureaucracy is central to the professional work of teachers and headteachers. Some of the possible reasons for this include an over-reliance on centralised policies – policy borrowing instead of policy learning – and frequent political shifts in policy direction which have not helped the cause (Egan and Grigg 2017).

More recently, Connolly et al. (2018) argued that headteachers are expected to fulfil and combine the two roles of being occupational and organisational, which creates challenges. Frequent changes in policy direction and accountability structures have left headteachers unclear about how their professional learning and development align with national initiatives.

In Wales the recent WG moves in Wave 3 towards the SLO agenda (OECD 2018), the implementation of the New Curriculum (Donaldson 2015) and the PSTLs (WG 2017b) are seen as attempts to bridge the gap between 'accountability led' and 'entitlement based' approaches to professional learning (Egan and Grigg 2017, p. 7). However, while this shows a commitment by the WG, their enactment remains unclear (see Section 3.9 Headteachers' Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership for further discussion).

3.6 International Professional Learning Perspective

This section explores the international perspective and gives some important insights into teachers' and headteachers' professional learning and development across the globe. While extensive literature exists on teachers' professional learning (Harris and Jones 2021), there is a paucity of literature specifically on headteachers' professional learning and development (Harris 2017), with even fewer studies focusing specifically on headteachers' personal experiences and perceptions of their own professional learning (Torrance 2015, p. 487).

3.6.1 General International Debates on Teachers' Professional Learning

Much of the existing research on teachers' professional learning since the mid-1970s (Little 1993; Loucks-Horsley et al. 1998, cited in Garet et al. 2001, p. 920; Timperley et al. 2007; Borko et al. 2010; Darling-Hammond 2017; OECD 2019) indicates a shift from individual course-based learning with 'standardised content' (Little 1993, p. 138; Garet et al. 2001; Borko et al. 2010) to approaches that promote collaborative work to enhance professional expertise and improve learner outcomes (Timperley et al. 2007). This shift led to increased interest in 'reform types' of professional learning and development (Garet et al. 2001, p. 920) which are seen as improving pedagogical practices by encouraging activities like mentoring, coaching and study groups. These collaborative practices, especially when integrated into teachers' daily routines, are considered beneficial for pupil outcomes (Timperley et al. 2007; Veen et al. 2012; OECD 2019) and more meaningful for teachers (Kools and Stoll 2016). However, recent international evidence (OECD 2019) indicates that collaborative professional learning activities are the least attended by teachers, with lack of time or school support and budgetary issues being primary reasons for non-participation (OECD 2019 TALIS). The most popular activities align more with individual course-based learning (Loucks-Horsley et al. 1998, cited in Garet et al. 2001, p. 920;

Veen et al. 2012), which, according to Timperley et al. (2007), rarely change teaching practices enough to impact pupil outcomes. These findings have led to the development of a teacher-led enquiry approach, which is widely regarded in the literature as the best method for teachers to adapt to rapidly changing educational contexts and develop professional expertise (Timperley et al. 2007; Veen et al. 2012; Harris and Jones 2017b).

Teacher inquiry involves teachers identifying a pupil's learning need and collaborating with colleagues to deepen their thinking and improve student outcomes (Timperley et al. 2007; Timperley 2011; Dunn et al. 2021). Two of the main challenges facing teachers is identifying how their classroom experiences may have contributed to their existing professional learning and the high levels of expertise needed for teachers to carry out the inquiry (Timperley et al. 2007; Dunn et al. 2021).

3.6.2 General International Debates on Headteachers' Professional Learning

Empirical evidence shows a strong link between high-achieving education systems and the professional learning of headteachers (Jensen et al. 2016). In an international study on three high-performing systems – British Columbia, Hong Kong and Shanghai – it was found that these regions prioritise quality professional learning, seeing it as effective only if it improves pupil learning. These systems foster continuous professional learning, where school leaders share responsibility for their own development and that of others.

Current thinking towards a more personalised form of headteachers' professional learning, or as Earley (2020, p. 118) described it, 'customised' to the individual, is regarded as the most successful approach. This 'customised' approach allows for headteachers to tailor their professional learning to their individual needs and their educational settings. It also puts the responsibility of professional learning onto the individual headteacher. The idea that headteachers need agency and autonomy to tailor their professional learning aligns with findings by Liebowitz et al. (2018). Their study on Portuguese headteachers revealed that many do not engage in professional learning activities, which they perceive as irrelevant to their roles. This lack of participation may stem from limited opportunities, as 23.5% of Portuguese lower secondary principals had not participated in any professional learning activities in the previous twelve months.

Earley's (2020) ideas offer a different perspective compared to earlier work, which emphasised a more generic approach to professional learning and development. This earlier approach failed to account for individual experiences and settings (Southworth 2002). As a result, it limited the potential application of new professional learning in specific school contexts (Bresicha et al. 2015). The ideas of Brauckman et al. (2020) that professional learning for headteachers should be considered as an 'evolutionary process', with highly skilled headteachers able to adapt and solve problems as they evolve in their daily roles, is more in keeping with the ideas of Earley's 'customised' approach (2020, p. 118) and suggests that headteachers should consider the relevance of their individual school contexts in connection to their own professional learning and development.

According to Earley, headteachers' professional learning and development is most effective when it includes dedicated time for reflection during their working week. Opportunities for reflection and critical engagement might involve attending university courses, taking part in professional forums or taking sabbaticals (Earley 2020). Similarly, the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD 2019 TALIS) revealed that headteachers commonly engaged in professional learning activities such as reading professional literature (87%), attending courses and seminars (77%) and participating in educational conferences (75%), while peer coaching and observation are less frequent (47%), except in Hungary, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, where over 80% participate in peer coaching. The OECD (2019) TALIS report identified four main barriers to professional learning activities: heavy workloads, limited incentives, perceived irrelevance and financial costs, with activities often deemed irrelevant if not aligned with strategic priorities (OECD 2019 TALIS p. 176).

Research has shown that effective school leadership significantly impacts teaching, learning, and school organisation (Leithwood and Levin 2005; Leithwood et al. 2008, 2020) and is crucial for school improvement efforts (Leithwood et al. 2020). Therefore, headteachers need to receive professional learning that equips them with the necessary skills (OECD 2019). However, despite this evidence the OECD (2019) have still identified inconsistent leadership provision worldwide, which has led to headteachers feeling inadequately prepared for their leadership roles. Specifically, newly qualified headteachers have expressed feeling ill equipped for their new

leadership responsibilities (Earley et al. 2002; Bolam et al. 2005; Hobson and Sharp 2005; OECD 2019). This was an issue common to Wales, particularly evident in Wave 1 in the implementation of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and the Professional Headship Induction Programme (PHIP 2001) designed for newly appointed headteachers (Connolly et al. 2002; Egan and James 2003; James and Williams 2005).

3.7 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales

During Wave 1 (1999 to 2009) there was a shift away from the externally imposed accountability system seen in Westminster, UK. The Learning Country signalled a departure from the mandated and accountability-focused approaches that had prevailed prior to devolution (Egan and Grigg 2017). In this wave there were several WG attempts at providing coherence in professional learning across the Welsh education system, such as the establishment of the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) (2000), the National Entitlement Agenda (2002) and the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) (2008), which will be discussed in this section. Since 2014 and the implementation of Wave 3, there has been a shift in accountability structures towards a framework that prioritises professional learning and development as a strategy by the WG to improve educational standards. Additionally, the articulation of educational policies by three key ministers across the three waves has had a significant influence on the professional learning and development of headteachers.

3.7.1 Wave 1 (1999–2009)

In Wave 1, Jane Davidson served as Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning from 2000 to 2007, and she introduced several key educational policies (Learning Country, 2001, 2006) which were the catalyst of the professional learning and development agenda for the subsequent second and third waves. The Learning Country's ten-year vision for education and lifelong learning recognised the correlation between excellent leadership and pupil achievement (Learning Country 2001, p. 43), and this approach elevated the importance of professional learning and development for headteachers.

The GTCW was established in 2000 to register teachers and address cases of professional misconduct and incompetence (Jones and Roderick 2003). Beyond

these duties, its primary objective was to function as an independent regulatory body funded by the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) to oversee the teaching profession. The NAfW allocated resources for the professional learning and development of headteachers, delegating this responsibility to the GTCW (2000) on behalf of the teaching profession (Egan and Grigg 2016). Consequently, the GTCW developed a professional development framework for teachers in Wales, a comprehensive national framework designed to guide professional growth. Professional development, as defined by the GTCW (2006, p. 17, cited in Egan and Grigg 2016), includes both formal, structured training and informal, everyday learning experiences which help teachers improve their practice.

One of the aims of the GTCW as an independent body was to create a more consistent and coherent approach to professional learning across Wales. During its tenure, the GTCW funded and piloted various projects both within Wales and beyond, focusing on individual professional learning and development as part of the professional entitlement agenda. An evaluation of these projects found that effective professional learning occurred when individuals took responsibility for their own development (Egan and James 2003). Although the WG viewed the GTCW projects as a potential future policy direction, they were discontinued in 2010 due to funding constraints. However, the concepts later reappeared in the SEF (2008) as part of the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) agenda (Egan 2012; Harris and Jones 2017a). Additionally, the appointment of Jane Hutt as Minister of Education in 2009, combined with a series of Estyn reports (2007, 2013) highlighting inconsistencies in teaching quality and concerns over rigour, along with budget cuts by the Welsh Government, led to the dissolution of the GTCW as an independent body. The WG then took over the professional learning agenda through the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), acting as the regulator of professional qualifications in Wales. However, DCELLS did not operate independently but functioned as an arm's length organisation of the WG (see Section 3.7.3 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales Wave 3 for further discussion).

As part of the National Entitlement Agenda, a raft of professional learning and development programmes emerged, including the Chartered Teacher Qualification, and the National Headship Development Programme (NHDP) (2001). However, over the next decade, the implementation of the NHDP proved problematic, primarily due

to how the programmes were articulated by the NAfW (Connolly et al. 2002; Morgan 2002). The NHDP comprised three distinct programmes: the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH, 1997), targeting individuals aspiring to headship roles; the Professional Headship Induction Programme (PHIP, 2001), designed for newly appointed headteachers; and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH, 2001), tailored for experienced headteachers (Connolly et al. 2002). The PHIP stood out because it introduced an entitlement for newly appointed headteachers and represented the first comprehensive initiative for newly appointed headteachers in Wales, developed by the NAfW (Connolly et al. 2002).

However, the PHIP faced significant tensions, related to the articulation of its activities by the WG (Connolly et al. 2002; Egan and James 2003). Connolly et al. (2002) highlighted the limited time frame of five months for creating and delivering the PHIP, which left little time for consultation with headteachers and other stakeholders. This constraint stemmed from both the substantial workload associated with the PHIP and its development occurring during the summer holidays, when most stakeholders were not engaged in their normal duties.

Initially, the NPQH operated as a programme delivered at the regional level and aimed at fostering the development of aspiring headteachers in Wales as a WG strategy to raise leadership standards. It was overseen by the Consortium for Educational Leadership Training (CELT), which comprised four universities: Cardiff University; University of Glamorgan; University of Wales and Bangor University (Brundrett 2001). There were three stages to the NPQH programme: application and selection of candidates, training and development, and final assessment and award (James and Williams 2005). Despite being hailed as the ‘gateway to the headteacher profession’ in Wales (James and Williams 2005, p. 23), the NPQH encountered certain challenges. A significant issue revolved around the accessibility of the programme and stemmed from inconsistencies in the application processes managed by the LAs and the diverse school contexts. Particularly disadvantaged were aspiring headteachers working in small, rural schools with limited school budgets (Wallace and Rogers 2001), which was shown by the lower number of NPQH applications from these schools (James and Williams 2005). Additionally, variations existed in how LAs selected NPQH candidates, with many prioritising

funding for the development of their own potential NPQH candidates (James and Williams 2005).

A series of initial evaluations on the PHIP and LPSH (Egan and James 2003) identified that there were variances in the quality of experiences received by headteachers on the PHIP, in comparison to the LPSH, which the majority of headteachers found highly effective and good value for money. This was followed in 2008 with a formal evaluation of the NHDP (2001), commissioned by the NAfW and conducted by York Consulting and Old Bell 3 Limited (2008), which identified that 50% of aspiring and existing headteachers in Wales felt that the NHDP programmes did not meet their current leadership needs. As a result, there was a call for a more personalised and individualised approach to professional learning and development for headteachers. Subsequently, Leighton Andrews (2011), Minister with responsibility for Education during Wave 2, launched a revised model of the NPQH in 2011 which was further revised in Wave 3.

Alongside the NHDP, which targeted aspiring, new and experienced headteachers, the GTCW, supported by the WG, piloted a two-year (2007–2009) Chartered Teacher Qualification for practitioners who wished to excel as classroom practitioners without pursuing a leadership career pathway. An evaluation of the programme found that overall it provided good-quality experiences with some outstanding practices (Egan 2009). Both the Chartered Teacher Programme and the GTCW professional development projects were later replaced (see Section 3.7.2 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales, Wave 2). The Chartered Teacher Programme was replaced by the Master's in Educational Practice (MEP), and the GTCW professional development projects became part of the PLCs agenda (Harris and Jones 2017a), a strategy of the SEF (2008) (Egan and Grigg 2017).

The SEF (2008), introduced as part of the National Entitlement Agenda (2002) was characterised by its three-tiered approach involving schools, local authorities (LAs) and the Welsh Government (WG). It comprised five core themes: equality, autonomy, fostering a high-performance culture, promoting bilingualism and embracing systems thinking. These themes were integrated into the following five elements: collaboration with stakeholders, professional practice networks, support and intervention mechanisms, accountability and improvement strategies, and curriculum

and instructional practices. The SEF was considered radical in its focus on leadership compared to other policy plans such as the 'Learning Country' (2001, 2006). However, it proved ineffective because it failed to consider how the existing infrastructure could develop leadership capacity across the entire system (Scheerens 2017). Another criticism was that although the framework acknowledged the benefits of good teaching and learning, it did not specifically focus on the needs of learners as a means of raising standards (Keane 2018). While the SEF (2008) was praised for its emphasis on school leadership, it was also criticised for its failure to address leadership development at a broader level across Wales within the existing institutional framework (Scheerens 2017). Despite this, the policy document remained and was later revised in Wave 2.

During Wave 1, there was a significant recognition of the role of school leaders and their professional development in raising educational standards to achieve global recognition (Learning Country, 2001). However, despite this acknowledgement, shortcomings were observed in the articulation of educational policies (Learning Country, 2001) and professional development initiatives like the NHDP (2001), leading to challenges in their implementation (Connolly et al. 2002; Morgan 2002) Moreover, despite several WG attempts aimed at providing coherence across the Welsh system such as the establishment of the GTCW (2000), the Entitlement for All agenda (2002) and the SEF (2008), the issue of variances in the provision of professional learning within the Welsh system remained unaddressed. These challenges persisted into the subsequent Wave 2 period.

3.7.2 Wave 2 (2009–2014)

The professional learning agenda within Wave 2 initially involved the emergence of revised policies from Wave 1 (PRD 2001; GTCW-funded bursary projects 2002) and a review of the infrastructure, guided by key reports such as the Hill Report (Hill 2013), Estyn Annual Reports (2013), and the OECD's 'Improving Schools in Wales' (2014). These reports laid the foundation for the professional learning and development agenda.

Two of the key professional learning initiatives brought forward from Wave 1 and revised in Wave 2 were the Practice Review Development (PRD) model and the GTCW-funded professional development projects. The main difference of the revised

PRD was the emphasis placed on performance management as a framework to promote coaching and mentoring, reflective practice and action research (Egan and Grigg 2017). This PRD model was later incorporated into the 'New Deal' and 'Pioneer Schools' models adopted in Wave 3 as part of the New Curriculum initiative (Donaldson 2015) (see Section 3.7.3 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales, Wave 3 for further discussion). The PLCs were also incorporated into the revised SEF (2008) as a professional learning strategy as part of the school communities initiative (Harris and Jones 2017a).

Within Wave 2, there was also a review of the existing local and regional working arrangements with schools, who came under scrutiny with the commissioning of two key reports (WG 2011; Hill 2013). According to Connolly et al. (2018), this led to the establishment of meso-level middle-tier partnerships, deemed as 'the messy meso' within the existing accountability framework and identified as a potential risk to the reform effort (OECD 2017). Connolly et al. (2018) further argued that this was a WG strategy to exert greater influence over the teaching profession and identified it as a potential risk to effective reform (OECD 2017).

However, the challenges faced by local authorities and regional consortia working have persisted over the past two decades (Connolly et al. 2002; James and Williams 2005; Egan and Marshall 2007; Keane 2011; Hill 2013), extending into Wave 3. One significant factor driving the imposition of increased accountability measures on the teaching profession was the PISA (2009) results, which showed a decline in Wales' performance compared to the 2006 PISA results. This served as a catalyst for education reform in Wales (Keane 2011). Despite earlier assertions (Fullan et al. 2015, p. 4) that there was 'scant evidence' suggesting that pupil performance testing contributed to school improvement, a preference emerged for a more collaborative, co-constructive approach to Welsh educational policymaking, which became increasingly apparent in Wave 3 (Biesta et al. 2015; Fullan et al. 2015; Cochran-Smith et al. 2018).

The introduction of a new regional consortia (RC) model in 2012 aimed to foster greater collaboration among schools (Andrews, 2011). This restructuring initiative led to the establishment of four regional consortia across the country: North Wales, Mid and West Wales, South Wales, and Southeast Wales, facilitating collaboration and

resource sharing among the existing twenty-two LAs (Reid, 2011). According to Connolly et al. (2018), while the RC seemed to have well-defined direction and accountability structures established by the WG concerning educational standards and performance, the role and remit of LAs were perceived as less clear.

Currently, there seems to be very little critique of the RC model (2012), despite ongoing and consistent calls from the OECD to enhance the professional learning of Welsh leaders in Wales (OECD 2014). For instance, the independent report 'Successful Futures' led by Donaldson (2015) unequivocally highlighted the necessity for Wales to develop a high-performing educational system by prioritising the enhancement of leadership capacity at the local level. Consequently, Donaldson (2015) put forward two key recommendations: firstly, the need for collaboration among meso-level partners within the middle tier (including Estyn, regional consortia, Education Workforce Council and Higher Education Institutes) to function cohesively as part of the revamped national infrastructure; and secondly, the establishment of an 'arm's length structure to carry out day-to-day leadership' (Donaldson, 2015, p. 118). Subsequently, in the Wave 3 era, one such arm's length organisation which emerged was the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL). Professional learning and development continued to follow a national direction either through centrally funded initiatives such as the MEP and the PLCs or via the RC developing school-to-school partnership working (Egan and Grigg 2017).

The launch of the MEP programme in 2013 marked a significant shift in professional learning in Wales. The MEP stood out for its innovative approach rooted in school-based practice and overseen by an alliance of HEIs led by Cardiff University. The MEP aimed to raise educational outcomes by strengthening teachers' understanding of pedagogical practices aligned with international competitors such as Finland (Reynolds 2013). However, challenges arose in the design of the programme, particularly recruiting mentors from schools which had little engagement and had to rely on external mentors, often retired headteachers, which limited the effectiveness of the programme. Tensions arose between the WG and professional expectations on the design and enactment of the programme which was hindered by workload, budget and engagement of school mentors (Hadfield et al. 2017). One of the biggest criticisms of the MEP was that programme design was not carried out co-constructively with headteachers or practitioners (Hadfield et al. 2017). What

followed was a review of the quality and equity of the Welsh education system with the publication of the report 'Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective' (2014). The report utilised the findings from Estyn (2013), who proposed that two key factors for educational reform were the capacity and quality of leadership. This was because they found that two-fifths of all headteachers inspected in primary schools were assessed as unsatisfactory or inadequate and only 6% of primary headteachers judged as excellent in the school leadership category, with secondary leaders performing only marginally better. It was not surprising, therefore, that the OECD drew a similar conclusion that leadership capacity was underdeveloped and 'the development of leadership capacity at all levels of the system has been weak, under-resourced and seemingly an afterthought to the larger reform effort' (OECD 2014, p. 67). It referenced that too much attention had been paid to using ineffective current performance management systems as the 'prime drive for system reform' rather than growing and developing Wales's own 'leadership capital' to enable the system to 'lead from the middle' (OECD 2017, p. 82). It established a clear link between the quality of teaching and learning and leadership and reinforced for Wales that investment in human capital was essential to raise standards in the quality of teaching and its leadership. This shift in thinking is witnessed in educational policy development in Wave 3 in national initiatives such as the 'New Deal' for teachers, reforms to ITE (Furlong 2015) and the New Curriculum (Donaldson 2015) as part of the' self-improving schools' system' agenda (Egan and Grigg 2017).

3.7.3 Wave 3 (2014–present)

Within the third Wave (2014–present), there is a departure from the heightened levels of accountability observed in Wave 2 (Reid 2011; Connolly et al. 2018; Milton et al. 2020) towards a more internal accountability model that fostered collaborative working (Biesta et al. 2015; Fullan et al. 2015; Cochran-Smith et al. 2018). This change in policy direction, backed by the OECD (2017, p. 25), emphasised that prioritising 'teacher professionalism' was crucial as part of the reform effort, necessitating 'a different type of teaching professional' to raise educational standards, which has dominated professional debates in this Wave 3.

One of the key examples of this new professional learning approach was the pioneer model emerging from the 'Successful Futures' report (Donaldson 2015). The pioneer model exemplified the shift towards occupational practices, involving teachers and

headteachers in the design process to leverage their expertise and critical role in effectively implementing the New Curriculum for Wales (Evans 2022). According to the OECD (2020), schools involved in the co-construction of the New Curriculum, achieving pioneer status and now serving as professional lead enquiry schools, have advanced further in their professional learning compared to those not involved in its development. This progress may be attributed to pioneer schools identifying, accessing and documenting their required professional learning; adhering to PSTLs; engaging in action inquiry; enhancing auditing skills; and utilising Professional Learning Passports (Egan and Grigg 2017).

Against the backdrop of ‘Successful Futures’ (Donaldson 2015), ‘The National Mission’ (WG 2017a) emerged as a pivotal document in Wave 3, rooted in collaborative policymaking principles (Milton et al. 2020). Under the leadership of Kirsty Williams, the Minister for Education, the National Mission was introduced as a three-year strategic plan with four distinct enabling objectives. Notably, the second enabling objective focused on fostering inspirational leaders committed to collaborative efforts to improve standards (WG 2017a). Within the National Mission framework, two key reforms were introduced to elevate teacher professionalism (OECD 2017, p. 25). Firstly, the NAEL was established to enhance leadership development and capacity building across the Welsh education system. Secondly, new PSTLs (2018) were implemented alongside revisions to the NPQH and a review of the school governance framework. Professional learning is prominently featured in the National Mission (WG 2017a, p. 26), with a key strategy to develop a National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) (2019) incorporating the revised PSTLs. Additionally, there is a commitment to the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) agenda in conjunction with the New Curriculum for Wales (CfW). These initiatives, along with the PSTLs, are crucial policies designed to foster ‘a different type of teaching professional’ (OECD 2017, p. 25), aligning with the revitalised professional learning agenda in Wales.

The concept of SLO (2018) originated in the early 1980s, acknowledging the role that effective leadership and professional learning and development play in fostering such environments (Argyris 1999). Key aspects of the SLO model include collective efficacy, distributed leadership and professional collaboration (Vesvio et al. 2008; Senge 2014; Kools and Stoll 2016). Introduced to Wales by the OECD as part of its

reform agenda and incorporated into the National Mission (2017a), the SLO framework reflected a commitment to fostering a culture of trust through collaborative and collegial approaches (Milton et al. 2020). Harris et al. (2022) argued that the Welsh SLO model is well supported by international research. However, they caution that without sufficient support and resources from the WG, the SLO risks becoming ineffective due to a lack of necessary infrastructure and expertise.

Two OECD reports evaluated Wales' progress with the SLO agenda. The OECD (2018, p. 15) initially found that while many schools were advancing, a significant number were still 'far from achieving this goal'. A subsequent report by Egan et al. (2018) on the interaction between the PSTLs (2018) and the SLO model revealed that only 40% of schools had adopted the SLO model, partly due to differing interpretations of the model among schools. Egan et al. (2018, p. 2) also observed limited synergy between the PSTLs and the SLO elements, highlighting the need for greater clarity. Similarly, the OECD (2021) reported that, three years later, the widespread implementation of the SLO agenda remained notably limited in most schools.

The establishment of the NAEL was a direct response to a series of reports highlighting shortcomings within the Welsh education system (Hill 2013, OECD 2014, 2017). Serving as a cohesive partner within the middle tier, the NAEL represented a departure from past policy practices described by Hargreaves (2011, 2012) as disjointed and fragmented policymaking in Wales during Waves 1 and 2. The NAEL promotes a systems leadership model (Fullan 2004; Dunford 2005; Higham and Hopkins 2007) which compromises academy associates – experienced headteachers who operate at school level under the leadership of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO appointed by the WG holds a civilian position, while the academy functions as a limited arm's length company sponsored by the WG. Despite its affiliation with the WG, the NAEL operates as a public institution and maintains its own shadow board, which convenes regularly to monitor its progress. The NAEL represented a major shift in the WG's strategy, aiming to build leadership capacity aligned with the SLO agenda (Fullan and Quinn 2015). This initiative sought to enhance collaboration by positioning the NAEL as a unified entity within the middle tier, alongside other meso-level partners such as the RC. This research focuses on the positioning of the NAEL within the two models of organisational and

occupational professional practice (Evetts 2011), given its status as an arm's length organisation of the WG. One key issue in transitioning from an external accountability system based on performance metrics to an internal accountability system that fosters agency is developing leadership capacity to manage these changes, which requires a collective understanding of these new approaches and responsibilities (Fullan and Quinn 2015).

The NAEL receives an annual remit and budget from the WG, with its main goal being leadership development in Wales (OECD 2014). The remit letter for 2022–2026 (Miles 2022b) defines the NAEL's role as a key part of the middle tier, emphasising the need for collaboration with other organisations to promote leadership development and support national priorities. The remit highlights the NAEL's responsibility to support all leaders in implementing the CfW, including areas such as curriculum design, stakeholder collaboration, cluster working and shifting from accountability-based assessments to those focused on individual learner progression. This marks a shift from the previous remit (2018–2021) by specifically referencing the CfW and focusing on cultural changes in accountability. The letter reaffirms the NAEL's role in quality assurance and as a middle-tier partner with the RC, reflecting a commitment to an internal accountability system aligned with professional practices (Evetts 2011).

Greany (2018), in an article commissioned by the WG, reviewed national leadership colleges in Singapore, England and Scotland to inform the development of the NAEL. The study explored how these institutions' CEOs manage policy and practice interactions and found their governance models. Critics argue that national leadership colleges 'represent institutionalised governance, serving as mechanisms for policy reforms by fostering a cadre of officially approved front-line leaders' (Gunter and Forrester 2009, p. 349), while others believe they bridge the gap between policy and practice (Burns and Koster 2016). Hudson (2007) suggests that despite a collaborative policy approach, governments maintain control through a mix of hierarchy, markets and networks, posing challenges for headteachers. This paradigm has been reflected in Wales over the past three waves through changes in accountability systems and navigation of professional learning resources (Connolly et al. 2018). Greany's study (2018) highlights the NAEL's importance for

headteachers' development and recommends strong governance and alignment with national priorities.

Despite Greany's (2018) recommendations, recent reports from the OECD Teachers' Professional Learning Study (TPL) (OECD 2021) and Arad Research (2021) reveal issues with the NAEL's role in the middle tier. These reports highlight tensions between the NAEL and RC over differing approaches to professional learning and development support. There are also concerns among some school leaders that the NAEL's focus is too narrow, targeting only a select group of academic associates, which suggests a possible misunderstanding of the NAEL's broader role. However, some believe that the NAEL is well positioned to support headteacher agency, particularly in professional learning programmes like the Welsh Master's in Educational Practice (Daly and Milton 2017), which aligns with the PSTL (2018) model.

A key strategy within the National Mission 2017–2021 (WG 2017a, p. 27) to address inconsistencies in professional learning was the introduction of the NAPL. The WG identified significant variation in access, entitlement, quality of experiences and the impact on learner outcomes (WG 2019). Evans (2022, p. 385) supported the national approach, identifying the NAPL as the 'likely vehicle' for headteachers' means to access the necessary support, but argued that on its own it would be insufficient to transform educational practice. The NAPL aims to create a system-wide model consisting of eight interconnected elements: pedagogy, professional learning offer and time, accreditation and recognition, the PSTLs, collaborative networks, the individual professional learning journey, learning organisation, and professional learning blend. This model focuses on ensuring professional learning entitlement for all individuals, clarifying expectations from middle-tier partners regarding provision and support and outlining the roles of the WG in policy implementation. A potential threat to the NAPL's success is the differing expectations of the middle-tier partners' roles, particularly the RC and the NAEL. The OECD (2017, 2021) and Arad Research (2021) reported tensions between the NAEL and RC due to divergent practices in professional learning and development support, often referred to as the 'messy middle' (Connolly et al. 2018).

A report carried out by Swansea University (Thomas 2018) identified that one of the positive aspects of the NAPL (2018) model was that it was linked to the PSTLs (one of the eight elements), but one of the criticisms and recommendations was that the PSTLs needed to be mapped to any existing and future resources so that headteachers could directly relate their professional learning to those skills which are expected of them. Conversely, both the PSTLs and the NAEL were the two key strategies identified in the National Mission (2017–2021) as the gateways to raise 'teacher professionalism' within the system, yet the evidence has suggested that differences exist in expectations of professional learning and development provision and support which could potentially hinder the Entitlement for All agenda of the WG.

More recently, there was a recognition by the Minister for Education, Jeremy Miles (2022b) that the existing professional learning offer (NAPL) was not as 'accessible and useful as it could be'. Miles' (2022) solution was the development of a new national entitlement which included a new validation process to ensure all professional learning and development was of a high standard and rooted in research evidence to reduce the variations of professional practice within the system. However, the Entitlement for All strategy promoted by Miles (2022) is not new within WG policymaking. This is evidenced in Wave 1 through the Learning Country (2001) and the implementation of the Continuing Professional Development: An Entitlement for All agenda. This programme was based on ensuring that every headteacher and teacher had a professional entitlement to high-quality professional learning. Egan and Grigg (2017, p. 7) argued that while these policy developments can be seen as a synthesis between accountability-led and entitlement-based approaches to professional learning, representing a commitment by the WG, the transition from policy to practice for an entitlement for all agenda has been a long-standing challenge across the three waves.

3.7.4 Professional Learning Debates in Wales

In Wales, the three waves of educational policymaking have demonstrated a shift in policy thinking. The broader changes observed in the interplay between organisational and occupational framing of professional work throughout the three waves of educational reform were reflected in the approaches made by the WG to the professional work and training of teachers and headteachers. The fragmented policymaking approach seen in Waves 1 and Wave 2 and the introduction of

increased accountability in Wave 2 resulted in additional scrutiny and pressure for headteachers (Harris and Jones 2015). However, in Wave 3 the WG has demonstrated commitment to a different approach to policymaking which promotes occupational practices to rebuild trust through an internal accountability system. The National Mission (2017, 2022) stands out as a pivotal policy document rooted in the occupational professional model endorsing three key policies: Curriculum for Wales (CfW), Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) and the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTLs). The PSTLs were considered key in delivering the CfW and the SLO agenda as a framework for headteachers and teachers to improve teacher quality in Wales.

The creation of cohesive bodies over the three waves became particularly problematic within Wave 3, with too many middle-tier partners and a lack of clarity of professional roles and responsibilities becoming what Connolly et al. (2018) described as ‘the messy middle’. According to Evans (2023, p. 7), this variance has led to misinterpretation by headteachers, who are expected ‘to navigate a messy and poorly choreographed landscape of professional support with little or no direction’. Within Wave 1, the establishment of the GTCW (2001) was later discontinued, mainly due to budget cuts, and renamed in Wave 3 as the Education Workforce Council (EWC) (2015) and the SEF (2008). During Wave 2, a revision of the infrastructure in Wales resulted in a new regional working model (RC) introduced in 2012 to enhance coherence and promote collaboration within the system (Andrews 2011). Wave 3 saw the creation of the NAEL (2018) as a cohesive body of the WG and the NAPL (2018) to reinforce a national cohesive approach to professional learning, later reinforced by the National Entitlement Professional Learning agenda (WG 2022). More recently, a WG-led streamlining and clarity of roles of the middle tier is under way (Miles 2022).

The different understandings of professional work manifest in how the professional learning and development of teachers and headteachers is conceived (as discussed in Section 3.5 Theorising Professional Work). One view from Forde et al. (2016) is that effective utilisation of a set of professional standards based on professional growth and continuous development needs means that headteachers and teachers need to understand the underlying principles of the design of the professional standards, alongside how they should be applied to ensure progress in their

professional careers. The design of the PSTLs in Wales embodies characteristics of occupational professional practices (Evetts 2011) such as collaboration, reflectivity and agency, setting them apart from previous competency-based frameworks perceived in Waves 1 and 2 which were generic and failed to consider contextual factors. However, it is not just about acknowledging the underlying principles of the design of the PSTLs but how they align with other occupational professional practice policies such as the SLO agenda and the CfW. In Wave 3 this joined-up thinking has been lacking in the literature, although as discussed earlier the recommendations from Greany (2018) perceived the NAEL as an intermediary body in supporting national initiatives.

Effective utilisation of professional standards necessitates strong self-evaluation skills among practitioners (Mayer et al. 2005). Yet, while acknowledging the critical role of self-evaluation, it must be contextualised within individual professional practices. An earlier view from Louden and Wilding (1999) suggested that practitioners should cultivate a deep understanding of their individual contexts and settings through the development of reflective skills. Similarly, Schön (1983) argued that reflection encompasses more than mere contemplation of learning (Korthagen 2004), promoting a ‘dualistic view’ wherein learners enhance their knowledge and skills through the integration of mind and body. Schön (1990, 1994) rejected the notion of technical rationality which suggested that learning is generic regardless of context and setting. Instead, he favoured a more personalised approach to professional learning achieved through meaningful reflective practice.

In Wales, the effectiveness of the PSTLs depends heavily on fostering teacher agency (Forde et al. 2016), which must be rooted in practices of reflection, collaboration and self-evaluation. To support schools, Estyn (2020) introduced the National Evaluation and Improvement Resource, which aims to enhance self-evaluation processes in schools. The resource’s teaching and leadership prompt is designed to align with the PSTLs. The challenge for the WG is to ensure that these practices are consistently and equitably implemented across all educational settings, considering the unique contexts of different schools (Evans 2023).

3.8 International Review of Professional Standards for Teaching and Learning

A considerable amount of literature has been written on professional standards for teachers and headteachers collectively (Gronn 2000; Sachs 2003; OECD 2005; Connell 2009; OECD 2013; Sachs 2016; Ledger et al. 2018; Mockler 2020), but a relatively small amount of literature has been written specifically relating to the professional standards of headteachers (OECD 2013). In this section, the phrase 'teaching standards' will refer to standards that apply to both teachers and headteachers in line with the literature highlighted above, unless drawing on literature relating to standards specifically for headteachers.

The meaning of the term 'teaching standards' appears to have been understood differently internationally, which has led to a lack of clarity and nuance around the usage of the term (Sykes and Plastrik 1993; Connell 2009; OECD 2013; Mockler 2020). Early views of the term 'teaching standards' are referred to simply as 'standards' (Sykes and Plastrik 1993; Bowker and Star 1999), with a differentiation of the term 'teaching standards' emerging much later (OECD 2013). In this early definition by Sykes and Plastrik (1993, p. 4) they describe a standard as 'a tool for rendering appropriately precise the making of judgements and decisions in a context of shared meanings and values'. According to Sykes and Plastrik (1993), standards serve as a measure to assess and attain goals based on established criteria regulated by government. Others have characterised standards as a set of agreed rules by which teaching professionals abide (Bowker and Star 1999). These early views of the term standards show a preference for a regulatory framework aligned with a professional model driven by political and policy agendas (Sykes and Plastrik 1993; Bowker and Star 1999).

Moreover, the term 'standard' is internationally recognised and is often referred to as 'competences' (Avalos 2005, p. 1), which has contributed to the lack of clarity and nuance surrounding its usage (Sykes and Plastrik 1993; Connell 2009; OECD 2013; Mockler 2020). Similarly, Forde et al. (2016) viewed the term 'standards' as representative of organisational professional practices as opposed to perceiving professional standards as a framework for continuous professional development and growth, which could lead to further misunderstandings. However, in an earlier view Reynolds (1999) suggests that there was a difference between the terms 'standards'

and ‘competences’: standards include measuring the values and attitudes of teachers and headteachers, while competences are the skills and knowledge that teachers and headteachers need in order to carry out their roles. Debates around standards reflect wider debates in relation to teaching as a professional practice. Using Hoyle’s (1974) restricted and extended continuum, there is a tension between standards and competences, and Reynolds (1999) recognised this difference.

An attempt to differentiate and clarify the term ‘standards’ was carried out by the OECD in 2011, with seventeen OECD countries and regions taking part in the two-year study. The OECD (2013) study was aimed at ascertaining a global view of standards-based policy implementation and identified four different types of standards: standards-based policies, pupils’ learning standards, teaching standards and school leadership standards. Findings identified that while the majority of the seventeen OECD countries and regions that took part in the study had standards policies for pupils’ learning, only five countries and regions had standards policies for pupils’ learning, teaching and school leadership (OECD 2013). These were Australia (Queensland and Victoria), Canada (British Columbia and Quebec), England, New Zealand and the United States (California and Texas). The standard policies within these contexts that were available for headteachers took the form of lists of standards which governments and economies considered to be ‘effective leadership practices’ (OECD 2013, p. 55).

Connell (2009, p. 218) critiques the use of teaching standards as mere lists dictating what the teaching profession should and should not do as the ‘dot point approach’. In practice this means that governments can ‘add or subtract to a list without affecting the teaching standards framework’. Other theorists (Louden and Wilding 1999, cited in Forde et al. 2016) also question the usefulness of the teaching standards used as prescribed to-do lists (Connell 2009), with some suggesting that teaching standards used prescriptively could contribute to a de-skilling of the teaching profession (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2007). Mockler (2020) argued that despite variances in international practice of how teaching standards are contextualised and used (Mayer et al. 2005; Connell 2009; OECD 2013), they are still compartmentalised into what Connell (2013, p. 220) regards as ‘specific auditable competencies and performances’ prescribing what teachers and headteachers can and can’t do in their professional practice. Similarly, Kennedy (2005, 2014a, 2014b) rejects what she

describes as a technocratic standard-based model of professional learning. In practice a technocratic approach suggests a generic ‘off the peg’ approach to professional learning that one size fits all regardless of the context of the organisation (Philpott 2014, p. 9). These findings (OECD 2013) also identified that there was a paucity of research literature available on teaching standards and even fewer for school leadership standards in comparison to the wealth of research literature available on pupils’ learning standards. At the time, suggested possible reasons for this were that teaching and school leadership standards have been a more recent development in educational systems internationally (OECD 2013).

Teaching standards were primarily introduced in countries and economies across the world in the late 1990s with the aim of raising standards in education (OECD 2013). In this section, the reasons why prioritising these teaching standards became important across educational systems worldwide will be explored further. According to Ball (2003), the combination of economic globalisation and the emergence of neoliberal regimes has led to the adoption of what he terms as an increase in performance cultures. This strategy is seen as a means for countries and economies worldwide to compete for world-class education systems. At the global level, the OECD has promoted this form of accountability in evaluating the success of world-class education systems (Schleicher 2012). An example of this is the OECD’s PISA international assessment rankings.

The importance placed on the OECD PISA assessments (2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2022) as a way of measuring global competency for pupils was given formal recognition in a report by the OECD in 2016 which was viewed as the world’s ‘first, comprehensive overview of education systems’ (OECD 2016, p. 1). The timing of this affirmation of PISA assessments by the OECD was considered by its critics as a government policy strategy to influence education policies (Ledger et al. 2019), and it has been used by politicians as a ‘global yardstick for measuring success in education’ across the world (Schleicher 2012, p. 123), which is not what the OECD intended. Schleicher (2012) further argued that governments using PISA assessments as a public strategy to influence education policy can result in unnecessary changes being made to education systems, which could possibly have a negative influence on schools, such as changes to the school’s curriculum and teaching methods. Gronn (2000, p. 554) questioned the integrity of governments in

their utilisation of teaching standards, arguing that teaching standards were merely *a 'vehicle for those who steer'*, serving as a means for government political agendas. On the other hand, as previously explored in the post-devolution section of this chapter, the adoption of the New Curriculum (Donaldson 2015) and the revision of the PSTLs (2017) were strategies by the WG in response to the disappointing PISA results in 2009 and 2015 as part of its wider reform agenda (OECD 2014, 2017).

Authors within what will be identified as the deprofessionalisation tradition have argued that the emergence of standards within educational policy have been part of wider accountability regimes and are an attempt by government to indirectly control the working lives of headteachers and teachers. According to Ball (2015), the global focus on improving pupil performance to achieve higher PISA table rankings (2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2022) has only leveraged increased accountability for the teaching profession and the use of teaching standards (Ball 2003). On the other hand, Sachs (2016) argued that by focusing on teaching standards as a regulatory framework for accountability purposes, there are missed opportunities for the professional learning and development of teachers and headteachers. Sachs (2016) further argued that teaching standards used for regulatory purposes are simply a tool to meet government and public accountability needs rather than focusing on the professional development of teachers and headteachers as professionals.

Similarly, Ball (2003, p. 224) maintained that teaching standards had become 'fabrications' – artificial creations manufactured solely to serve government objectives. Some contended that introducing teaching standards to oversee teachers' practices could be viewed as fuelling the emergence of an audit culture as described by Connell (2009, p. 217), which emerged from the neoliberal regime (Ball 2003). Initially, standardised tests were implemented to enhance pupil performance, and alongside this there was a rise in neoliberal education marked by distrust in teachers and increased accountability levels to promote a culture of performance (Connell 2009). According to Ball (2003), one effect of a neoliberal regime is the undermining of teachers' professionalism. This regime prioritises discovering and publicising best practices to meet the regulatory aspects of educational policy, leaving little room for teachers and headteachers to reflect on their professional practices.

Despite the criticism of the use of PISA assessments, teaching standards were introduced by governments as a strategy for improving teacher quality (Mulcahy 2011), which was considered internationally a way of achieving higher world rankings in the OECD PISA assessment tables (OECD 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2022). A key report entitled 'Teachers Matter', which assessed the status of teacher quality globally, was published by the OECD (2005). This international study (OECD 2005), conducted in 2002, involved twenty-five countries and identified the following three key recommendations for countries to have: clear and concise statements of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do through teacher competencies; common global teaching standards; and a shared understanding of what good teaching means. Internationally, teaching standards are perceived as an important part of raising educational standards and can help less developed countries by sharing and promoting best practices from other high-ranking education systems (Gallie and Keevey 2014).

Over the past two decades, there has been a shift from a technocratic model of teaching standards (Philpott 2014), which emphasised a regulatory framework in keeping with an organisational framework of professionalism (Sachs 2016), to an occupational model that fosters collaboration and collegiality in professional learning (Evetts 2011). The literature highlights various ways in which teaching standards are used within this new model, such as self-evaluation (Darling-Hammond 2001; Ingvarson 2002), goal setting (Hager and Gonczi 1991; Mayer et al. 2005) and reflection on professional practices (Mayer et al. 2005). Darling-Hammond (2001) promotes using standards to encourage collaborative work and to improve teaching practices, while Earl and Timperley (2015) stress the need for headteachers to enhance their evaluative skills for effective self-assessment. Sachs (2016) suggests that teaching standards can serve dual purposes: as both a regulatory framework and a tool for professional development acting as a platform for the professional learning and development of teachers and headteachers where knowledge and expertise can be shared. An alternative view proposed by Evans (2011, p. 861) is for teaching standards to be 'contextualised' to enable teachers and headteachers to explore and fully understand the contexts within which they practise.

This section has outlined from an international perspective the way teaching standards have been and are perceived by teachers, headteachers and

governments in countries and economies across the world. The most significant findings to emerge from this section is that there are variances in how teaching standards are contextualised and used in two different environments: teachers and headteachers as representatives of the teaching profession and governments of countries and economies (Mayer et al. 2005; Connell 2009; OECD 2013).

3.9 Headteachers' Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership

Over the past two decades, developing leadership capacity within the Welsh educational system has been recognised as a key strategy for raising educational standards, with professional learning for school leaders integral to the Welsh reform agenda (OECD 2014, 2017; Connolly et al. 2018). The Welsh Government (WG) formalised its approach to professional learning and development for teachers and headteachers through a series of key reform reviews, including the Initial Teacher Training review (Tabberer 2013), the Successful Futures review of the national curriculum (Donaldson 2015), the review of initial teacher education (Furlong 2015), and the SLO agenda (OECD 2018). These reviews collectively shaped the WG's commitment to improving educational leadership and teacher development in Wales.

Teaching standards have seen different interpretations and applications across the three waves of WG policymaking. These shifts reflect the evolution of WG policy, with professional teaching standards formalised in 2011 and 2016 during Wave 2, adopting an organisational professional framework, and in 2018 during Wave 3, embodying an occupational professional practice framework (Evetts 2011). One of the key debates within Wave 3 which will be explored in this section is the ownership of the PSTLs in Wales. This includes the placement of the PSTLs within the role of the Education Workforce Council (EWC) as an intermediary body and their integration into the regulatory and non-regulatory frameworks of the Performance Management Appraisal Process.

The professional leadership standards were revised in both 2011 and 2016 (Connolly et al. 2018) with an emphasis on improving leadership capacity within the system and requiring headteachers to meet six leadership elements: creating strategic direction, leading teaching and learning, developing and working with others, manging the school, securing accountability, and strengthening the community focus.

The Leadership Standards (2011) framework had three core strands of 'readiness': the professional role of the headteacher, continuing professional development, and professional capability and analytical skills (Baldwin 2022). Included in the Leadership Standards model (2011) was a set of overarching personal qualities and values.

In September 2017, new PSTLs were introduced. Newly qualified teachers were expected to comply with these standards starting in September 2017 as part of their ITE induction, with all headteachers and teachers required to comply by September 2018. The standards became mandatory in 2019. These PSTLs consolidated the Qualified Teacher Status Standards (2009), Practising Teachers Standards (2011) and Leadership Standards (2011), integrating the essential skills, knowledge and attributes for the teaching profession. The revised PSTLs align with occupational professional practices (Evetts 2011), promoting professional agency and collaborative working, marking a shift from the earlier models of professional standards in Waves 1 and 2, which were representative of organisational regulatory frameworks. The professional standards have three main elements: teaching and leadership, formal leadership and assisting teaching, with professional learning being an integral element of the new professional standards model. The teaching and leadership descriptors outline the expectations that should be met at the different stages of a teacher's career, and the formal leadership standards show the expectations and practices required of a formal leadership role (OECD 2021; WG 2017, 2019) (see Appendix A for PSTL 2018 model).

The focus on establishing a set of PSTLs that align with a clear pathway for early career progression was emphasised in both the Tabberer report (2013) and Investing in Excellence: Our National Workforce Development Plan (WG 2019c). These documents highlighted the importance of the PSTLs as a crucial element in career advancement. Arad Research, in collaboration with OB3 and the University of South Wales, conducted two evaluations of the Welsh professional standards (ARAD 2021, 2023). The goal was to evaluate how well the PSTLs were being implemented and how effective they were in supporting the educational workforce to meet the challenges of Wales' educational reform agenda (WG 2019). A key aspect of the year one evaluations involved assessing the levels of awareness, understanding and application of the PSTLs, which was achieved by gathering perspectives from

thirty-two senior leaders representing twenty diverse schools across Wales. The findings highlighted the crucial role school leaders play in helping staff comprehend the professional standards, with in-house training sessions proving to be the most effective method. However, some schools noted that staff, particularly veteran teachers and support staff, were less engaged with the PSTLs, viewing them mainly as tools for career advancement. In contrast, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and those in initial teacher education (ITE) programmes demonstrated a strong understanding of the PSTLs due to their course and induction requirements. Similarly, a second-year evaluation of the PSTLs found that NQTs, ITE students and those involved in the NQT mentoring and induction process were the practitioners who had a greater understanding and awareness of the PSTLs (Arad 2023). However, there was an increase from the year one evaluation in those practitioners who were engaged in senior professional development programmes. The research also highlighted that headteachers were pivotal in engaging staff with the professional standards through their own expertise, although this leadership approach was not consistently observed across Wales (Arad 2021, 2023).

One possible reason for this inconsistency, according to Egan et al. (2018, p. 5), is that the term ‘standards’ in the PSTLs framework can be prone to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Unlike conventional standards, they consist of five overarching headings (collaboration, pedagogy, innovation, leadership and professional learning), each encompassing a range of descriptors. These five ‘standards’ could be more accurately associated with ‘areas of professional learning’ or ‘nodes’. Early perspectives on the term ‘standards’ by Sykes and Plastrik (1993) and Bowker and Star (1999) were rooted in organisational professional practices. This perspective was not significantly altered when the OECD (2013) attempted to clarify the term, as the understanding of ‘standards’ remained anchored in regulatory practices rather than being viewed as a framework for ongoing professional growth and development.

One of the key debates between the WG and the education sector revolved around the establishment of intermediary bodies in Wave 2, including the Performance Management Appraisal Process, governing bodies and the EWC. One of the main challenges in implementing the PSTLs is the absence of an external professional entity tasked with regulating these professional standards, which has resulted in calls

for clearer guidance and support for school leaders and their school staff (Estyn 2020). Currently, the EWC, formerly the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW 2000; see Section 3.7.1 Headteachers' Professional Learning in Wales Wave 1), serves as the independent regulatory body in Wales for maintained schools and Further Education (FE) settings, youth workers and those involved in work-based learning. Established in 2015, the EWC's mandate includes contributing to the quality of teaching and learning; upholding and improving professional conduct standards; safeguarding the interests of learners, parents and the public; as well as maintaining public trust and confidence in the education workforce.

The EWC regulates the professional conduct of headteachers and teachers, handling breaches of the code of conduct in a quasi-judicial role, with sanctions ranging from reprimands to prohibitions (Baldwin 2022). Although it operates as an independent regulatory body, balancing misconduct enforcement with professional support is challenging (Forde and McMahon 2019). Despite its association with the WG, the EWC maintains political independence (Alcorn 2004). In Wales the abolishment of the GTCW and replacement of the EWC (2016) gave the EWC a much wider scope as an independent middle-tier partner within the Welsh system. The EWC also oversees the monitoring of Professional Learning Passports (PLPs), a tool for practitioners to reflect on and record their professional development, which is funded by the WG through the Pebble Pocket app. Despite the tool's intended use for mapping learning experiences and uploading evidence, a 2023 evaluation by Arad Research and partners found minimal use beyond NQTs and mentors. Additionally, a 2021 EWC report indicated that NQTs are more engaged with the PLPs compared to more experienced headteachers and teachers.

However, the performance management of headteachers and teachers comes under the jurisdiction of the WG. The School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (2011) set out the 'what' of performance management appraisal, and it is a statutory responsibility of the governing body and headteachers to meet these statutory requirements. Headteachers are accountable to these bodies for their leadership, and the Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (2011) make the governing body and local authority (LA) responsible for headteacher performance management.

The primary aim of the regulations (2011) is governance of the performance management process, for example who carries out the appraisal and when, as well as the review process and appeals. Effective performance management requires review partners to be knowledgeable about the PSTLs. For teachers, this role is typically filled by the headteacher or another teacher, while for headteachers, it involves LA-appointed review partners, potentially including school improvement officers or challenge advisors. The debate over the PSTLs centres on whether their use in performance management might undermine trust and reflective practices, as argued by Egan et al. (2018). However, the revised PSTL framework emphasises self-evaluation, and Earl and Timperley (2015) highlight the need for support in developing these skills. Therefore, it is crucial for governing bodies to understand how the PSTL framework aligns with statutory requirements to ensure effective implementation. To support this process, a Practice Review Development (PRD) model is available to help governors and headteachers assess the impact of professional development on practice. One of the challenges for headteachers and governors is that although the PSTLs were revised in 2017, the School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (2011) have not been updated. The WG has revised the PRD guidance to align with current standards and initiatives, but the 2011 regulations remain unchanged.

3.10 Conclusion

This literature review began with a historical overview of Welsh education both pre and post devolution to highlight the uniqueness of the Welsh education system and its political relationship with Westminster, UK. This context set the stage for broader discussions about the establishment of the NAEL and the development of the PSTLs for headteachers and their school teaching staff. This review then examined these issues through three waves of educational policymaking, corresponding with the tenures of three key Ministers of Education: Jane Davidson (2000–2007 Wave 1), Leighton Andrews (2009–2013 Wave 2) and Kirsty Williams (2016–2021 Wave 3).The purpose of this study is to explore the issues raised in this literature review regarding headteachers' understanding and use of the PSTLs within the broader reform agenda and in relation to intermediary bodies like the NAEL. A key focus is to understand headteachers' perspectives on their professional learning and development in the context of the PSTLs' implementation.

The research questions which derived from this literature review are as follows:

- How do the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership fit within the wider reform agenda in Wales?
- What are headteachers' understandings and use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership for their own and their school teaching staff's professional learning and development?
- What are headteachers' understandings of the role of the NAEL in relation to their professional learning and development?

Chapter 4: Methods and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods used to explore the professional learning and development of headteachers in Wales in relation to the revision of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTLs) (2018) and the establishment of the National Academy of Educational Leadership (NAEL) (2018). It begins by justifying the pragmatic orientation which I adopted for this research before discussing and evaluating the research design and methods chosen. The rationale for the approaches employed is also justified in this chapter. Additionally, I carefully consider ethical principles during data collection, including reflecting on my positionality to ensure impartiality and neutrality, thereby enhancing the reliability of this research.

4.1.1 Research Questions

The three research questions for this study are:

- How do the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership fit within the wider reform agenda in Wales?
- What are headteachers' understandings and use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership for their own and their school teaching staff's professional learning and development?
- What are headteachers' understandings of the role of the NAEL in relation to their professional learning and development?

4.2 The Research Paradigm

Any study of the social world is founded on philosophical assumptions, which are a way of managing the complex world in which we live (Wallace and Wray 2016. Kuhn (1996) wrote about the sciences, exploring how scientific progress occurs through paradigm shifts that redefine established theories and methodologies. Similarly, Hammersley (2013, p. 13) portrays paradigms as 'not simply methodologies: they are ways of looking at the world, different assumptions about what the world is like and how we can understand or know about it'. As a researcher, it is vital that the philosophical assumptions which underpin this research paradigm are made explicit so that the methods and findings can be justified.

Generally, it is seen that there are two distinct ontological perspectives which frame social research. Broadly, these debates relate to positivist and interpretivist approaches to knowledge (Thomas 2017). Within the former, social facts are seen as existing beyond human interpretation and discoverable through rigorous, objective, empirical scientific enquiry; within the latter, facts are always socially embedded and can only be arrived at through human interpretation. This approach thus focuses on subjective meaning-making and individual and collective interpretation (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). The representation of the philosophical paradigms which underpin qualitative and quantitative enquiry as being antithetical has resulted in what have been described as the 'paradigm wars' (Gage 1989, p. 4). It has been argued that these 'wars' militate against effective social research. Rejecting the depiction of distinct paradigms is pragmatism, which goes beyond the 'reveal' or 'discover' approaches, arguing that knowledge is 'constructed' through the process of enquiry. This term emerged to describe opposing theoretical perspectives within the social sciences concerning the nature of reality and the methods used in social science research (Morgan 2014).

Originally, the term pragmatism was introduced by James (1897) in a public speech, but the philosophical use of its term came from Peirce (1904) over two decades ago before being developed further by Dewey (1933) as a philosophical approach. This is described in layman's terms by Oakley (1999, p. 56), who states that researchers are no longer 'slaves to a particular methodological approach through loyalty or social context, but instead can choose epistemologies which are more suited to the research questions based on the criteria of fitness for purpose'. Thus, within a pragmatic approach research questions are foregrounded and the method that is chosen is based on answering questions which have been posed.

Islam et al. (2022) consider that pragmatism has become a prominent philosophical research paradigm due to its focus on practical exploration to understand and address problems. They claim that the use of 'blending methodologies' may facilitate a deeper understanding of such problems (Islam et al. 2022, p. 119). This perspective aligns with Creswell and Creswell's (2003) earlier view that researchers should prioritise the research problem and then employ different methodological approaches to solve the problem. Adopting a 'what works' approach accordingly enables researchers the freedom to combine quantitative and qualitative methods

without being restrained by one research perspective (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003, p. 713; Williams 2020). Drawing on the research questions, this study adopts a multi-phased mixed-methods approach. It evaluates both the use and understanding of the PSTLs to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the professional learning and development of headteachers in Wales.

4.3 Research Design

This research study is focused on the three research questions outlined in Section 4.1.1. Thus, an initial challenge for this study was becoming familiar with the research questions as well as the scope of the project. My aim was to choose a research design that would effectively answer the research questions while also operating within the time parameters of this study. As a result, I chose a mixed-methods exploratory sequential design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011), whereby distinct stages of quantitative and qualitative data collection were predetermined and planned at the outset of the research process. This approach ensured a systematic and comprehensive investigation of the research questions (Section 4.1.1) and was divided into three distinct phases (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Time scale and methods

Phase	**Method**	**Population and Sample**	**Timescale**
Phase One	Elite Interviews	5 Experts	17.9.22 to 22.11.22
Phase Two	Headteachers' pan-Wales Online Survey	161 headteachers 1,510 (School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC)) (WG 2023/24)	14.2.23 to 17.4.23 9 weeks

Phase Three	Headteacher Interviews pan-Wales	16 headteachers	19.4.23 to 29.4.23

Initially, I anticipated challenges with the scale of the research due to the three phases of data collection. However, I overcame these by meticulously organising my data collection and analysis. I felt that a strength of the research design was its sequential nature, which would help me facilitate the design, implementation and reporting of each set of findings.

One of my first considerations was integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to address the research questions (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011) and understanding how each phase of data collection depended on the others (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010). Following Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) mixed-method principles, I made four key decisions: determining the level of interaction between strands, prioritising the strands, timing the strands and establishing procedures to mix the strands. According to Greene (2007), the level of interaction is crucial when designing a mixed-methods study which can be either independent or interactive (see Table 1). An independent level occurs when qualitative and quantitative data are implemented separately. However, in this study I needed an interactive level because each phase's design and execution depended on the results of the previous phase. I implemented the methods sequentially, starting with qualitative data collection and analysis in Phase One (elite interviews), followed by quantitative data collection and analysis in Phase Two (headteachers' online survey). The Phase Two survey was based on Phase One's data, which in turn informed the qualitative design and interview schedule for Phase Three (headteachers' interviews). This iterative process allowed me to develop emergent research questions and design the headteachers' online survey and interview schedule effectively to inform my research questions.

Equal weighting was given to the qualitative methods in Phases One and Three and the quantitative methods in Phase Two to answer all three research questions. A challenge I faced was timing the data collection across the three phases, considering headteachers' school term schedules and the availability of the expert interviewees. I

addressed this by scheduling interviews and surveys during term time, which proved successful. All three phases informed each other, which was useful as it meant my project, although it may have taken longer, was focused. My final consideration was determining the approach for mixing data from the three phases. Morse and Niehaus (2009) refer to this as the point of interface or stage of integration. In this study, integration occurred at the data collection stage: connecting qualitative data from Phase One to quantitative data in Phase Two and using Phase Two results to inform Phase Three. This approach helped me facilitate a deeper understanding and clarification of the issues identified by headteachers from the Phase Two survey.

4.4 Phase One Research Design

In Phase One: Elite Interviews, five key people from policy, professional and regulatory frameworks involved in the inception of the development of the Welsh PSTLs (2018) were interviewed as experts in this field. The aim of interviewing key individuals was to provide clarity around the thinking that underpinned the PSTLs. To gain this information, it was necessary to design an interview process which would allow me to elicit this information in the most effective way yet still be exploratory in nature (Bryman 2006; Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010). I considered it appropriate to regard all five key individuals as experts in their field due to their high-ranking positions in education. This aligns with the views of Odendahl and Shaw (2002), who define elite interviewees as individuals who occupy high socio-economic positions and have decision-making influences. However, there were several factors which I needed to consider when choosing an elite interview design process. According to Bogner et al. (2009), one advantage is that an elite interview is less restrictive than a standardised interview. The main reason for this is that elite interviewees are usually used to communicating well in their professional capacity, which means that the interviewer can really explore in depth the questions that need to be answered. While I acknowledged the elite interview would allow me to elicit the information I needed, I also understood that interviewing key people in high-ranking positions could also be potentially problematic (Mikecz 2012). Considerations such as gaining access to interviewees, gaining their trust, and building and establishing a rapport (Mikecz 2012) were factors I needed to consider in order to ensure that the interview process would run smoothly (see Section 4.4.2 Phase One: Elite Interviews).

All five experts were recruited via my personal contacts with the NAEL and the WG and included two headteachers, one senior member of the WG and two independent senior members in the field of education. I chose these five experts because I was informed by the WG that these five individuals had a high level of knowledge, expertise and involvement in the inception of the standards. Table 4.2 identifies the different types of experts and their working roles.

Table 4.2 Elite interviewees

Position Held	**Policy Actors of the Educational Field**	**Interview Type**	**Length of Interview**
Headteacher	Member of the original working party group South Wales	Face to Face	55 mins
Headteacher	Member of the original working party group North Wales	Zoom	54 mins
Regulatory Body Member	Senior member of the Welsh regulatory body	Zoom	55 mins
Government Official	High-ranking member in Welsh Education	Zoom	59 mins
Independent Educational Consultant	High-ranking expert internationally in the field of education	Zoom	60 mins

4.4.1 Elite Interview Piloting Schedule

For Phase One piloting, I conducted an online interview with a former colleague who held a similar high-profile position as the five elites scheduled for interviews. This format was chosen for its convenience given my colleague's busy schedule. The

interview schedule was originally organised into five themes based on my three research questions: involvement and background of the PSTLs, inception of the PSTLs, development of the PSTLs, understanding and use of the PSTLs, and supporting headteachers in the implementation of the PSTLs. Each theme included a series of questions, along with prompts, probes and follow-up questions. This structure helped me create appropriate questions linked to each theme.

The pilot interview was valuable as it allowed me to evaluate and refine the interview process and questions (Thomas 2017). Feedback indicated that most questions were clear and free of ambiguous language, and that my colleague felt comfortable answering them. The open-ended questions were particularly effective, eliciting detailed and expansive responses (Cohen et al. 2018). However, the questions on the design and inception of the PSTLs were challenging for my participant as they were not directly involved in this theme and they also felt there was insufficient transition from the previous theme. For example, the involvement and background of the PSTLs (theme one) focused on questions about how the working party was originally created. This was followed by questions on the inception of the PSTLs (theme two). My participant suggested that questions about the working group's process, such as objectives, time frames and organisation, would have provided better context for understanding the theme on the inception of the PSTLs (theme two). In response, I adjusted the elite interview schedule by adding a theme on the process of the working group involved in the PSTLs (see Appendix B for the elite interview schedule) to allow for a smoother transition between the two themes. For questions my participant was unsure of due to lack of direct involvement, I encouraged honest responses, emphasising that the themes were intended as a guide for the areas I needed to cover (Thomas 2017).

4.4.2 Phase One: Elite Interviews

I opted for a semi-structured approach to interviewing in Phase One: Elite Interviews due to its flexibility and ability to explore topics in depth (Brinkmann 2013; Thomas 2017). However, I had to be mindful of differences in conducting semi-structured interviews with elite interviewees. One of the challenges I found in conducting the elite interviews was maintaining rigour and avoiding potential bias in the data collection process (Cohen et al. 2018). I had to consider the possibility of power differentials between myself as the researcher and the elite interviewees due to my

previous roles as a headteacher and academy associate (Odenhal and Shaw 2002; Morris 2009) (see Section 4.7 Ethics for further discussion). However, my previous professional roles helped me secure the elite interviews, which could have otherwise been challenging (see Conti and O'Neil 2007).

Additionally, it was important to gain the trust of the experts to ensure that I collated the high-quality data that was needed (Harvey 2011). One way of gaining trust is to be transparent by giving information about who I am, where I am working, the nature of the interview, how long the interview will take, and how the data will be used and disseminated (Harvey 2011). My previous roles as a headteacher and academy associate provided a positive platform, helping to build mutual respect and trust as a foundation for the researcher–interviewee relationship. Therefore, obtaining correspondent addresses and providing the information needed was easily transmitted via email to all five elites. Notably, all participants responded to the inquiry promptly with no reminders required (see Section 4.7 Ethics for information on data storage, utilisation and dissemination). I also had no issues obtaining consent from all five experts for participation and recording of the interview (see Appendix C).

While I understood that face-to-face interviews are widely recognised as the preferred method for qualitative research due to their ability to capture both verbal and non-verbal cues, providing a more comprehensive understanding of participant responses (Thunberg and Arnell 2022), I was also mindful of time constraints for both my research and the experts' busy work schedules. Therefore, I offered the interview choice of either face-to-face or digital interviews via Zoom/Microsoft Teams. Digital interviews, however, have limitations in recording visual cues as they capture only the head and a portion of the upper body (Lo Iacono et al. 2016). I also had to consider potential technical difficulties that could affect the quality of the interview, such as sound delays (Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst 2017) and insufficient technical resources (Rowe et al. 2014). Nonetheless, while face-to-face interviews are considered the gold standard in qualitative research (Thunberg and Arnell, 2022), digital interviews can be a viable alternative with appropriate planning.

Despite these limitations, four of the experts opted for digital interviews due to geographical constraints, busy schedules and familiarity with the technology owing to

their high-status roles (Alkhateeb 2018; Archibald et al. 2019). However, one expert opted for a face-to-face interview due to technical issues in the school they were attending, which was not problematic (see Table 4.2 in Section 4.4). I conducted all five elite interviews in English between September and November 2022, each lasting no longer than sixty minutes. The interview length was primarily to ensure sufficient time for identifying emergent questions for Phase Two: Headteachers Online Survey and subsequent analysis and data collection in Phase Three: Headteachers Interviews, as well as being respectful to the experts' busy work schedules.

I considered Gray et al.'s (2020) ten-point list when conducting visual digital interviews on Zoom/Microsoft Teams. These included sending direct links via email to the digital meeting, having a backup plan in case of any technical difficulties and using a stable internet connection. My backup plan if any technical difficulties occurred was to carry out the interview via telephone, although I was aware that telephone interviews could potentially be less effective (Bogner et al. 2009). However, I did not have any technical issues during the four expert interviews and therefore did not need to revert to a telephone interview. I also carried out the digital interviews in a quiet space so as not to be disturbed (Jenner and Myers 2019). The face-to-face interview was carried out in an office space within the school setting, which allowed both myself as researcher and my interviewee to conduct the interview in an undisturbed manner.

I created an interview schedule which enabled me to manage my interview time as well as providing a structure to the interview, as I was conscious that time was more restricted for the experts due to their busy work schedules (Harvey 2011). My interview schedule categorised the interview questions into the following six themes: involvement and background of the PSTLs, process of working group involved in the PSTLs, inception of the PSTLs, development of the PSTLs, understanding and use of the PSTLs, and supporting headteachers in the implementation of the PSTLs, with related questions of the issues that I needed to explore (see Appendix D for elite interview schedules). I was not forced in any way to follow the themes in the interview schedule verbatim, but I used the themes more as an aide-memoir to keep as a reminder of what I intended to cover (Thomas 2017), just as I had successfully done in the pilot interview.

To help prevent any potential strain on the five elite interviewees, I used a combination of both short and long questions in the interview schedule (Dexter 2006), as well as breaks and brief pauses to allow for more thoughtful, expanded responses (Berry 2002). To achieve a balance between silence and elaboration, I designed questions which were open-ended and non-restrictive, in line with the importance of allowing the elites the freedom to express their thoughts (Aberbach and Rockman 2002, p. 674). Additionally, prompts and probes were employed as a useful tool to stimulate further responses, particularly from those interviewees who were less confident in their answers (Thomas 2017). One theme that required prompts and probes was the supporting of headteachers in the implementation of the PSTLs around the role of the NAEL. When I asked two of the elites about the NAEL's role in supporting headteachers implement the PSTLs for themselves and their teaching staff (Q6c), I needed further clarity on their positions as both their responses were lucid. Consequently, I asked them to provide examples of instances where they felt this had occurred and in what capacity they had been involved. I also used words and phrases such as 'really?' or 'that was interesting' to stimulate the elite interviewees to elaborate on questions to give them the opportunity to provide more detailed responses (Marshall 1984). This was where I found using the themes as an aide-memoire allowed me to be flexible to ensure that I gained the most appropriate response to the questions.

After all five elite interviews had taken place, the interviews were transcribed and sent to all the elites for them to verify that the transcription was a true and honest record of the conversation. I gave the elites two weeks to respond to ensure I had enough time to analyse the data in preparation for Phase Two of this study. All five elite interviewees responded within this time frame. For information on how the data from Phase One Elite interviews was stored, analysed and subsequently destroyed, see Section 4.7 Ethics.

4.5 Phase Two: Online Survey

For Phase Two of this study, I needed to engage with headteachers across Wales to gain wider views on aspects of the PSTLs, and an online survey was considered the most effective way of gaining this information from a large sample of geographically dispersed headteachers (Thomas 2017). Other methods were considered such as postal surveys, but an online survey was deemed more accessible because

headteachers use computers in their daily roles (Ruel et al. 2016). Another reason why an online survey was chosen was because of its anonymity, which may make headteachers more comfortable about expressing their opinions (Involve 2014, cited in Thomas 2017, p. 218). Qualtrics online survey software was used to design and distribute the online survey to headteachers across Wales and the responses gathered during Phase One: Elite Interviews informed the design of the online survey. The online survey represented a range of educational settings, including nursery, primary, secondary, pupil referral units, and special schools. However, the survey responses were not analysed based on socio-economic factors or language context (English/Welsh medium). Additionally, the 'middle tier,' comprising local authorities, Regional Consortia, and Initial Teacher Education institutions, was not included in the data collection.

From the six themes identified in Phase One: Elite Interviews, three required further exploration: development of the PSTLs (theme 4), understanding and use of the PSTLs (theme 5), and supporting headteachers in implementing the PSTLs (theme 6). These themes were selected to gain deeper insights into headteachers' perceptions and views. For example, for the theme of understanding and use (theme 5), I needed to fully grasp the challenges and barriers headteachers faced in comprehending and utilising the PSTLs for themselves and their teaching staff, as well as the levels of support they received and felt they needed.

4.5.1 Research Methods for Online Survey

For the design of the online survey, I used Tashakkori and Teddlie's (2003, p. 303) thirteen principles (P) of questionnaire construction, paying particular attention to the following principles:

- P2 – Understand my participants.
- P3 – Use familiar and natural language.
- P4 – Write questions which are simple, clear and precise.
- P5 – Do not use leading or loaded questions.
- P12 – Develop a questionnaire that is easy for the participants to use.

In addition, Thomas (2017) recommends the following when designing online surveys:

- Keep the questionnaire short.
- Keep the questions succinct.
- Be clear about what I am asking and only ask for one piece of information at a time to avoid confusion.
- Think about the structure of the questions; easy ones to start to engage the participant.
- Pre-test the questionnaire to make sure that it was unambiguous and ask for feedback.

Qualtrics online software was chosen for the design and distribution of the online survey for the following reasons. Firstly, Cardiff University has an institutional licence for this software, making it more accessible and cost effective. Qualtrics also provided comprehensive online training for researchers in customising, sharing and collecting modules, and as I was unfamiliar with the software, I found this training was beneficial for my data collection.

Initially, I planned the following process as part of my preparation in implementing the online Qualtrics survey:

- Design the online survey questions.
- Write the survey questions in Microsoft Word.
- Map the survey questions against the original research questions to make sure they were aligned to the gaps in literature identified in the literature review.
- Build the survey in Qualtrics.
- Pre-test the survey.
- Create a distribution database.
- Create a cover letter to participate for newsletter distributions and database.
- Edit distribution database after first mail out.
- Send out two reminders to distribution database.

- Monitor the number of responses in Cymraeg and English.

Firstly, the design of the online survey had to be visually appealing, but the main considerations were that I had to choose a design which would provide valid and reliable online research data (Ruel et al. 2016). The reasons for this were to minimise error, because if I considered reducing error this would improve the reliability and validity of the research. This aspect of the online design was important if I was to strive to achieve data which was accurate, relevant and free of bias, notwithstanding Ruel et al.'s (2016) claim that no survey can achieve complete reliability.

I structured the questions around four main themes: contextual questions; understanding and use; formal leadership elements and descriptors; and the NAEL, which corresponded to my three research questions and the adjustments made from the elite interviews (themes 4, 5 and 6). The survey included a total of forty-four multiple-choice questions and one open-ended question. Several of the multiple-choice questions used a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to select the option they felt was most appropriate. These questions were designed to capture headteachers' experiences and attitudes towards the identified themes (Ruel et al. 2016; Thomas 2017). Surveys can include both open and closed questions (Reja et al. 2003). Although I considered using a mix of open and closed questions, I opted primarily for closed questions to help respondents focus their thoughts on predefined choices. However, open-ended questions offer more nuance and depth (Ruel et al. 2016). To balance this, I included a single open-ended question at the end of the survey to allow respondents to express their views on any aspect of the four themes that they felt might not have been adequately covered. By limiting the number of open questions, I ensured that I could explore these more qualitative aspects in greater depth during Phase Three: Headteachers Interviews.

The order of the questions in the survey was also a relevant part of the design process, with easier questions placed at the beginning, progressing to more complex questions asked further on in the survey (Dillman 2007). This was to avoid 'respondent fatigue', where respondents become frustrated, confused or bored (Bradburn et al. 2004; Dillman 2007), leading to respondents avoiding questions or guessing answers in order to complete the survey more quickly. For this reason, I

began the survey asking some general information questions about the respondents and their school settings (see Q4, Q5, Q6 in survey in Appendix E) to engage the respondents and to encourage them to complete the rest of the questionnaire. The survey design also included a progress indicator on the bottom of each page to encourage headteachers to complete the survey and again to avoid 'respondent fatigue' (Ruel et al. 2016, p. 8), although headteachers could view this differently if the progress indicator was slow-moving. It could be seen as a distraction if headteachers fixated on the progress bar, which could possibly hinder the quality of the responses (Crawford et al. 2001).

It was also important that only participants in the target population answered the online survey to minimise error (Ruel et al. 2016). This was addressed by placing a 'screener question' which certified that those attempting to complete the survey were headteachers and acting headteachers (Ruel et al. 2016). I also offered the survey to be completed in Cymraeg and in English. I was also conscious of avoiding what Biemer and Lyberg (2003) describe as 'respondent burden' by asking questions which may put the respondent under undue stress if asked a question that needs a high degree of concentration (Graef et al. 2008). However, while this was a consideration, I also had to moderate the sensitivity of some of the questions to avoid placing any respondent under any unnecessary stress (Biemer and Lyberg 2003). For example, some of the multiple questions could be considered sensitive, especially those questions which ask headteachers about their understanding and use of the PSTLs (2018) (See Q9, Q10, Q11 in Appendix E as examples). To help with these contingency questions, skip logic was incorporated in the survey, which allowed respondents to bypass irrelevant questions, thus guiding them to relevant parts which would be appropriate to them to reduce participant burden and fatigue. I also made it so that participants could skip questions and leave them unanswered if they wished. Contingency questions also allowed me to ask more nuanced and detailed questions from certain groups. For example, Q14 and Q15 of the survey asked the respondents about their level of familiarity of the formal leadership elements and descriptors of the Welsh PSTLs. If a headteacher answered 'unfamiliar' for Q14 and Q15, a skip logic was added to avoid the respondent spending any time on further subsequent questions related to this subject area.

4.5.2 Devising the Cover Letter

Once the online survey was designed in Qualtrics, I created a cover email to formally invite headteachers to participate. Ensuring that the tone of the letter was appropriate was crucial, as it was the first exposure respondents would have to the study, which, according to Shuttles and Bennett (2008), can impact response rates. I followed the principles suggested by Ruel et al. (2016) for writing the cover letter, which included using plain, straightforward language; keeping the letter to a single page; using a normal font and margins; incorporating bullet points if listing items; signing the letter; including a title and affiliation information; and avoiding the use of video, pictures, flash or JavaScript in the email. Applying these principles, I created a cover letter that clearly communicated the purpose and benefits of the research to headteachers in straightforward language and managed to keep it to one A4 page. Additionally, I included the estimated time for survey completion (based on a pilot mean time of twelve minutes) and the types of questions to be asked, and I assured respondents of the survey's anonymity. The letter also provided a link for headteachers to access the survey. Other considerations included taking care to not use spam language, as many people would have spam guards installed on their computers by their local authorities to filter out any unsolicited bulk emails. I made every effort to avoid using spam trigger words and phrases such as 'click here, click below, opportunity, important information regarding, you have been selected' (Ruel et al. 2016, p. 4).

4.5.3 Distribution of the Survey

The total number of headteachers in Wales is 1,510, identified from the School Workforce Annual Census (WG 2023/24). Therefore, my aim was to reach as many headteachers as possible in my distribution list to capture a census. It was difficult to safeguard against a respondent filling out the survey more than once because assuring anonymity of headteachers was part of the consent to participate (Ruel et al. 2016, p. 6). Reminders to all headteachers were sent out every two weeks to encourage them to participate, and the number of responses was monitored throughout the nine-week period (see Table 4.1). Another factor to take into consideration was that the launch of the survey clashed with teachers' industrial action, which may have affected the number of responses I had for the research (National Education Union 2023).

The survey was distributed through six channels: the WG newsletter (*Dysgu*), the directors of the twenty-two local authorities via ADEW (Association of Directors of Education in Wales), professional learning leads from regional consortia (Education Achievement Service (EAS), North Wales Regional School Improvement Service (GwE), Central South Consortium (CSC), Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Swansea – Partneriaeth, Mid Wales Educational Partnership (MWEP)), the NAEL's newsletter *Cyswllt*, Twitter, and a headteachers' database. The gatekeepers for each distribution were facilitated through my previous headteacher and NAEL academy associate roles. One challenge was creating the headteachers' database, which was time consuming because I compiled it using publicly available contact addresses for headteachers from each of the twenty-two local authorities in Wales, after confirming with the WG that no national database existed due to the need for constant updates. Each local authority is responsible for maintaining an accurate record of headteachers' names, email addresses and contact details. Although I could have relied on individual directors to distribute the survey information, I needed to ensure the distribution process was rigorous to maintain the credibility of my research.

One issue arose with the *Dysgu* newsletter, where a duplication of the survey link occurred, potentially enhancing the survey's visibility but also risking duplicate responses. I sent information about the study's purpose, a survey link and my contact details as a PhD researcher to the WG for inclusion in the *Dysgu* newsletter. Unfortunately, the March 2023 *Dysgu* newsletter misleadingly implied that the NAEL was leading the survey, rather than it being a collaboration between the WG and the NAEL. This error was promptly corrected by the WG, who re-sent the survey with the appropriate amendment.

4.5.4 Pilot Testing of Survey

Piloting for the Phase Two: Online Survey, involved a sample of five people in the field of education, some of whom were headteachers in Wales. I decided to carry out cognitive interviews (Collins 2010) for the piloting purely on the grounds that the survey was anonymous and out of my control once it had been distributed, which would prove testing of the questions more difficult. Additionally, the cognitive interviews would allow me to check the flow of the survey, test the questions in case of misinterpretation and monitor how long the survey would take to complete (Converse and Presser 2013). I also took on board that the pre-testers' own values

and beliefs about the answers to the questions were to be ignored (Jansen and Hak 2005). This was to maintain the objectivity and validity of the research as the pre-testers' views could introduce bias, leading to skewed data or influencing how the questions were framed and interpreted. By setting aside their personal beliefs, I ensured that the focus remained on the actual data from the pilot testers, thus enhancing the reliability and neutrality of this study (Jansen and Hak 2005).

The think-aloud and probing techniques are the two techniques most used in cognitive interviewing to evaluate how participants interpret and respond to survey questions (Collins 2015). The think-aloud method involves participants verbalising their thoughts as they answer questions, providing insight into their cognitive processes and revealing potential misunderstandings or difficulties. The probing technique involves asking participants how they set about answering the questions being tested. I chose the 'probing' cognitive interviewing technique in preference to the 'think-aloud' interviewing technique (Collins 2015, p. 14) because I felt that this method was better suited to my research design, which was to elicit information from the interviewee rather than test their thought processes of how they answered the questions (Willis 2005; Beatty and Willis 2007). I also wanted to avoid 'respondent fatigue' with interviewees becoming frustrated, confused or bored (Ruel et al. 2016, p. 8), which was a risk if I asked respondents to think aloud their thought processes when they answered each question. Additionally, interviewees may not be entirely comfortable in thinking out aloud, which may have restricted the amount of required information I could gather (Collins 2015).

I followed the four-stage model of survey response described by Tourangeau (1984) as a method of carrying out the cognitive interview 'probing' technique (see appendices). From this I planned my five cognitive interviews. I emailed the pre-testers and explained that the cognitive interview would be in two parts (see Appendix F for the Cognitive Interview Protocol). The first part was the completion of the survey, which they could complete at a time and place convenient to themselves. The second part was the cognitive interview itself, which I carried out via Zoom, and this lasted approximately sixty minutes. It was important that the cognitive interview took place in a timely manner after the online survey had been completed to capture the data needed (Collins 2015). All five pre-testers were informed that the purpose of the cognitive interviews was to test the wording of the questions for anomalies and

misunderstandings, to explore the usability of the online survey and to explore whether the routing instructions were clear for the respondents. I sent copies of the survey (see Appendix E for a copy of the survey) to all pre-testers as an aide-memoire during the interview process. Additionally, I also asked all the pre-testers to time how long it took them to complete the survey.

The cognitive interviews identified several problem areas (Rothgeb 2008, p. 584), which were mainly issues around a lack of clarity on some of the terminology of the questions which had caused confusion.

For example, in Q9:

How often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) with your staff?

- Every day
- Every week
- At least once a term
- Once a year
- Never.

Four out of the five pre-testers indicated that the term ‘staff’ required clarification. This was due to the possibility that respondents could confuse the term with ancillary or administrative staff and teaching assistants, thereby confusing the accuracy of the survey results. To address this issue, the term ‘staff’ was replaced with ‘school teaching staff’ in the original research question and all subsequent survey and interview questions.

Another example of lack of clarity was Q12, where four out of the five pre-testers found the word ‘important’ confusing and suggested the word ‘relevant’ would be a better choice. Also, three out of the five pre-testers identified that the word ‘unimportant’ and ‘not all important’ were virtually the same.

Here is Q12:

How important are the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) in supporting your school leadership role?

- Extremely important
- Fairly important
- Slightly important
- Unimportant
- Not all important.

This was changed to the following statement:

The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) are relevant in supporting me in my school leadership role:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree.

(See further modifications in the cognitive interview analysis table in Appendix G.)

4.5.5 The Final Sample Size

The rationale of why an online survey was chosen for this study has already been discussed in Section 4.5 Phase Two: Online Survey. The sample size for this study was n=161 headteachers from the total of 1,510 headteachers in Wales taken from the School Workforce Annual Census (WG 2023/34).

4.6 Phase Three Research Design

This phase employed a qualitative approach to gather data from sixteen individual interviews with headteachers in Wales. The selection of headteachers was purposeful, ensuring a balanced representation from various educational settings, including nursery, primary, secondary, special schools, and pupil referral units. However, the headteacher interviews were not structured around variables such as phase, socioeconomic background, or language context.

Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases (Patton 1999). This form of sampling involves selecting individuals who are particularly knowledgeable about or experienced in a

specific field (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). Therefore, all interviewees were specifically chosen for their leadership knowledge and experiences to bring depth and detail to the research questions. Thirteen headteachers were recruited through various gatekeepers: the NAEL, the regional consortia, the local authorities and my personal contacts from previous leadership roles. At the end of the survey, I included a question asking if respondents would like to participate in the next phase of interviews, providing an opportunity for more headteachers to volunteer. Additionally, three headteachers were recruited directly from the survey, resulting in a total of sixteen headteachers participating in Phase Three: Headteacher Interviews (see details in Table 4.3)

Table 4.3 Types of headteachers' interviews

Number	**Role**	**School Type**
3	Acting Headteacher	Primary
1	Headteacher	Special School
7	Headteacher	Primary
5	Headteacher	Secondary

The interview questions were developed based on an initial analysis of the quantitative survey data. For instance, the survey data revealed that headteachers reported using the PSTLs less frequently for themselves as opposed to their school teaching staff. As such, in the interview, I asked headteachers the following questions.

For example, in Q9 from the online survey:

How often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) for yourself as a school leader?

- Every day
- Every week
- At least once a term
- Once a year

- Never.

And in Q10 from the online survey:

How often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) with your school teaching staff?

- Every day
- Every week
- At least once a term
- Once a year
- Never.

This finding led to modifications in the Phase Three headteacher interview questions to investigate the reasons behind this discrepancy. The interview schedule included the following questions:

Q1C

How did you perceive the PSTL (2018) to be used for yourself?

How did you perceive the PSTL (2018) to be used for your school teaching staff?

When do you use the PSTLs standards for your school teaching staff?

Why do your school teaching staff use the PSTLs?

The above questions were designed to understand the usage and rationale behind the use of PSTLs from a headteachers' perspective. The first question sought to understand whether headteachers apply the PSTLs to their own professional development and invites elaboration on barriers or reasons for not using the PSTLs. The second question aimed to identify specific contexts or situations in which headteachers utilise the PSTLs, focusing on practical application and frequency of use. Additionally, there is an exploration of the application of PSTLs in managing and developing their school teaching staff, revealing whether the PSTLs are integrated into wider school practices. The motivation and perceived benefits behind school teaching staff's use of the PSTLs are also examined, determining if their use is driven by external requirements, internal motivations or a combination of both.

However, Phase Three piloting revealed that further modifications to these questions were needed for the headteachers' interview schedule.

4.6.1 Phase Three Piloting

Piloting was conducted with two participants: one acting and one experienced headteacher in similar leadership roles to the sixteen headteachers scheduled for interview. I developed an interview schedule (see Appendix H) aligned with the three research questions (see Section 4.1.1) and organised it into themes to ensure a focused approach for both myself as interviewer and the interviewees. I found the two pilot interviews valuable, enabling me to adjust the headteacher interview schedule. This section will present three examples of how this process was implemented; for a comprehensive list of headteacher interview modifications, refer to Appendix H.

Initially, I designed the context questions to gather background information about the participants. However, I decided to remove the original context question, 'What are your roles and responsibilities?' due to the lengthy and unnecessary responses received during the pilot. The second set of interview questions were around usage of the PSTLs for themselves and for their school teaching staff. For example, Q1C, I originally phrased as, 'How did you perceive the PSTL (2018) to be used for yourself?' and 'How did you perceive the PSTL (2018) to be used for your school teaching staff?' However, the feedback from the piloting was that these two questions needed further clarification as the initial phrasing of 'perception' was too abstract, which the pilot interviewees suggested could lead to ambiguous or varied responses. I changed the word 'perceived' to 'consider' as I felt that this was more direct. By shifting to more direct questions, I felt that the revised versions sought to establish whether PSTLs are used by the headteachers and their school teaching staff before delving into how the PSTLs are applied to school practice. I also felt that this modification ensured that any further exploration of PSTL usage was based on a clear understanding of its application, thereby improving the relevance and accuracy of any subsequent responses during interview.

The final example of modification was some of the questions on the NAEL. When I asked the participants, 'Where do you see the NAEL's role in terms of your professional learning and development?' (Q3d), they felt that the question was

ambiguous and open-ended, which could potentially lead to varied and unclear responses about the NAEL's role. In response to this feedback, I modified the question to 'Do you feel that the NAEL meets your professional learning needs? If so, how?' to elicit a clearer and more direct response. I felt that by asking headteachers explicitly whether the NAEL addressed their professional learning needs, it would encourage them to provide me with concrete examples.

4.6.2 Phase Three: Headteacher Interviews

I adopted a semi-structured approach for the headteacher interviews, similar to the elite interviews conducted in Phase One (see Section 4.4.2). This section will highlight some notable similarities and differences between the two sets of interviews. The objective of the Phase Three interviews was to capture the individual experiences of headteachers in a way that reflected their daily professional roles rather than reinforcing my own previous leadership experiences (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). To ensure headteachers felt comfortable and open to sharing their personal experiences, I felt that individual interviews would be better suited so that I could gain a deeper insight into the headteachers' perspectives and experiences and clarify any issues that I needed (Thomas 2017).

All sixteen headteachers were given a choice of face-to-face or digital interview via Zoom/Microsoft Teams. Given the geographical dispersal of the headteachers invited to interview, I chose a digital interview approach alongside face-to-face interviews (Christmann 2009). Of the sixteen interviews, only one headteacher opted for a face-to-face interview. When planning the interviews, I had to reschedule four interviews due to school-related issues. However, this did not impact the overall interview timeline as I felt it was more important to secure the interviews and accommodate the headteachers. Only one of the interviews was conducted via telephone due to technical difficulties at the start of the digital interview (Thunberg and Arnell 2022) which could have otherwise resulted in the rescheduling of the interview or inability to conduct it within time constraints (Conti and O'Neil 2007). All interviews were conducted in English and lasted an average of forty-five minutes.

In line with Mikecz's (2012) findings, both Phase One and Phase Three interviews emphasised the importance of gaining trust and building rapport before conducting the interviews. I achieved this by sharing personal information and outlining the

research objectives to develop a connection with the interviewees. A key difference between the two phases was the ease of accessing interviewees. In Phase Three, headteachers were more accessible due to my previous leadership and associate roles, which facilitated the invitation process and helped establish the necessary trust and rapport (Mikecz 2012). In contrast, accessing elite interviewees was more challenging due to their high-status roles and busy schedules (see Section 4.4.2). Both interview groups preferred digital interviews over face-to-face ones, citing factors such as geographical constraints, busy work schedules and familiarity with technology (Alkhateeb 2018; Archibald et al. 2019). A significant reason for headteachers' confidence in using technology was the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which spurred a digital revolution (Nind et al. 2021) and made digital communication more accepted (Thunberg and Arnell 2022). Like elite interviewees, headteachers communicated well and used technology effectively. However, as already stated, one headteacher opted for a face-to-face interview due to internet connection issues, highlighting the importance of a stable internet connection as part of Gray et al.'s (2020) ten-point digital preparation plan (see Section 4.4.2).

An interview schedule similar to Phase One was developed, categorised into four themes linked to the three research questions: familiarity and accessibility, understanding and use, relevance to leadership roles, and the NAEL and professional learning for headteachers. Additionally, follow-up questions with prompts and probes were included (Harvey 2011) (see Appendix H for headteachers' interview schedule). Similar to Phase One, I used a combination of long and short and open-ended questions with frequent breaks and pauses to allow headteachers to express their opinions freely (Dexter 2006). One notable difference I found between Phase One and Phase Three interviews was the ability for me to maintain impartiality and my positionality stance due to my previous headship and associate roles (Patton 1999). Although insider knowledge served as an asset in the elite interviews, I found it challenging to remain objective during the headteacher interviews for the following reasons. I found that I related to the headteachers and the demands of their leadership role, for example the implementation of recent WG policy initiatives such as the New Curriculum and dealing with post-COVID-19 well-being issues. However, I also recognised that I needed to retain my role as

researcher as an objective outsider to ensure that my data collection was of high quality. (For a more detailed discussion, see Section 4.7 Ethics).

4.7 Ethics

This research study was submitted to the Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on 2 June 2021 and gained approval on 17 June 2021. I was aware during my research of the need to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards in line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2018).

I needed to acknowledge my positionality in both my previous roles as a headteacher in Wales and an associate (cohort one) of the NAEL. While these experiences gave me a balance of understanding and insight into the education system in Wales, they also presented a potential conflict of interest. In resigning from my position as headteacher in 2019 and while acknowledging my experience was a strength, it was also important for my role as researcher that I strived to adopt a position of emphatic neutrality (Patton 1999, p. 1204). Adopting a stance of neutrality and impartiality was not easy to achieve considering my two previous roles in education as outlined above; according to Denzin (1989), all researchers bring preconceived ideas and interpretations to their research. To minimise any misconceptions that might have occurred during this research because of my two previous roles and to ensure methodological rigour, it was therefore important to state my positionality before conducting the interviews and survey (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

An example of when I had to strive to maintain a position of emphatic neutrality in this study was during the Phase Three headteacher interviews, when I needed to allow participants to elaborate on the questions asked and provide their own perspectives without interference from myself. For example, during the headteacher interviews when I asked about whether the NAEL met their professional learning needs (Q3c see headteachers' interview schedule in Appendix H) I found it difficult to hide my insider knowledge from when I was an associate with the NAEL, which I found was a positive professional learning experience, particularly when participants stated that they were unfamiliar with the NAEL (Q2d).

However, one of the key ethical considerations during this research process was my responsibility to my participants (BERA 2018, p. 7), in that I needed to be transparent about my previous roles as a headteacher and associate of the NAEL, which was acknowledged because my positionality could potentially influence the research process (point 27, BERA 2018). I also acknowledged that this research had been sponsored by the Welsh Government (WG) and the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) (point 29, BERA 2018) by informing the participants at the start of interview and in the online survey introductory information. I was conscious that knowing about the sponsorship could have led some participants to align with what they perceived as the sponsors' interests, potentially introducing response bias. It could also have made some participants more cautious in their feedback, especially during Phase Two: Headteachers Survey and Phase Three: Headteachers Interviews, as they could have felt that their answers might have implications for their headship roles. On the other hand, acknowledgement could have given this study credibility, encouraging engagement and participation by the headteachers.

Additionally, there was a need to recognise that any personal views that I had were not intrusive to my research and did not influence the research process (Scott and Usher 1996). This aligned with the views of Miller and Glassner (2011), who stated that it was important that a researcher understood their insider and outsider position. Although I have considerable knowledge as an insider from my previous roles, I did not want to present myself as an intruder as this could have possibly jeopardised my data collection and be a conflict of interest (point 30, BERA 2018). An example of being an intruder was to compromise my positionality of emphatic neutrality by preconceived ideas and interpretations from my previous roles as headteacher and an associate of the NAEL. Therefore, I needed to remain as an outsider in my research role to prevent this happening by being open and honest about my previous roles.

To ensure transparency, I openly disclosed my positionality from the outset, including my previous roles as a headteacher and associate (Holmes 2020). This openness helped participants understand the context of my perspective and potential biases, fostering trust and allowing them to consider how my background might influence the research process. By being upfront about my experiences and connections, I aimed to maintain integrity and encourage honest, reflective engagement from participants.

While I anticipated challenges in maintaining impartiality and addressing my positionality, I believed it was crucial to ensure that my personal values and beliefs did not influence the research. For instance, based on my own experience as a headteacher, I recognise that the role can be demanding and that some view the PSTLs as fulfilling political and policy objectives (Evans et al. 2011, p. 862). On the other hand, my previous role as an associate of the NAEL led me to view the academy as a highly valuable initiative for supporting headteachers' professional development. Given this perspective, I felt it was essential to openly disclose my values and beliefs. I aimed to avoid influencing the interviews and online survey by misinterpreting responses based on my own biases, which could compromise the validity of the research.

During the process of conducting elite interviews, caution was taken in relation to the potential risks that could arise. Specifically, consideration was given to the possibility of power differentials existing between myself as researcher and the elite interviewee (Odenhal and Shaw 2002; Morris 2009). For example, I was aware of the likelihood of experiencing feelings of intimidation in the presence of the elites due to their high-level job roles. This could have led to a situation of superiority as elites are accustomed to 'being in charge' within their professional roles, thus creating the potential for them to take control of the interview (Plesner 2011, p. 13). However, my prior experience in headteacher and associate roles allowed me to consider myself as a fellow professional. Advantages to having insider knowledge and expertise, according to Trinczek (2009), are that it allowed me to raise issues which an outsider may be unfamiliar with, although there is a potential risk to the interviewer's positionality. Insider knowledge also avoids elite interviewee boredom when an interviewer with outside knowledge asks questions which are already familiar to the interviewee (Bogner et al. 2009). On the other hand, insider knowledge could be a disadvantage because I could be perceived as a potential critic, which could lead to limited answers and affect the quality of the interview (Bogner et al. 2009; Van Audenhove and Donders 2019). Nonetheless, I was mindful of the need to remain objective and strike a balance between my positionality stance and eliciting the information I needed.

For Phase Two: Online Survey, I ensured anonymity, while for Phase One: Elite Interviews and Phase Three: Headteacher Interviews, I maintained confidentiality.

Headteachers completing the survey were given the option to remain completely anonymous and avoid providing any identifiable information. This was made clear in the survey's introduction, where I specified that no email addresses or personal information would be collected. At the end of the survey, headteachers were invited to contact me if they wished to participate in Phase Three: Headteacher Interviews. I requested that they got in touch with me via email. Following the survey, three headteachers contacted me expressing their interest in being interviewed. While these three headteachers emailed me directly with the survey link, the survey response was not linked to their email addresses in any way, meaning their responses to the survey remained anonymous.

Achieving confidentiality for Phase One and Three was via an introductory letter which was sent out by email to all potential interviewees. The letter detailed the nature and purpose of the research and gave participants the chance to opt in or out of the study, as well as to decide whether to remain anonymous due to the potentially sensitive nature of the research and their professional positions. All requests for anonymity were honoured to safeguard the participants' professional reputation and to protect them from external criticism and intrusion (point 45, BERA 2018).

Written consent was obtained from all participants in Phase One and Three (see Appendix C for a copy of the consent forms), which included the right to withdraw from the research up to the time of publication (point 31, BERA 2018).

After the interviews, I sent the transcripts to the individual interviewees, allowing them the opportunity to clarify and make any necessary adjustments. I felt that this ensured that the interviewees felt the transcription accurately reflected what occurred during the interview (Thomas 2017). Although time consuming, this method of recording was more precise in capturing each spoken word, while acknowledging that non-verbal behaviours were not included (Thomas 2017). The transcription services were provided by an organisation recommended by Cardiff University, and anonymity was maintained since the transcripts contained no identifiable information. The headteachers were identified only by their order of interview, such as Headteacher 1, Headteacher 2 and so on.

I informed all the interviewees from Phases One and Three that the digital recordings would be stored, analysed and subsequently destroyed in line with British Educational Research Association guidelines (points 48 and 50, BERA 2018) and Cardiff University Ethics Committee guidance on data. I ensured that the survey and interview data was stored on secure premises in a locked cabinet and password protected (point 50, BERA 2018) complying with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR, 2018).

4.8 Data Analysis

This section will outline the data analysis methods employed in this study, which adheres to the three-phase exploratory sequential design proposed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). The design's primary goal was to investigate and explore data from all three phases to gain a thorough understanding of the challenges faced by headteachers. The analytical approach used was consistent with the pragmatic orientation adopted for this study.

Given the three-phased design, I considered the data collection strategy I needed as the organisation of the data was crucial for accurately addressing my three research questions (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). Each phase's data was analysed independently, with Phases One and Three utilising qualitative methods and Phase Two employing quantitative methods. Phase One data was explored to inform the survey in Phase Two, while Phase Two (quantitative) was used to gather data on both awareness of and the use of the PSTLs, as well as informing the areas explored in depth in Phase Three (qualitative).

Thematic analysis was used to identify and highlight the recurring themes from the responses gathered in Phases One and Three of the data collection process, aiming to 'thematise meanings', as suggested by Holloway and Todres (2003, p. 347). Additionally, Phase Two involved the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse the data generated in the survey. Within these phases I adopted the five-phase mixed-methods data analysis proposed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) as it aligned well with the pragmatic approach adopted in this study:

- Preparing the data for analysis
- Exploring and analysing the data

- Representing the analysis
- Interpreting the analysis
- Validating the data and interpretations.

4.8.1 Phases One and Three – Preparing the Data for Analysis

Initially, I decided how to prepare the data for analysis considering the number of interviews from each phase. I felt that transcription would be an efficient way to capture the data accurately. In Phase One due to the smaller numbers, just five expert interviews, I decided to transcribe the data myself, and in Phases One and Three the data from the interviews was transcribed by a specialist company recommended by Cardiff University. This latter option was chosen because of the higher number of interviewees: sixteen headteachers compared to five expert interviewees. However, I was conscious that transcribing was time consuming, and I needed to allow enough time to transcribe the five expert interviews to ensure that the data was transcribed accurately. I did this by repeatedly listening to the audio recording and then started and stopped the audio recording as I typed, taking note of the timings and making sure I noted which comments were the researcher's and which those of the interviewee. If an expert paused, laughed or had interruptions because of their busy work schedules during the recordings, such as a telephone call, I made notes as part of the transcription process. According to Miller and Glassner (2011), it takes approximately four hours to transcribe one hour of audio recording, but I found that it took me twenty-three hours to transcribe the five expert interviews.

The transcribed data from both phases was typed into word processing files for analysis, with each expert and headteacher interview having a separate folder and file. Organisation of this data was key, and I subsequently developed a matrix with different headings and numbered them individually, creating a folder for each phase and filing the individual interviews into the correct folders. For example, Phase One, Expert 1, 2 etc. and Phase Three, Headteacher 1, 2, 3 etc.

4.8.2 Phases One and Three – Exploring and Analysing the Data

A preliminary exploratory analysis of the data gives a general sense of the data (Creswell 2014). All the interview data in Phases One and Three were transcribed, which allowed me to read and reread through the data to develop a thorough

understanding. During my reading I made copious notes; I then created a coding matrix where each note was numbered, which helped me with the early beginnings of creating themes. I also circled any quotes or metaphors which I felt would be useful to explain the individual themes. For example, *'unleash teachers'* and '*a fearful environment'* in the expert data and '*difficult to be a cheerleader'* and *'combine harvester'* in the headteachers' data.

This coding strategy was helpful in analysing the data from the sixteen headteachers, providing me with a comprehensive understanding of the entire qualitative data collection. For example, perspectives held by headteachers on the COVID-19 pandemic and their perspectives on different meso-level organisations in the middle tier, such as the RC or LAs. I then listed all the code names into a matrix and looked for those which Creswell (2014, p. 269) terms as 'redundant' to the process. However, I did not totally disregard these as I constantly checked to see that the coding was conducive to the research questions. I was constantly thinking how the themes could generate a discussion to answer my three research questions. I used Creswell's (2014) method for grouping the themes together: ordinary themes, unexpected themes, hard-to-classify themes, and major and minor themes. I found that most of the themes fitted into the following: timing, performance management or meso-level partnerships. However, I found it harder to classify the role of the RC and the LAs as part of the middle tier, whether they came under the theme of performance management or under the theme of meso-level partnerships. In the end I decided to include performance management under both themes until I had clarified the best theme to interpret the data to answer the research questions.

According to Creswell (2014), there is no single accepted approach to analysing qualitative data, but reading the data, marking it by hand and dividing the data into parts and colour coding are what Creswell (2014) considers the process for analysing data if carried out by hand in preference to analysing using computer software. Using a computer software programme for the qualitative interviews was not a consideration because I wanted to have a hands-on approach without the intrusion of a computer. I also felt that due to the headteacher interviews being professionally transcribed, I had time to dedicate to manually sorting out the data myself.

I adopted the 'bottom up' approach to analysis by first collecting the data and then preparing it for data analysis as proposed by Creswell (2014, p. 261). This was an iterative process which allowed me to go back and forth between the two phases by reading it several times, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the data supplied by the respondents.

4.8.3 Phases One and Three – Representing and Interpreting the Analysis

I needed to address how the data compared to the research questions, the existing literature and personal experiences (Creswell 2014). The data analysis from both these phases was represented in word processing, with quotes from the interview data represented in italics followed by a data analysis of the evidence. The data analysis was represented under the following subheadings, which related to the three research questions:

Phase One (Expert Data)

RQ1 – How do the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership fit within the wider reform agenda in Wales?

- Regaining teacher professionalism into the Welsh system
- Transitioning towards occupational practices
- Use of external feedback to pave the way for reform
- Identifying where the PSTLs fit in the reform agenda
- Fostering agency and autonomy.

RQ2 – What are headteachers' understanding and use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership for their own and their school teaching staff's professional learning and development?

- Meso-level partnerships, 'the messy middle'
- Headteachers' understanding of the PSTLs
- Implementation and engagement of the PSTLs
- Headteachers' use of the PSTLs.

RQ3 – What are headteachers' understandings of the role of the NAEL in relation to their professional learning and development?

- The NAEL as a middle-tier partner
- Headteachers' understandings of the role of the NAEL
- Professional learning and development opportunities within the NAEL.

Phase Three (Headteachers' Data)

RQ1 – How do the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership fit within the wider reform agenda in Wales?

- Timing of the PSTLs
- Reform fatigue.

RQ2 – What are headteachers' understanding and use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership for their own and their school teaching staff's professional learning and development?

- Meso levels of accountability
- Curriculum for Wales (CfW)
- COVID-19 pandemic
- Performance management.

RQ3 – What are headteachers' understandings of the role of the NAEL in relation to their professional learning and development?

- Headteachers' understandings of the role of the NAEL
- Role of the NAEL as a meso-level partner within the middle tier
- Headteachers' professional learning and development needs
- Headteachers' professional learning and development opportunities.

4.8.4 Phases One and Three – Validating the Data and Interpretations

In qualitative research the focus is more on validity than reliability in order to determine whether the data is accurate, trustworthy and credible (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Validation is the process taken by the researcher gathering the data to ensure it is accurate. To check the validity of the data, I 'member checked' (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011, p. 211) by contacting all participants and asking them to check the interview data for accuracy and to determine if the data was a true reflection of the

interview. Only one headteacher asked for clarification, which was resolved via email.

4.8.5 Phase Two – Quantitative Data

The data analysis for this phase involved analysing the data obtained from the headteachers' online survey, which was designed and administered using Qualtrics survey software. The target audience for the online survey encompassed all headteachers in Wales. The total count of headteachers in Wales, as determined by the School Workforce Annual Census (WG 2023/24), stood at 1,510. The objective was to reach as many headteachers as feasible through the distribution strategy outlined in the research design.

4.8.6 Phase Two – Preparing the Data for Analysis

Initially, I needed to score the data, and I did this by assigning a numeric score to each response category for each survey question. For continuous scales where I used the five-point Likert scale, I recoded some of the continuous questions for consistency and used the same numbering system with the positive, such as 'strongly agree' scoring 5 to 'strongly disagree' scoring 1.

For example, Question 8:

Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership?

- Very familiar
- Familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Unfamiliar
- Very unfamiliar.

Each individual response on the five-point Likert scale was awarded a numeric score, with very familiar = 5, familiar = 4, somewhat familiar = 3, unfamiliar = 2 and very unfamiliar = 1.

The first three questions of the survey were categorical questions (Q4, Q5, Q6) asking what the interviewee's professional role was and what educational setting they came from.

For example, Question 4:

Are you a headteacher?

- Yes
- No.

And Question 5:

Are you an acting headteacher?

- Yes
- No.

Following the scoring of the data, I processed it for analysis utilising SPSS. I opted for SPSS because it was a software programme familiar with Cardiff University and its accessibility was well suited for the online survey. Additionally, I selected SPSS because it provided access to technical support which could assist in addressing any arising questions or concerns. The data from the Qualtrics software programme was inputted to SPSS ready for analysis to create an SPSS database. A value was given to each participant who had taken part in the survey, with other columns with variables such as start and end date and language used as the survey could be completed in English or Cymraeg.

4.8.7 Phase Two – Exploring the Quantitative Data

The next stage was to identify potential errors of missing data within the dataset. Errors typically arise when participants provide scores outside the variable range or input incorrect numbers into the dataset. Missing data may occur when participants skip questions, and for ethical reasons it was imperative to adopt a strategy for handling any missing data to prevent skewing the dataset (George and Mallery 2001). I utilised the SPSS feature of arranging variables numerically, which facilitated the identification of errors or missing data during data inspection, deleting those participants who had missing data. While this assessment of the data might result in fewer individuals being included in the final sample, it ensured accurate analysis.

According to Creswell (2014), researchers should consider how to address missing data at the outset of any data collection and propose creating a survey that participants are motivated to complete and capable of doing so, thereby minimising

error or missing data occurrences. Creswell (2014) further argued that missing data signified a flaw at the design and planning stage. However, I recognised the possibility that some headteachers might not complete the survey due to factors such as the sensitivity of the topic, limited knowledge or interruptions due to their leadership responsibilities. Therefore, I established a set of criteria at the outset to determine the start and completion of the survey so that results would be consistent.

The criterion for deletion of respondents was as follows:

- Any respondent who opened the survey and did not answer any questions at all
- Any respondent who opened the survey and answered Q4 – Are you a headteacher? and/or Q5 Are you an acting headteacher? but did not answer any further questions
- Any respondent who opened the survey and answered Q4, Q5 and Q6 – What type of school do you work in? and did not answer any further questions in the survey.

4.8.8 Phase Two – Analysing the Data

The data from the online survey data was analysed to address each of the three research questions. I conducted a univariate analysis on each of the questions to determine the central tendencies, to see the distribution of responses and to ascertain how a typical person responded. Measures of central tendency, such as the median and mode, were utilised for the continuous data of each descriptive question that required a rating on the five-point Likert scale.

A bivariate analysis was performed using Spearman's rank order correlation coefficients. This was because I was interested in the strength and direction of variation between the ordinal variables. Crosstabulations and chi-square were considered as alternatives, but these would not provide an insight into the strength of the relationships between the variables. In addition, in many cases the assumption of having an expected cell count of five or more for the chi-square test would have been violated. Hypothesis testing served as a method to compare relationships between the different survey questions with Creswell's (2014) five-step framework for the hypothesis testing:

- Identify a null and alternative hypothesis.
- Set the level of significance.
- Collect the data.
- Compute the sample statistic.
- Decide whether to reject the null hypothesis.

The significance level for this study was set at 0.05, indicating that there was a 5% chance that any observed differences in the data could be attributed to random variation, while 95% of the data was considered statistically significant. This threshold was chosen due to the descriptive nature of the online survey questions, which could be subject to human error or misunderstandings. To assess the significance of the online data, SPSS was used to calculate the probability (p) value. The p-value helped determine whether the observed relationships between variables were due to chance or if they were statistically significant. Specifically, if the p-value was below the 0.05 threshold, it was interpreted as showing a statistically significant relationship between the variables. Conversely, if the p-value was above 0.05, the null hypothesis, suggesting no significant relationship, was retained. This design-making process allowed for the evaluation of variable relationships and their statistical significance.

For example:

RQ1 – What are headteachers' understandings and use of the PSTLs for their own and their school teaching staff's professional development?

Q8 – Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the PSTLs?

Q9 – How often do you use the PSTLs for yourself as a school leader?

Hypothesis – There is a relationship between levels of familiarity and usage for headteachers' own professional learning and development.

Null Hypothesis – There is no relationship between levels of familiarity and usage for headteachers' own professional learning and development.

4.8.9 Phase Two – Representing the Analysis

The results of both the univariate and bivariate analysis were represented in tables to summarise the data. These tables served as a means of organising the dataset.

The data was represented with a combination of visual and written text as an effective means of analysing the data.

To enhance the clarity and interpretability of the findings, bar charts were generated to illustrate trends within the dataset. These visual aids not only facilitated the identification of patterns and relationships but also served as a mechanism for reporting the significance of hypothesis tests in the bivariate analysis.

Additionally, there was an open text question in the survey (Q21), and where appropriate the headteacher comments are shared within the findings and included in the analysis.

4.8.10 Phase Two – Interpreting the Analysis

The conclusion of the analysis of the online survey data involved a comprehensive interpretation which included a synthesis of key findings and an explanation of the results. Limitations and future study recommendations (see Chapter 8 Discussion) included potential weaknesses or challenges encountered during the research process; these limitations comprised considerations such as lack or loss of headteacher participation in the survey and the type of school settings. By presenting these limitations, this study aimed to provide valuable insights for future research work embarking on similar investigations (Creswell 2014).

This was followed with suggestions for future study recommendations (see Chapter 8 Discussion).

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has identified the methods by which the three research questions in this study (see Section 4.1.1) have been answered. By taking a pragmatic view to this research, I have been able to shape the way that all three phases have been designed and conducted. In the next chapters the findings of this study will be analysed in preparation for future discussion and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Findings 1 (Elite Interviews)

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, findings from the five expert interviews from Phase One will be analysed and presented. The subsequent two chapters will present the findings of data from Phase Two of the study, which involved a national online survey, and Phase Three, which involved interviews with sixteen headteachers.

The data presented in this findings chapter was taken from expert interviews from five key people involved in the inception of the development of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTLs) (2018). The aim of these interviews was to provide clarity around the thinking which underpinned the PSTLs. Specifically, the five experts represented the following: the professional body in Wales which has responsibility for regulating headteachers' and teacher's professional conduct; a Welsh Government (WG) official accountable for educational policy; and other key people involved in the design and creation of the PSTLs (See Chapter 4). Each expert interviewee was allocated a number which corresponds with the order in which they were interviewed, i.e. 1 refers to the expert who was interviewed first, 2 refers to the expert who was interviewed second and so on.

The expert interview findings in this chapter explore the relationship of the trajectory of the professional learning and development of headteachers in Wales across three waves of policymaking: Jane Davidson (2000–2007 Wave 1), Leighton Andrews (2009–2013 Wave 2) and Kirsty Williams (2016–2021 Wave 3). The findings explore how these three waves have compromised headteachers' professionalism, leading at times to a lack of clarity and direction in the professional learning needs of headteachers (OECD 2021).

The main themes drawn from the data of the expert interviews are professional agency, autonomy and accountability. Professional agency and autonomy of the PSTLs will be explored through the analytical lens of occupational and organisational models of professionalism, utilising this typology to interpret and understand the data. Additionally, the findings will explore headteacher agency and autonomy in relation to the broader decision-making processes which led to the establishment of the PSTLs: how 'risk taking' has been theorised from a WG and headteachers' perspective in relation to teacher agency. Accountability focuses on external

influences in creating a ‘trust’ environment, the existence of meso-level partnerships and the role of the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) in relation to the PSTLs and the professional learning and development of headteachers.

5.2 Understanding Headteacher Professionalism

The changes in educational policies over the past two decades have brought uncertainties and ambiguities in the expectations of the role of the headteacher which have influenced the understanding of the term ‘headteachers’ professionalism’. The reasons behind these changes, as already stated, coincide with WG policymaking over the past two decades. One of the key themes that have emerged from these political changes has been the reorientation of ‘headteachers’ professionalism’. For example, Waves 1 and 2 are perceived as eras which had a more formal organisational approach in comparison to Wave 3, which adopted a more collegial, co-constructive occupational approach to professional learning. The organisational and occupational economy is a key policy discourse in professional debates, but at this present time it is also a key policy discourse within organisational and occupational accounts of professional practice.

In Wales, this has been a political discourse over the past three waves of Welsh policy, becoming a key debate between government policy and the teaching profession. As discussed in Section 3.7 Headteachers’ Professional Learning in Wales, there were different approaches to teacher professionalism within the phases of educational policymaking in Wales. The literature review indicated that within Wave 2 there was a move to a more centralised and organisational approach to professional work. The expert interviews suggested that the introduction of the PSTLs was an attempt to pivot back towards an occupational understanding of teachers as professionals.

Data from the expert interviews will seek to ascertain the political reasons and decision-making processes in relation to this policy discourse and where the PSTLs sit within this reorientation as part of the wider reform agenda. A starting point for this data was to ascertain the understandings of headteacher professionalism from the five experts who were key players in the inception of the PSTLs.

The expert interviews positioned the introduction of the PSTLs as a government strategy to redeem headteacher professionalism as part of its educational reform journey.

> *First and foremost, to regain in the profession that word professionalism for school leaders and for it to be seen as that, the process of growth. (Expert 4)*

According to Expert 4, it is important to re-establish professionalism in the role of school leaders. Usage of the phrase 'first and foremost, to regain in the profession' indicates that professionalism was somehow lost and now needs recovering or restoring. This view relates to the trajectory of headteachers' professional learning over the three waves of Welsh policymaking. This is confirmed by Expert 4 when using the phrase 'for it to be seen as that the process of growth', which emphasises that 'professionalism' is synonymous with growth and development and aligns with the shift towards a more collegial, co-constructive approach to Welsh policymaking in Wave 3. For Expert 4, professionalism was not about hitting performance targets but fostering growth.

Expert 3 talked about the introduction of increased accountability in Wave 2:

> *So, there was a history of performative policymaking in Welsh education, it was quite punitive or seen as punitive in that the one minister some time ago gained international reputation. (Expert 3)*

In their statement, Expert 3 used the phrase 'quite punitive or seen as punitive', which reinforced that a 'performative policymaking' culture had implications for those who underperformed or were unable to comply. In practice, this had consequences for headteachers, resulting in what was considered an increased load of bureaucratic and administrative responsibilities which militated against the occupational understanding of professional 'growth' which this interviewee was promoting (Connolly et al. 2018). One of the consequences of this 'performative' policymaking is, according to Expert 3, the development of a culture of defensiveness where teachers and headteachers are reluctant to employ forms of reflection which, inevitably, involve recognising one's weaknesses:

That is what the international literature tells us, that if people are on performative cultures with punitive consequences where they are going to be held to account, which is what the Welsh education was, they are less likely to be candid about their progress and what they can and can't do, and so this was something of a reaction to that. (Expert 3)

The data suggests an oblique critique of some of the performance measures introduced within Wave 2. As the literature states, the education minister at the time (Andrews 2011) made the decisions that were felt necessary to raise educational standards in Wales. Against a backdrop of poor Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) performance table results (2007, 2011), governance took the form of a more regulated organisational model of professionalism, which on reflection could now been viewed as 'punitive'. Previous research has similarly evidenced that at different points people rally to occupational and organisational models of professional practice for different reasons (Evetts 2011). As the literature informs us, Wave 2 is represented as a high accountability system; however, as already mentioned, this is contexed and will be discussed further in Chapter 8 Discussion.

One of the significant influences in the realignment of Welsh education is the OECD, whose recommendations have played a pivotal role in shaping Welsh education policy for the past two decades. An example of this is the involvement of the OECD in facilitating the revision of the PSTLs, which was carried out by inviting WG officials to participate in discussions with other European OECD countries with similar performance data.

And what the OECD does, their core perspective it does that brokerage, it puts you into a particular space, it asks particular reporting and research to take place before you enter the space, and then you gather around the problem of this territory or country and say this is what is working for us or not working or sometimes you find that there is a structural thing in the way. (Expert 3)

I think Austria and Belgium and France, Holland and Estonia were there, but they were represented in territory that we were in, which I can't remember. But the point is this that in one of those territories you had high

> *accountability data running right through the education system but used in a critical and enabling way. So, people felt really comfortable to say my data shows a challenge in this, but I can't see how to crack this problem, where can we go with this, but the data is really clear that it's a problem. (Expert 3)*

During interview, Expert 3 expanded on the subject discussing how the WG regard the OECD as a 'brokerage' system. This indicates that the WG perceived the OECD as an active rather than passive participant, one that actively contributes to the development of the Welsh education system. The broader implications are that the OECD countries which Expert 3 later talked about have established an educational model where pupil data is seen as a strategy for improvement rather than a means of punitive accountability. Expert 3 talked about how this approach promoted collaborative working and honest and open discussions about their countries' data without feeling criticised. The collaborative approach stated by Expert 3 suggests strongly that the OECD has moved towards an occupational model of professionalism where common ideas and challenges are shared.

> *One of the key characteristics of an occupational model is a high level of trust and confidence within the system; trust and confidence from the WG in implementing the policy changes, and trust and confidence in headteachers in enacting the policy changes. The issue is whether we are granting headteachers and teachers the freedom to take risks in their professional roles and how this affects their agency and autonomy.*
>
> *There was a residual fear, a feeling that whatever you said at WG about the standards, I am still accountable in this way, either to my parents, my LA, my governing body, and that was a fearful environment. Leaders were afraid to fail, and they didn't think that failure was the diet of leadership in the way that most liberal professional systems do acknowledge that occasional failure is part of the diet of growth. (Expert 3)*

Expert 3 talked rhetorically about the Welsh system that previously considered performative accountability systems representative of Wave 2 had discouraged headteachers from taking risks and engaging in innovative practices because of the threat of failure. Both the organisational and occupational models identify with

contrasting concepts of failure within a system. An organisational environment identifies with what Expert 3 relates to as a ‘fearful environment’ where ‘leaders were afraid to fail’, in comparison to an occupational environment which promotes risk taking and regards occasional failure as part of ‘the diet of growth’.

One of the consequences that Expert 3 identified as a result of the performative culture of Wave 2 was both defensive practice and a wider distrust towards government from teachers and headteachers. Expert 3 suggests that because of this distrust some headteachers felt that what they may have been given is the ‘freedom to fail’. This aligns with the perspective of Priestley et al. (2015), who argue that agency is also related to capacity and resource.

> *The question is does the system really trust the government enough to accept all this responsibility this new paradigm is offering. So, at one level you are saying here is the new standards and there is a load of freedom which comes with it and a load of enablers which come with it, and at other times people were hearing ‘over to you now; if this goes wrong, it’s your problem because we are not giving you the fixed rigid tool which we gave you before’. (Expert 3)*
>
> *So, if you have an accountability environment which is based on outcomes, then giving people freedom, offering subsidiarity, offering teacher agency, all those others doesn’t mean much in that high accountability space. (Expert 3)*

Expert 3 highlights a key aspect of this ongoing professional debate with the question, ‘Does the system really trust the government enough to accept all this responsibility this new paradigm is offering?’ Expert 3 highlights the interplay between trust and accountability, questioning whether headteachers genuinely trust the WG enough to embrace the increased responsibility offered under this occupational model of professionalism. While the WG has shown a commitment to an occupational practice model, the implementation in practice for some headteachers remains sensitive. This shift in thinking raises questions on both accounts. On the one hand it involves striking a balance between granting headteachers greater freedom and responsibility while at the same time still holding them accountable for their actions and decisions. Although it is understood that any

changes made towards an occupational model require reviewed measures of accountability (Evetts 2011), it is the approach taken to enforce the accountability measures for headteachers which remains in debate.

On the other hand, concerns arise about whether headteachers and teachers have the correct contextual conditions for agency to be achieved (Priestley et al. 2015). As Expert 3 stated, offering teacher agency 'doesn't mean much in that high accountability space'. According to Biesta and Tedder (2007), the achievement of agency always results from the interplay of individual efforts, resources and contextual factors, which can both enable and constrain individuals depending on their environments. The question is how the WG is going to achieve this balance of accountability within an occupational framework which fosters professional growth without 'constraining' headteachers and teachers.

The transition to an environment which promotes headteacher/teacher agency was clearly an issue for the experts. Expert 3 talked about how accountability systems can hinder professional growth and development, and Expert 5 talked about ways to transition from a model previously characterised by fear and accountability, as Expert 3 stated above 'a fearful environment', to one which promotes agency.

> *There is the question of how far that accountability and innovation and how far it can hamper professional appetite for taking on any kind of change at all, even if that change has got a sound evidence base. It's a safe place to carry on with what we have been doing, the accountability environment that we have been doing it. (Expert 3)*
>
> *Yeah! I think the early thinking was how can we move this model from this, like the accountability fear into one of agency? And how can it be seen as that… (Expert 5)*

The main issue was how do you get headteachers to embrace a system that previously created a 'fearful environment'? All the expert interviews highlight the importance of agency, a key debate discussed in the literature review and central to debates within professional education. In these expert interviews agency is highlighted, emphasising the ability of headteachers to maintain control within a collaborative environment (Kauppinen et al. 2020) rather than being mandated. The larger issue concerns how agency manifests in the PSTLs and the degree of agency

and autonomy granted to headteachers and teachers to shape their professional practices within an internal accountability system.

Experts 3 and 4 framed the PSTLs within the waves of Welsh educational policymaking in terms of a move away from the performative excesses of what was identified as Wave 2 policy:

> *So, I would say theoretically or culturally the intellectual and professional underpinning of the move towards this paradigm for the standards was a reaction towards a performative management. (Expert 4)*

Towards the latter stages of Wave 2 there was a recognition of the negative effects of overly prescriptive 'performance'-driven cultures (OECD 2014, 2017). From this emerged the promotion of a more occupational understanding of professional practice and attempts to promote the agency of teachers and headteachers and the adoption of a New Curriculum (Donaldson 2015), which laid the foundations for what was identified as Wave 3. However, as Expert 3 acknowledged, the existing professional teaching standards did not reflect these changes.

> *The current standards were discontinuous with the way that the new curriculum feels, discontinuous with the new cultures of professional learning that were emerging through OECD and across Europe at the time and they needed a refresh. (Expert 3)*

One of the key debates among the expert group was in relation to the new PSTLs as being the 'vanguard' for change or, alternatively, reflecting and capturing changes which had already taken place. Expert 2 supported the latter position:

> *I don't have a problem with WG choosing to start with the standards, but the standards would have been more welcomed and grabbed by more people if the standards had been later on. At the time the OECD was talking about Schools as Learning Organisations and all those things, and the standards development fitted that. (Expert 2)*

While Expert 5 acknowledged some of the problems with an early launch of the PSTLs, they explained clearly the rationale behind the 'vanguard' approach discussed above:

> *I thought it was two years too early personally, but I suppose you have to start somewhere to break through, haven't you? And Graham Donaldson had written a report which said that you needed a new curriculum, and if you are going to have a new curriculum, you have to have teachers which can make it work. If you have teachers that make it work, you need headteachers that make it work and then you have to have accountability in tune. (Expert 5)*

While outlining their position and being critical of an early launch of the PSTLs, Expert 5 did acknowledge some positive outcomes. They expressed a personal belief that the initiative began prematurely by two years but recognised the necessity of starting at some point to make progress. Expert 5 referenced Graham Donaldson's report (2015), which promoted a new curriculum for Wales and emphasised the need for teachers in the system who can implement the New Curriculum effectively. Expert 5 extends this view to headteachers, who they also consider play a crucial role in ensuring the curriculum's success, and the importance of aligning accountability measures with this new educational framework. This perspective of Expert 5 highlights the interdependence of curriculum development, headteacher and teacher readiness, and accountability in educational reform. However, Expert 5 did reflect during interview on their early view of timing of the PSTLs:

> *Perhaps I will take back what I said about the standards being too early, because what the standards have done is informed other aspects of the development. So, consequently, the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) developed out of that… (Expert 5)*

The timing of the implementation of the PSTLs appeared a challenge for the WG on two fronts. Firstly, it was influenced by two key policy levers, the Donaldson Report (2015) and the OECD (2017) recommendations. The Donaldson Report (2015) advised the WG that a new curriculum was necessary, while the OECD (2017) urged for an accelerated development of the PSTLs as part of the reform efforts. Additionally, alignment with the SLO agenda and its National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) agenda were important elements of consideration.

> *The theory was that if you could unleash teachers and show that through the standards you would give confidence to the teaching profession that the curriculum and all the associated developments with Successful Futures was a genuine belief on the part of the government. (Expert 5)*

Expert 5 suggests that 'if you could unleash teachers', this would give the teaching profession more autonomy and agency. The use of the word 'unleash' suggests that teachers' capabilities and potential were constrained, and similarly again Expert 5 talked about teachers 'exercising freedoms' indifferent to previous 'performance managerial' environments.

Expert 3 had an alternative view: 'it was an opportunity to generate a level of trust and confidence in our workforce'.

These interviewees argued that granting greater autonomy and agency to headteachers and teachers in their professional development will regain a status of teacher professionalism marked by a renewed sense of trust. In the context of Wales, the revised PSTLs go beyond being just a WG strategy for school improvement. Instead, they show a commitment by WG to improve relations, placing value on the views and contributions of its headteachers and teachers.

The transition by the WG towards a set of PSTLs that promote agency and autonomy, in contrast to previous performative approaches to professional standards, brought additional challenges. One of the challenges which emerged related to the lack of clarity within the middle tier of education policymaking in Wales and who has the responsibility for the professional standards.

> *So, the regulatory body continues to have a fundamental problem of the fact that the WG own the standards, because it's a really odd situation that if the regulatory body registers against the code of conduct and practice that we own and against a set of standards that we don't own. And that is really, really peculiar, OK?(Expert 1)*

Expert 5 had an alternative view on ownership of the PSTLs:

> *It never really bothered me because I was more concerned with how they were going to use it, were they going to use it well. I suppose if a teacher*

is in trouble and going to be struck off, then the regulator would use the standards to debate whether they were struck off. (Expert 5)

The statements above highlight a significant anomaly in the regulatory process, where the regulatory body in Wales does not have ownership of the standards like other international countries. In Wales, the regulatory body sits within the middle tier alongside the NAEL, the regional consortia, local authorities, Estyn and other external bodies. The interplay between these middle-tier relationships will be explored later in this chapter. What has been identified from the expert interviews so far is tension for one middle-tier partner over who 'owns' the PSTLs.

For us in Wales responsibility for the standards lives with the WG. So, editorial control, for example responsibility for any liability surrounding the standards if they were to be somehow dangerous, the WG owns those standards and that is written in regulation. (Expert 3)

So, EWC continues to have a fundamental problem of the fact that the WG own the standards because it's a really odd situation that if EWC registers against the code of conduct and practice that we own and against a set of standards that we don't own. (Expert 1)

The distribution of responsibility of the PSTLs initiated a discussion among the two experts. Expert 3 argued that the responsibility of the PSTLs lies with the WG, while Expert 1 suggests that there is tension regarding the ownership of the PSTLs. There are not clear guidelines of responsibility within the middle tier, which has created tensions around where responsibility rests for teachers' professional learning, development and regulation.

The twin foci of development and regulation relate to some tensions with regards to what the actual function of the PSTLs themselves are, and Expert 1 develops this argument further:

There is a real complex argument there, and that's why standards should be over with us because, like I said, the way that it looks to teachers is that you trust us to regulate, you trust us to strike people off, you trust us

to accredit teacher training programmes, but you don't trust us to bone and shape around standards. (Expert 1)

So, the regulatory body in Wales is weaker, and it's a model that's paid for by the profession, which means that the profession doesn't own the standards, which is not right, or fair or normal. It's that distrust of the profession to own the standards themselves is that what that is, but why are WG holding on? (Expert 1)

Expert 1 said the 'standards should be over with us', which implies that headteachers and teachers are trusted to engage in other professional practices, but in Expert 1's view, the WG 'don't trust us to bone and shape' the PSTL's for the teaching profession. In Expert 1's view the regulatory body, which is owned and run by the teaching profession, should also own the professional standards by which the profession is being judged. For this interviewee there was evidence of a residual distrust. Subsequently, in Expert 1's view they suggest that the WG does not trust the regulatory body to own and modify the PSTLs. This is an interesting argument considering that the approach taken by the WG, as recommended by the OECD (2014, 2017), is to regain trust in the teaching profession. Yet, as Expert 1's interview identified, the PSTLs are owned by the WG, which potentially casts doubt around fostering agency and trust as part of the future shaping of the profession.

An example of this is the monitoring of the Professional Learning Passports (PLPs), which are owned by the regulatory body in Wales and not by the WG. This raises the question whether the WG trusted the teaching profession to engage in a self-regulatory teaching standards model, which are practices within an occupational framework. However, accountability for the monitoring of the PLP's lies with the regulatory body, headteachers and their teaching staff. This debate continues in Section 5.4 Headteachers Use of the PSTLs.

Additionally, there is tension around what the role of the PSTLs is perceived to be: whether they are benchmarks or tools to promote agency and professional learning and development.

As Experts 2 and 5 stated:

> *Well, first of all it was a question of what you are trying to achieve. Are you trying to achieve compliance or are you trying to achieve responsibility and autonomy? Are you trying to achieve that it's about teachers believing about developing? (Expert 5)*
>
> *They're all about agency and autonomy. They're all about exercising. (Expert 2)*

There are two contrasting tensions that have arisen from the data from Expert 2 and 5 on the implementation of the PSTLs by the WG. The first involves the objective of achieving compliance, which implies that certain rules and regulations are followed. The second regards the objective of achieving responsibility and autonomy, and for headteachers and teachers to take responsibility and ownership of their actions.

The challenge facing the Welsh system is that the three waves of educational policymaking have shaped these objectives, characterised in terms of agency (Baldwin, 2022). As the literature stated, in Wave 1 policy focus was on 'made in Wales' divergence strategies from Westminster, UK. This was followed in Wave 2 by a period of increased centralisation of WG control with a focus on data, standards and categorisation, where professional standards were used for benchmarking and, to some extent, accountability purposes. Wave 3 has seen a culture of collegial collaboration with a renewed emphasis on professional agency and teacher autonomy (Biesta et al. 2015), whereby the PSTLs are seen as a framework to promote teacher agency and autonomy. However, within this context the professional standards are seen to be owned not by the profession but by those that regulate it

However, the overarching challenge for the WG, as stated earlier by Expert 4, was to regain 'that word professionalism for school leaders and for it to be seen as that, the process of growth'. The challenge lies in striking a balance between accountability and trust while determining appropriate levels of influence on headteachers' professionalism. The experts talked further about how these changes to the PSTLs as a framework for personal growth and development in Wave 3 could be achieved.

Expert 2 talked about the shift in responsibility:

> *It was about identifying that the responsibility of using these standards lies with me and I use these standards for me to develop. (Expert 2)*

While this data has raised issues around accountability and trust, it also highlights how headteachers' perception of the revised teaching standards was also a matter of concern. As mentioned by Expert 4, the WG made efforts to engage headteachers in the presentation of the PSTLs:

> *It was presented as a developmental tool rather than a competency model. (Expert 4)*

Similarly,

> *The key principle was that it was a developmental tool rather than perceived as punitive. (Expert 2)*

However, Expert 1 gave an alternative view:

> *So, globally, it is generally recognised that professional standards are built on what is loosely known as the know, do how model. Standards are set out and all you need as a professional is what you need to know, to do and how. (Expert 1)*

The data from Experts 2, 4 and 1 show a comparison of views regarding their perceptions of the revised PSTLs. Expert 1 data identified with a competency-based professional standards framework. It aligns with the 'know, do how model' and provides headteachers and teachers clarity with what they should believe, know and be able to do (Mulcahy, 2011). According to Mulcahy (2011), this type of professional framework benefits headteachers and teachers because it sets out clear expectations and guidelines. On the other hand, Connell (2009) argued that when headteachers and teachers are presented with a standards framework setting out exactly what they should and shouldn't do, it can undermine teacher professionalism. Considering both these views in respect of the WG approach to the revised PSTLs, tension exists between Experts 2,4 and 1 data over differences in opinions on what the revised model should look like in practice.

However, Expert 5 had a differing view:

> *In a sense if you say to teachers these are your standards and you want the best standards, you don't want to be called a standard teacher, do you? You want to be the best teacher you can be, so consequently you are embracing these standards and take them forward; they are about*

> *you, not about proving to the system that you are good. Now, if you are a headteacher who has always had teachers proving the job right, that is a real shift. The same with the heads, these are your standards; we want you to be the best headteacher you can. (Expert 5)*

Expert 5 talked about the focus of the PSTLs as a developmental and self-regulatory standards model opposed to headteachers working within a regulatory framework: 'they are about you, not about proving to the system that you are good'. This view of Expert 5 aligns with Experts 2 and 4, who earlier stated that the PSTLs were presented as a developmental tool rather than a compliance model.

The expert data suggests that the emphasis on the revised PSTLs was not solely on updating teaching standards, but the approach taken was equally important. For instance, the phrase by Expert 5 'if you are a headteacher who has always had teachers proving the job right, that is a real shift' demonstrates this change in approach from previous compliance models identified in Wave 2. In these teaching standards models, headteachers focused on evaluating teachers' performance. However, the new approach by the WG encouraged headteachers to support teachers in their professional growth and development.

Expert 5 talked about the significance of the PSTLs and how they could be interpreted by the teaching profession. According to Expert 5, presenting a standards model as a way of teachers improving their own pedagogical practices could serve as a motivating factor for their professional growth. This was highlighted by Expert 5: 'these standards would help teachers to be better at helping the children to learn what they were trying to develop'.

Expert 3 had a different emphasis:

> *The intellectual and professional framework in which it sat needed to be consistent with the culture of the new curriculum, and if you just draw those two frameworks alongside one another and the new curriculum is framed as empowering, liberating, enabling and not granular in structure as to what to teach on the first day, there is a deal more school level autonomy that the principle of subsidiarity as they call it, and we really needed the standards to reflect that range. (Expert 3)*

The key message from Expert 3's data above suggests that the approach taken to the PSTLs was aligned to the New Curriculum's focus on granting increased autonomy for headteachers and teachers. This is clarified by the term 'subsidiarity' and 'reflect that range', indicating that the approach taken was inclusive and designed to reflect the freedom and flexibility offered by the New Curriculum. However, it wasn't just the New Curriculum which initiated an occupational way of working; equally important was the SLO agenda. Together, these two policies and the revised PSTLs were the key policy levers for the introduction of the new co-constructive way of policymaking for headteachers and teachers in Wales. Secondary to this debate is the lesser consideration given to the performance management structure in Wales, which was rooted in a culture of performance-driven policymaking in Wave 2. This aspect will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.3 Headteachers' Understanding of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership

The following data from the expert interviews highlights that although the approach taken for the implementation of the PSTLs was in principle agreed by most of the experts, there were challenges which the experts faced, such as how to engage headteachers in understanding and using the PSTLs.

Expert 4 talked about the approach taken:

> *I remember the conversation was very much around there is not meant to be any definitive description of a standard or meaning of a standard, more about professional dialogue of a standard which would engender meaning in a school between two teachers, between teacher and leader or between different leaders so the standards could be interpreted.(Expert 4)*

Some experts thought the PSTLs were easy to understand:

> *I thought they were all relatively straightforward to understand and the whole purpose of them was to have that initial discussion to decide what those standards meant for you in your context. (Expert 5)*

The data highlights that great emphasis was placed on encouraging professional dialogue between headteachers and teachers to help them understand the PSTLs. Expert 4 and 5 talked about the importance of presenting the PSTLs as a framework that headteachers could utilise aligned with their own contexts.

Specifically, Expert 5 talked about the language that was considered:

> *There were five words which gelled together, pedagogy which is at the heart of it and collaboration which helps it to share; you have all these phrases, and people were attracted to that… (Expert 5)*

Expert 5 referred to the PSTL model, which has five standards (pedagogy, collaboration, professional learning, innovation and leadership), although they only talked about two of the professional standards, pedagogy and collaboration, as a reference for the PSTLs to promote professional dialogue. The experts took time to create a PSTL framework which headteachers and their school teaching staff would engage in, and the choice of language that was used was considered important.

> *And the argument was that if you are asking these five standards of teachers to take through to leadership as well. So, that is why you have the five words and had I known this was coming I would be advising the word responsibility or something else instead of leadership; in leadership it's sort of obvious that was there. (Expert 5)*

Data from Expert 5 indicated that there was an issue related to the PSTLs for teachers and their applicability to leadership roles. Specifically, the data identifies that the word 'leadership' is one of the five professional standards, and the word leadership is also one of the descriptors. Expert 5 stated in hindsight if they had foreseen this discussion that the choice of terminology on reflection could have been different and a word like 'responsibility' could have been chosen. However, Expert 5 indicates that the term 'leadership' itself is clear and the comment 'sort of obvious' indicates that the term itself is self-explanatory when related to leadership.

The experts had to make decisions on how the PSTLs would inform leadership and how they would be helpful to headteachers in developing their own professional practice and agency, as well as that of their school teaching staff. Expert 5 illustrated how, on reflection they did this:

> *We had a long discussion on whether we should write interim descriptors. So, if this is what a beginner-level leader looks like and this is what a highly effective sustained leader looks like, so what is a good, very good and excellent and so on. (Expert 5)*

The experts felt strongly that the PSTLs had to be different to previous competence standards models.

> *Now we could have written a matrix: this is one to five of this standard etc., but we all felt collectively that if we did that it would become a tick box exercise. (Expert 5)*

The data showed a collective decision was not to create a matrix with specific levels to each standard because there was concern that such an approach would reduce the standards to a tick box exercise or checklist like the previous competency standards models. The decision to avoid this type of model emphasised a commitment to a model which was developmental and self-regulatory, as stated earlier by Experts 3 and 4.

While some experts found the PSTLs straightforward to understand, the introduction of new terminology such as 'innovation' and 'collaboration' – two of the five standards – was perceived as a potential challenge by some experts, yet it showed a commitment to a self-regulatory model.

5.4 Headteachers' Use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership

The challenge for the experts was to overcome any barriers and to motivate headteachers to actively understand and use the PSTLs not just for themselves, but also for their teaching staff.

> *Oh, we said how on earth are we going to get people to use this, how are you going to get people to record their development, reflect on it and assess themselves against the standards? We said the only way to do it is build it into the system. (Expert 2)*

This is highlighted by Expert 2 with the question, 'how on earth are you going to get people to…', which implies a recognition of the difficulty facing the WG for headteachers and teachers to participate in the process. Expert 2 raises the issues here in relation to the PSTLs being seen as a standalone by headteachers, and thus the potential for them to be under-utilised. Expert 2 argued that to prevent this they needed to be part of wider systemic reform of the system and become integral to that systemic change. Expert 2 offered a solution, 'to build it into the system', which indicates that the only way to ensure engagement was to make it a natural part of

the professional development process. This debate is explored further in this section, when the experts talked about long-term sustainability of the PSTLs and the engagement of headteachers and school teaching staff, especially trainee teachers in initial teacher education (ITE) and Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) at the start of their careers.

Recent research in Wales (Baldwin 2022) has illustrated the high levels of isolation and risk that headteachers have experienced as a consequence of both the accountability mechanisms introduced in Wave 2 and the COVID-19 pandemic. The low trust system in Wave 2 created an atmosphere of competition rather than professional communication and collaboration. This intensified headteachers' feelings of isolation (Baldwin 2022). This is supported by Expert 5:

> *They are looking at two directions, aren't they? Looking at their staff and they are looking for their governance and their local authority. You can understand why it's different for leadership for headteachers, particularly to take it on; what you then get is headteachers who are nervous about a world that they don't know, and if you are a teacher you have other teachers doing this, you are within a group. But if you are a headteacher, even though one of the standards is collaboration and you haven't been used to collaboration because you are in a competition, your aim is to beat the other schools in the area, that's really hard. (Expert 5)*

The data reveals that headteachers face challenges from their staff, their governors and local authorities. It could be argued that the rapid pace of change from the educational reform agenda in Wales has impacted on headteachers in both Wave 2 and Wave 3, which could make some headteachers, according to Expert 5, 'nervous about a world they don't know'. As the literature review in this study highlighted, two OECD reports (2014, 2017) both identified issues in the Welsh education system described as 'reform fatigue' (OECD 2017, p. 21). Further research carried out by Connolly et al. (2018, p. 619) aligned with these OECD findings, arguing that the top-down accountability and hierarchal control measures imposed in Wave 2 have reshaped the role of headteachers to reflect and enact educational policies. Although this may not have been the intended consequence, it has nonetheless resulted in accountability pressures placed on headteachers. Despite the shift towards

occupational professional practices in Wave 3, Expert 5 perceived that headteachers still felt under pressure from accountability demands, particularly from meso-level partners such as local authorities and governance. According to Baldwin (2022), this pressure was exacerbated by a perceived lack of support in their roles, leading to a work overload.

> *The reality, probably, is that the experienced headteachers and teachers probably haven't looked at them too much; that would be my perception, but it's about developing them over the coming years. (Expert 2)*

Expert 2 perceived that experienced headteachers and teachers would be the group of practitioners who would be the least engaged with the PSTLs. This could be for several reasons, and they may not feel it necessary to engage with the standards due to their existing knowledge and experience. However, the data recognised that engagement with the PSTLs is a long-term process that headteachers and teachers will gradually adopt.

Both Experts 2 and 5 acknowledge that headteachers, for various reasons, may not have used or considered the PSTLs. What both argue is that the structures need to be in place for the effective use of the PSTLs. Expert 5 locates this change at a school level:

> *I think the standards on their own do nothing, it's how you use them that is the key. Again, I think it was very much down to individual schools and individual governing bodies and headteachers, how they use the leadership standards. (Expert 5)*

Expert 5 acknowledged that the PSTLs as an independent framework are not inherently effective, as their impact is determined by how they are applied by headteachers in practice. The data also highlights the significant role of individual schools, governing bodies and headteachers in applying the PSTLs, implying that the success of the PSTLs largely depends on how headteachers and their schools interpret the PSTLs.

Some headteachers may be hesitant to engage with the PSTLs, particularly those practices they may be unfamiliar with due to their different leadership experiences. One such area discussed by the experts was collaboration. Expert 5 illustrates that

while the rhetoric of collaboration is easy, the realisation can be difficult. They argue that for collaboration to work there must be support provided to headteachers:

> *You can be pleasant to each other and nice to each other and all that, but real collaboration about the work is a real challenge for them. I think it was an area where it was needed; we should have done more on trying to get the headteachers to collaborate in the way that pioneer schools were collaborating about the job of helping the standards to work. (Expert 5)*

The data reveals the difficulties headteachers face in collaborating effectively. It shows that while interactions can be 'pleasant' and 'nice', it can be superficial and often lack depth. Expert 5 highlighted that achieving true collaboration is a significant challenge, noting that maintaining good interpersonal relationships alone isn't enough to ensure productive collaborative working among headteachers. Expert 5 also emphasised the need for more effort to foster collaboration and highlighted the 'pioneer schools' model as an example of effective collaborative practice. The literature review identified that those schools achieving pioneer school status through the co-constructing of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) have advanced more in their professional development compared to those not involved (OECD 2020). Egan and Grigg (2017) suggest that this progress may be linked to the pioneer schools employing PSTLs as a strategy for professional learning, along with engaging in action inquiry, improving auditing skills and utilising PLPs.

The structure of the PSTLs differed from what was previously used in Wales. The new PSTLs were perceived as a framework for professional learning and development, and not a reference point for a more organisational or managerial 'tick box' approach. This, however, resulted in headteachers who have used the previous model feeling that they are too vague:

> *That was one of the bits of feedback I had, that there wasn't enough meat on the bones, and I am thinking it was never meant to be a matrix, highlight number two when you have achieved that. This is what you start with, and this is what you are aiming for… (Expert 5)*

Expert 1 expressed an alternative view:

> *The model is different, and if they open up the standards, they are a hell of a lot more complicated in structure than any other sets of standards you will find. I am not sure this is a good idea. I am not sure that this helps professionals, but that was the decision that was made. But we still haven't got the things that should come with a set of standards. You haven't got a professional body or government promoting them, explaining them, helping people use them, having exemplification; these are massive blockers for them actually working. (Expert 1)*

Experts 1 and 5 had differing opinions on the structure of the PSTLs. Expert 5 viewed the PSTL model as intended to be self-regulatory, driven by headteachers and teachers, aligning with the occupational professional practice model (Evetts 2012). Conversely, Expert 1 felt that the structure proposed by Expert 5 was too open-ended. Expert 1 argued that the PSTLs are distinct from other models of teaching standards and emphasised the need for adequate support and promotion of the PSTLs among headteachers.

According to Expert 1, the complexity of the PSTLs and the absence of key components they associate with an effective set of teaching standards could hinder their acceptance within the teaching profession. While Expert 1 agreed with the decision to change the teaching standards, they believed there are 'massive blockers' preventing their successful implementation. They argued that these 'blockers' stem from the lack of a professional body or government actively promoting the PSTLs. Expert 1 emphasised that headteachers still require significant support in implementing the PSTLs, a view that aligns with Priestley et al. (2015, p. 135), who argue that attention must be given to the 'cultural and structural domains' that shape teachers' work, such as support and resources. They contend that granting teachers 'autonomy', as seen in the PSTLs' self-regulatory framework, is insufficient without proper support, which has been a key issue in the implementation of the PSTLs within Wave 3.

Another challenge facing the experts was determining the format of the PSTLs. Transition to a digital, interactive format faced criticism. Initially, this was disappointing considering that the focus was to produce a set of teaching standards which would be accessible and easy to understand. However, some headteachers

preferred the more traditional document format compared to an interactive format which allowed users to explore different sections according to their own professional development needs. The choice by the experts to choose an interactive website format was done intentionally to encourage a personalised approach to professional development and growth. The debate over the PSTLs being interactive was not merely one of technology. The decision to move to a more interactive approach was to try to move away from the professional standards being seen as a tool for 'ticking boxes'. Those experts who preferred the more traditional printout of the teaching standards highlighted that this could be a barrier for some headteachers in engaging with the new self-regulatory approach offered by the PSTLs.

> *I think it was about the introduction of the standards and making it clear, and again a lot of people didn't like the idea that they couldn't have a printout. I don't think it was ever published as a document. It was also this interactive PDF, and again there was criticism about that. Again, it was meant to be something that you could jump around and not go from front cover to back cover. You don't start at standard one and go through to standard 3;4 you can choose the standards where you feel you want to make some progress and in theory record that progress on the PLP. (Expert 5)*

However, when the PSTLs were launched, this ambitious interactive element was lost as they were first launched in a PDF format which restricted the interactive element.

> *I was disappointed that we didn't get the website developed; it never came to fruit that it was first imagined, and when the first standards were put on the web, they were just basically PDFs. (Expert 5)*
>
> *I thought they would be active not passive; they would be working standards. (Expert 3)*

The data from Expert 5 and Expert 3 highlights significant dissatisfaction with the implementation and functionality of the website for the PSTLs. Expert 5 expresses clear disappointment that the website did not develop as initially envisioned. The expectation was for a comprehensive, interactive platform, but what was delivered were essentially static PDF documents, suggesting a failure to meet the anticipated

potential of the project. The phrase 'never came to fruit' indicates that the initial ideas and goals for the website were not realised, resulting in a standards model that fell short of expectations. Similarly, Expert 3 expected the standards to be 'active' and 'working', meaning they should have been dynamic, interactive, and continuously updated. Expert 3 expressed disappointment about the PSTLs being 'passive', indicating they were merely static documents that lacked interactivity and ongoing engagement. Expert 3's expectation of active PSTLs suggests a desire for a more engaging and user-friendly platform that could facilitate continuous professional development for headteachers and teachers.

One of the ways of engaging headteachers that the WG considered was the use of the PLPs as a standardised platform to promote a consistent approach in using the PSTLs by requiring teachers to upload evidence against the PSTL framework. A headteacher's comment from the survey stated that 'Professional Learning Passports are not easy to navigate', which suggested that this headteacher had experienced difficulties with some of their school teaching staff. Expert 3 identified that those teachers in their early careers were more likely to engage with the PLPs:

> *ITT teachers having to upload to the PLP evidence to each of the standards to start their career for their first year of NQT, their induction year and so on. For the past five years it's been compulsory for new teachers to do this, and therefore, they have a really good understanding of them. Younger teachers coming through, they are setting an example and hopefully they will stay with it. (Expert 3)*

Initial teacher training (ITT) teachers and NQTs must upload evidence to their PLPs to demonstrate their competencies against the PSTLs, ensuring they meet induction requirements as part of a strategy to promote reflective practice for early-career teachers. Expert 3 mentioned that this practice is expected to continue throughout the induction year, aligning with the goal of the PSTLs being a developmental framework. Expert 3 also expressed hope that 'younger teachers' would 'stay with it', highlighting the importance of long-term engagement with the PSTLs. By adhering to PLP requirements early in their careers, Expert 3 believed that teachers set an example for their colleagues. However, one challenge with the PLP system is the increased time and workload required for ITT and NQT professionals to document

and upload evidence, which can be especially demanding for those new to the profession. On the other hand, the headteacher online survey data indicated that the PLPs were not user friendly, potentially causing frustration or even disengagement among more experienced teachers. This could, in turn, limit these teachers' use of the PSTLs for reflecting on their professional learning and development. These findings align with the literature review where the Education Workforce Council (EWC 2021) found that NQTs were more engaged with the PLPs compared to more experienced headteachers and teachers. In addition, this debate is highlighted in the headteachers findings (see Section 7.4 Understanding and Use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership in Relation to Performance Management).

One of the key tensions within the PSTLs was between the regulatory body and the WG. While the PSTLs were promoted as a tool for reflective professional enquiry, there remained a mandated obligation. This tension was explained by Expert 1:

> *If it was mandatory, why do I have to do it? It's just more work… And do I have to check the teacher's PLP and so on? The message about the value of it, if they could stop it being seen as clerical and get it seen as reflective, it would be an absolute boon for teachers and as that comes up through the system. (Expert 1)*

The key point from the data is that when something is mandatory there is often a resistance because of perceptions of the increased workload it potentially brings. In this data the PLPs are perceived as adding an extra layer of work and responsibility that could be viewed by some headteachers as burdensome. The data suggests that if the monitoring of the PLPs is seen as extra clerical work, headteachers and teachers are less likely to engage; however, if headteachers perceive the PLP's as an opportunity for their teaching staff to reflect on their pedagogical practices and positively impact on their learners, they are more likely to engage in the process.

These issues identified by Expert 1 extend beyond what is considered a monitoring role carried out by headteachers in the professional learning and development process. Its key message aligns to earlier debates around trust and accountability between the WG and the teaching profession. On the one hand the WG are implementing a set of PSTLs which fosters agency and autonomy, yet there are

mandatory elements within this framework associated with regulatory organisational professional practice.

An example of this is in the performance management process, which appears to sit within both the organisational and occupational practice frameworks, as stated by Expert 3:

> *So, we did renew the standards, and we did, but we did retain the performance management guidance because the performance management guidance always only ever said you should do performance management in line with the standards. We could have changed that, and we could have said performance management is about growth. It's not about performance, right? (Expert 3).*

Expert 3 acknowledges that the teaching standards were updated while the performance management system remained unchanged. The data suggested that consideration was given to different approaches to performance management more aligned with the philosophy of the revised PSTLs towards a more developmental framework.

The tension between the PSTLs as a tool for performance management and the catalyst for professional development was highlighted more strongly by Expert 4, who argued that there was a tension between the structured nature of performance management:

> *I think they don't particularly develop heads at this moment in time purely because our performance management system is still very, very structured, and to me it is very much the old way of doing things (Expert 4).*

The OECD (2021) identified that the current performance management system in Wales is misaligned to current policymaking. This misalignment has impeded the progress of headteachers in effectively implementing the PSTLs for themselves and their teaching staff. Expert 4 indicated that this has hindered headteachers' understanding and use of the PSTLs. This is problematic since performance management is seen as an intrinsic part of the professional learning process for headteachers. The data from the expert interview aligns with that of OECD (2021)

and Arad (2021), who recommend that current performance management procedures are co-ordinated with current initiatives.

5.5 Middle-Tier Partnerships

The literature has identified developing leadership capacity (OECD 2014, 2017) and professional learning for headteachers as a crucial element of the Welsh reform (Connolly et al. 2018). One approach employed by the WG to promote headteachers' professional learning has led to the creation of meso-level partnerships within the middle tier, such as the creation of meso-level bodies the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) and the regional consortia (RC) to sit alongside the local authorities (LAs), all of whom share responsibility for professional learning. This debate is part of a much wider agenda in relation to the intermediary bodies which existed in Wales pre devolution, and which continued into Wave 2 with a review of localised and regional arrangements.

The main purpose of this, as the literature states, was to improve educational standards in Wales, but it resulted in the WG leaning towards a more organisational model of governance, leading to increased accountability measures. The trajectory of WG approaches towards professional learning and the reasons why these fluctuations have taken place have already been discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. However, the commitment by the WG to create a professional learning system based on trust goes some way to explaining the various strategies that the WG have adopted, particularly in Wave 3.

Within Wave 2 there was the introduction of new tiers. One of these were the RC, which were more directly aligned to the WG and, it was argued, reduced the autonomy which the teaching profession had previously experienced. Within this restructuring, professional learning and development rested with the RC rather than within the regulatory body on behalf of the teaching profession. Within this, the previous version of the PSTLs were perceived as a framework for performance within an organisationally oriented system. Within Wave 3, while the PSTLs remained the remit of the RC, they now were tasked with developing support and opportunities for professional learning to complement the use of the PSTLs.

> *The regional consortia have the job of supporting the standards in a variety of ways, one of which is designing the professional learning with the standards, their core curriculum. (Expert 3)*

The role of the RC has moved from challenge (Wave 2) to one of support (Wave 3) for schools, a role which historically lay with the LAs. The role of the RC in relation to the PSTLs was instrumental for the WG in helping engage headteachers with the teaching standards. Specifically, the shift was part of a much wider WG strategy towards a more internal accountability system. In this case the change of role to support for the RC placed the onus of challenge on individual headteachers. This had implications for the experts when they were discussing whether the PSTLs needed a training programme to support headteachers in its implementation. The reason for this was that the PSTL framework was intended as a self-regulatory framework, and some of the experts felt that a training programme could possibly confuse headteachers.

> *There was a lot of discussion about did we need a roll-out programme and a training programme. It will take me a little while to explain, but my belief is that we shouldn't; they are all headteachers and teachers and they can read, and they work it out for themselves, and they can talk about things. And they are a vehicle for conversation, so let them talk about it. And if the presentation of the standards is good enough, it will work. (Expert 5)*

Expert 5 talked about a more hands-off approach to implementing the PSTLs in comparison to previous training programmes traditionally delivered alongside new policy initiatives. As discussed earlier, the PSTLs were a WG strategy to help re-position professionalism back into the Welsh system. However, Expert 5's approach, which emphasises headteachers and teachers independently understanding and using the PSTLs, might be excessive. It assumes they possess the necessary expertise and experience and should be trusted as professionals to interpret and apply the teaching standards on their own. However, in taking this line of argument Expert 5 has expectations that headteachers and teachers will have the capacity to engage in these processes and be the 'vehicle for conversation' to foster collaboration with others.

But there was never an intention of any formal training to go through them, from what I remember. (Expert 4)

Expert 4 further highlights the WG's commitment to an internal accountability system that fosters a collaborative, co-constructive approach to educational policymaking. The goal is to shift away from viewing teaching standards merely as a toolkit, which, according to Broadbent and Gallagher (2013), can lead to confusion. Evans' (2011) idea is for teaching standards to be used as a reflective and planning tool as a way for practitioners to explore and fully understand their own contexts.

The experts interviewed had differing perspectives on the support needed to promote the effective use of the PSTLs. Expert 5's view was that the PSTLs themselves should act as a catalyst and that teachers had the capacity to use them as a tool for reflection. This aligned with the more general moves in Wave 3 to foster the agency of Welsh headteachers and teachers:

There was almost a wish, and this sounds terrible, a wish to stop people training folks and developing new formats. One of the things which creates a problem is when people think I have to really help with this, and I will show them helping by developing a new way of recording. (Expert 5)

The 'wish to stop people training folks and developing new formats' presents the view that previous strategies of implementation of new policy initiatives had possibly hindered developments. Expert 1 had an alternative view:

You've gotta build scaffolding round them, you've got to provide exemplification and support and all that stuff. (Expert 1)

In contrast, Expert 1 emphasises the need for structured support, or 'scaffolding', including exemplification and ongoing assistance, to help headteachers and teachers adopt and implement the PSTL model. The views of these two experts show a tension between the need for headteachers and teachers as teaching professionals to understand and use the PSTLs independently without the necessity of consistency and clarity and the importance of robust support systems. This suggests that a unified, well-supported approach to professional learning and development is essential, with the focus being on ensuring that the PSTLs are delivered with comprehensive support and clear guidelines.

To provide professional support and professional learning and development for headteachers, the WG launched the NAEL. However, this body was introduced into an already crowded middle tier, and it was felt that there was little clarity in relation to where it sat with regards to other meso-level bodies.

> *Kirsty Williams was really for the academy, but what the academy has to do is work out where it fits in with the landscape of the middle tier, where the middle tier doesn't necessarily need to shift to allow the academy in. (Expert 1)*

As Expert 1 data highlighted, one of the challenges for the NAEL is how it fitted within the middle tier. The other challenge is clarification of its professional learning responsibilities in relation to other intermediary bodies such as the RC. Expert 1 talked about how the onus for the clarification lies with the academy, 'what the academy has to do is work out where it fits in'. This is an interesting view by Expert 1 if we look at the context within which the NAEL was established. As the literature shows, the recommendations by the Donaldson Report (2015, p. 118) to establish 'an arm's length structure to carry out day-to-day leadership' was a clear strategy to improve leadership development and capacity in Wales. Moreover, Donaldson (2015) also recommended that middle-tier partners work together as part of the revised national infrastructure.

While the intentions of the WG was to act on the Donaldson (2015) and OECD (2017) recommendations, it resulted in an overload of intermediary bodies within the middle tier, creating a lack of clarification of roles and responsibilities (OECD 2021). As Expert 1 identified, both the RC and the NAEL are examples of two middle-tier organisations which fit this criterion. In respect of this, the issue is where the RC and the NAEL as middle-tier partners with professional learning responsibility fit in relation to the PSTLs.

Expert 5 had their own views:

> *The academy has the job of supporting relationships, processes, conversations, not of providing professional learning because that is supposed to be a defined boundary. It enables leadership conversations which are different to a professional learning programme, but they should use standards as their vocabulary. (Expert 5)*

Expert 1 had an alternative view:

> *I think in terms of NAEL, yes, they should be involved in that, but they should only be endorsing, validating, quality assuring or accrediting whatever you want to call it, just leadership stuff. (Expert 1)*

The experts' data highlighted a nuanced role for the NAEL, primarily a supportive role for headteachers to develop their leadership skills. Expert 5 clearly talked about the role of the NAEL as a facilitator and not a provider of professional learning, which aligns with previous recommendations (Donaldson 2015; OECD 2017, 2021)

Expert 5 continued their conversation:

> *So, you've got this tension, I don't mean a negative tension, and I think the academy should be fundamentally focused on the leadership standards, which in turn affects all the other standards; none of them sit separately, which is the point of them. (Expert 5)*

Expert 5 talked about tensions around the subject of professional learning roles and responsibilities for the NAEL and suggested that the NAEL should be a facilitator for leadership development as a middle-tier partner. As discussed earlier by Expert 3, the RC also have professional learning responsibilities. The argument rests in what the OECD (2021, p. 36) described as 'a complex ecosystem' within the middle tier, causing 'some confusion about the respective roles of the leadership academy and the regional consortia'. Subsequently, headteachers have found navigation of their professional learning support within the middle tiers more difficult.

5.6 Conclusion

The expert interview findings in this chapter examined the evolution of professional learning and development for headteachers in Wales across three waves of policymaking. More specifically, the analysis also focused on the role of the PSTLs within this policy framework. The findings explored headteacher agency and autonomy in decision-making, the concept of 'risk taking' from both the WG's and headteachers' perspectives, and the impact of accountability, particularly in fostering a trust-based environment and the involvement of meso-level partnerships and the NAEL.

The experts' data identified three key themes for further exploration in Phase Two: Online Survey – the development of the PSTLs, understanding and use of the PSTLs, and supporting headteachers in implementing the PSTLs. This exploration will provide clarity by focusing on headteachers and their school teaching staff's familiarity with and usage of the PSTLs, as well as the relevance of the standards. The reasons why these three themes were chosen will be explained in this section.

One of the key findings from the experts' data was that restoring professionalism for headteachers and teachers was considered a top priority, and the PSTLs were viewed as a crucial tool to facilitate this process. Within this context, the experts acknowledged that previous WG approaches to professional teaching standards could influence headteachers' perceptions of the PSTLs. This was particularly relevant for more experienced headteachers who had endured the performative, organisational policies of Wave 2. The findings highlighted how the experts managed the shift towards the occupational-oriented practices of Wave 3, despite being hindered by several issues beyond their control. These issues included ownership of the PSTLs, regulatory and non-regulatory performance management requirements, and the complex middle-tier partnerships.

However, as the experts' data highlighted, it wasn't simply a matter for the experts to design and present a set of PSTLs grounded in occupational practices, but whether, as stated by Expert 3, headteachers 'trusted the government enough to accept all this responsibility this new paradigm is offering'. Firstly, the experts' data identified a clear understanding of the influences of Wave 2 era and talked about a 'fearful environment' where school leaders felt 'afraid to fail'. A major consideration was the necessity of finding a balance that would allow headteachers to take risks and trust the WG without feeling 'fearful' or 'restricted'. This was evidenced in the data by the significant attention the experts paid to the design, roll-out, and presentation of the PSTLs to effectively engage headteachers. For the experts, it wasn't just about involving headteachers in the PSTLs but about engaging them in the broader shift in WG thinking towards an occupational policy–oriented system. Additionally, they recognised that other factors, such as the Donaldson Report (2015) and the OECD (2017), influenced their decisions on issues like the timing and roll-out of the PSTLs.

On the one hand experts were driven by headteachers' perceptions of the PSTLs, and on the other by the recommendations of the Donaldson (2015) and the OECD (2017) reports to expedite the development of the PSTLs. Experts understood the theory and urgency behind these influences, particularly the CfW agenda (Donaldson 2015), which the WG viewed as key for restoring teacher professionalism. Findings identified that the roll-out of the PSTLs was intended to coincide with the implementation of the CfW as part of the WG strategy to regain the trust of headteachers. This WG strategy generated debate among the experts. One expert argued that the timings of the PSTLs were initially too early but then reflected and suggested that the roll-out of the PSTLs had escalated other aspects of professional learning and development, such as the NAPL (2018).

Findings from the experts' data identified that all the experts had a clear understanding of the importance of the PSTLs in relation to the wider reform agenda in Wales. However, what the experts could not anticipate was how headteachers and teachers perceived the role of the PSTLs as an instrumental tool within the reform agenda. This was an area which needed to be explored further in Phase Two: Online Survey under the developmental theme of the PSTLs.

The experts identified three challenges they believed could influence headteachers' understanding and use of the PSTLs: ownership of the PSTLs, regulatory and non-regulatory requirements regarding performance management, and the complex partnerships within the middle tier. Firstly, the experts noted that the ownership of the PSTLs by the WG rather than a regulatory body could impact how headteachers perceive and utilise the PSTLs. They observed that WG ownership might give headteachers and teachers the impression that the profession was not fully trusted, which created difficulties for the experts as they attempted to implement PSTLs designed to restore trust within the profession.

The second issue centred on the regulatory and non-regulatory aspects of the current performance management system. The findings revealed that the experts believed it was adequate to maintain the existing performance management guidance, which states that performance management only needs to align with the standards. However, they questioned why the guidance did not emphasise growth over performance, as this approach seemed to contradict the foundational principles

of the PSTLs. Additionally, the experts agreed that the PSTLs were misaligned with current WG policies, particularly the Performance Management Appraisal Process. This concern is consistent with recommendations from the OECD (2021) and the evaluation report by Arad (2021) highlighted in the literature review.

Experts discussed the appropriate level of support for headteachers since the PSTL framework was self-regulatory, placing overall responsibility on headteachers. The findings showed differences in the level of support anticipated from the implementation of the PSTLs. Experts favoured moving away from previous formal training models to a more 'hands-off approach' to avoid potential confusion for headteachers to align with occupational practices (Evetts 2011). Another expert, however, suggested that headteachers needed 'scaffolding' around the PSTLs. These views were influenced by the existing middle-tier partnerships, particularly the RC and the NAEL. This was problematic because experts saw both the RC and the NAEL as facilitators to support headteachers' engagement with the PSTLs. However, there was confusion over professional learning roles and responsibilities and where the PSTLs sat within this framework. For example, the WG tasked the RC with designing professional learning with the PSTLs, potentially conflicting with the experts' views, and the NAEL's role within the PSTLs remained unclear. One of the potential reasons for this from the findings was that while the experts agreed that the NAEL's remit was to support headteachers and provide professional learning and development, it was established in what the experts considered an 'already overcrowded middle tier'.

The experts' findings indicated that their expectations for implementing the PSTLs, grounded in occupational-oriented practices, were potentially ambitious given the existing challenges in the Welsh infrastructure. These challenges included the complex middle-tier partnerships and the regulatory and non-regulatory requirements of the current professional learning agenda, such as the performance management appraisal system. The experts' data revealed that significant consideration was given to headteachers' perceptions of the PSTLs, considering the trajectory of the professional learning agenda in Wales, which aligns with the principles of occupational-oriented practices. Additionally, the findings highlighted the anticipated perceptions of headteachers regarding the understanding and use of the PSTLs, providing valuable insights for the study and paving the way for further clarification in

Phase Two: Online Survey and Phase Three: Headteachers Interviews (see Appendix E for Phase Two: Online Survey themes and questions).

Chapter 6: Findings 2 (Online Survey)

6.1 Introduction

Phase Two of this study was a survey of Welsh headteachers in relation to their awareness and use of the PSTLs. The overarching research question (RQ2) that this survey sought to answer was 'What are headteachers' understandings and use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership for their own and their school teaching staff's professional learning and development?', in conjunction with RQ1, 'How do the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership fit within the wider reform agenda in Wales?' and RQ3, 'What are headteachers' understandings of the role of the NAEL in relation to their professional learning and development?'. Arising from the expert interviews, the survey set out to ask questions on the following: context, understanding and use, formal leadership, and the role of the NAEL.

The survey aimed to ascertain the strength and direction of the relationship between these key variables. These quantitative analyses served as a basis for the headteachers' interviews (Phase Three), forming a crucial component of this three-phase mixed-methods study. Some of the questions posed in the online survey which cover similar themes have been grouped together for analysis. The conclusion of this chapter will summarise the key findings of the quantitative analysis and identify the headteachers' interview questions that were developed as a result of these findings.

6.1.1 Participation in the Online Survey

Participation in the online survey was open to both headteachers and acting headteachers across Wales, with responses accepted in both English and Cymraeg. For consistency, in the subsequent data analysis the term 'headteacher' will be used to refer to both headteachers and acting headteachers.

A total of 161 headteachers started the survey; 27 of those who started the survey did so in Cymraeg. The number of respondents who completed the survey was 80 (77 headteachers and 3 acting headteachers, see Table 6.1). This means that a total of 81 respondents gave incomplete responses. These participants were removed from the sample as part of the data cleaning process.

The criteria for deletion of respondents were as follows:

- Any respondent who opened the survey and did not answer any questions at all.
- Any respondent who answered Q4, ‘Are you a headteacher?’ and/or Q5, ‘Are you an acting headteacher?’ but did not answer any further questions.
- Any respondent who answered Q4, Q5 and Q6, ‘What type of school do you work in?’ and did not answer any further questions in the survey.

However, there were 5 headteachers who completed only part of the survey, meeting the data cleaning criterion; the possible reasons for this will be discussed in the data analysis.

Possible reasons for the 81 respondents who did not complete the survey include:

- Time element to complete the survey
- Lack of knowledge of the topic
- Sensitivity of the topic
- Distribution to those who were neither headteachers nor acting headteachers, due to use of newsletter databases (WG, RC, LA)

The total number of headteachers in Wales is 1,510, identified from the School Workforce Annual Census (WG 2023/24). Therefore, the percentage of headteachers who completed this survey was 10.7%.

The headteachers who participated in the survey came from a variety of educational settings including nursery (9%), primary (67.9%), secondary (22.9%), special school (4.6%), pupil referral unit (1.8%) and others, which may have included faith-based or Welsh-medium schools (1.8%). The most popular educational setting was primary. Exploration of types of school settings was beyond the scope of this current study but was useful in ascertaining the range of school types in the dataset for potential future studies.

Table 6.1 Type of participants who completed the survey

Survey Questions	N Frequency	Valid %
Q4 Are you a headteacher?	77	96.3
Q5 Are you an acting headteacher?	3	3.8

6.2 Univariate Analysis

Table 6.2 Univariate analysis table of Wales online survey

Survey Questions	N	Frequency (Valid %)	Measure of Central Tendency
Q8 – Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the PSTLs?	80		Mode = Very Familiar Median = Familiar
Very familiar		41.3	
Familiar		40.0	
Somewhat familiar		13.8	
Unfamiliar		2.5	
Very unfamiliar		2.5	
Q9 – How often do you use the PSTLs for yourself as a school leader?	80		Mode = At least once a term Median = At least once a term
Every day		5.0	
Every week		6.3	
At least once a term		51.2	
Once a year		25.0	
Never		12.5	
Q10 – How often do you use the PSTLs with your school teaching staff?	80		Mode = At least once a term Median = At least once a term
Every day		2.5	
Every week		3.8	
At least once a term		58.8	
Once a year		27.5	
Never		7.5	
Q11(a) – The PSTLs are easy to understand	79		Mode = Agree Median = Agree
Strongly agree		8.9	
Agree		45.6	
Neither agree nor disagree		13.9	
Disagree		20.3	
Strongly Disagree		11.4	

Q11(b) – The PSTLs are useful for my own professional development.	79		Mode = Agree
Strongly agree		10.1	Median =
Agree		46.8	Agree
Neither agree nor disagree		16.5	
Disagree		16.5	
Strongly Disagree		10.1	
Q11(c) – The PSTLs are useful for my school teaching staff's professional development	79		Mode = Agree Median =
Strongly agree		10.1	Agree
Agree		57.0	
Neither agree nor disagree		11.4	
Disagree		11.4	
Strongly Disagree		10.1	
Q11(d) – The PSTLs help me in meeting WG policy initiatives	79		Mode = Neither
Strongly agree		7.6	agree nor
Agree		29.1	disagree
Neither agree nor disagree		31.6	Median =
Disagree		19.0	Neither
Strongly Disagree		12.7	agree nor disagree
Q12(a) – The PSTLs are relevant in supporting me in my school leadership role	75		Mode = Agree Median =
Strongly agree		13.3	Agree
Agree		42.7	
Neither agree nor disagree		17.3	
Disagree		13.3	
Strongly Disagree		13.3	
Q12(b) – The PSTLs are relevant in supporting my school teaching staff in their professional learning and development	75		Mode = Agree Median = Agree
Strongly agree		9.3	
Agree		50.7	
Neither agree nor disagree		17.3	
Disagree		10.7	
Strongly Disagree		12.0	
Q13 – It is important to support my school teaching staff in gaining a good understanding of the PSTLs	74		Mode = Agree Median =
Strongly agree		16.2	Agree
Agree		56.8	
Neither agree nor disagree		9.5	
Disagree		6.8	
Strongly Disagree		10.8	

Q14 – How familiar are you with the five formal leadership elements within the PSTLs – pedagogy, leadership, professional learning, innovation, collaboration?	79		Mode = Very familiar Median = Familiar
Very familiar		44.3	
Familiar		43.0	
Somewhat familiar		8.9	
Unfamiliar		2.5	
Very unfamiliar		1.3	
Q15 – These leadership elements have formal leadership descriptors attached. How familiar are you with these?	73		Mode = Familiar Median = Familiar
Very familiar		30.1	
Familiar		38.4	
Somewhat familiar		28.8	
Unfamiliar		2.7	
Very unfamiliar		0.0	
Q16(a) – The formal leadership descriptors help me to identify my professional learning and development goals	72		Mode = Agree Median = Neither agree nor disagree
Strongly agree		6.9	
Agree		43.1	
Neither agree nor disagree		22.2	
Disagree		18.1	
Strongly Disagree		9.7	
Q16(b) – The formal leadership descriptors help me to take responsibility for my professional development.	72		Mode = Agree Median = Agree
Strongly agree		9.7	
Agree		43.1	
Neither agree nor disagree		20.8	
Disagree		13.9	
Strongly Disagree		12.5	
Q16(c) – The formal leadership descriptors help me promote professional dialogue between me and others	72		Mode = Agree Median = Neither agree nor disagree
Strongly agree		5.6	
Agree		41.7	
Neither agree nor disagree		25.0	
Disagree		15.3	
Strongly Disagree		12.5	

Q16(d) – The formal leadership descriptors help me to be reflective in my leadership role	72		Mode = Agree Median = Agree
Strongly agree		8.3	
Agree		45.8	
Neither agree nor disagree		19.4	
Disagree		15.3	
Strongly Disagree		11.1	
Q16(e) – The formal leadership descriptors are well aligned to my current professional learning and development needs	72		Mode = Agree Median = Neither agree nor disagree
Strongly agree		4.1	
Agree		38.4	
Neither agree nor disagree		26.0	
Disagree		20.5	
Strongly Disagree		11.0	
Q18 – How familiar are you with the NAEL?	75		Mode = Somewhat familiar Median = Somewhat Familiar
Very familiar		25.3	
Familiar		24.0	
Somewhat familiar		30.7	
Unfamiliar		13.3	
Very unfamiliar		6.7	
Q19 – How important is the work of the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?	59		Mode = Extremely important Median = Slightly important
Extremely important		22.0	
Fairly important		15.3	
Slightly important		20.3	
Unimportant		22.0	
Not at all important		20.3	
Q20 – How relevant is the work of the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?	59		Mode = Not relevant Median = Relevant
Extremely relevant		15.3	
Very relevant		16.9	
Relevant		18.6	
Slightly relevant		20.3	
Not relevant		28.8	

Each online survey question from the Univariate Data analysis in Table 6.2 will be analysed individually in the following section. The corresponding graphs for each of the research questions are shown in Appendices I–R.

6.2.1 Data Analysis of Univariate Data Collection

Q8 – Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the PSTLs?

The headteachers who participated in the online survey were asked about their levels of familiarity with the PSTLs, with 80 valid responses received for this question (all eligible participants completed this question). The median response was 'familiar' and the modal response 'very familiar'. Over 81% of respondents reported being 'very familiar' or 'familiar' with the PSTLs, accumulating to more than three-quarters of the total responses. Just 13.8% answered 'somewhat familiar', with 2.5% 'unfamiliar' and 2.5% 'very unfamiliar', respectively. Overall, more headteachers reported being familiar with the PSTLs compared to those reporting that they were unfamiliar (see Appendix J).

Q9 – How often do you use the PSTLs for yourself as a school leader?

Q10 – How often do you use the PSTLs with your school teaching staff?

The headteachers who participated in the online survey were asked to indicate how often they used the PSTLs for themselves as a school leader and with their school teaching staff. The mode and median response for both questions were 'at least once a term'. A higher percentage of headteachers used the PSTLs 'once a term' for their school teaching staff (58.8%) than for themselves (51.2%), a difference of 7.6%. A total of 12.5% of headteachers who responded answered that they 'never' used the PSTLs for themselves at all, and just 7.5% answered that they 'never' used the PSTLs with their school teaching staff. All headteachers answered these two questions (n=80). Overall, headteachers reported using the PSTLs for their school teaching staff more frequently than for themselves.

Q11(a) – The Welsh PSTLs are easy to understand.

The headteachers who took part in the online survey were also asked whether the PSTLs were easy to understand. A total of 79 responses out of a total of 80 headteachers responded to the question. One headteacher chose not to answer this question and any subsequent questions in the survey. This headteacher answered three previous questions in the survey, that they were 'very familiar' with the PSTLs (Q8) and that they used the PSTLs 'once a term' for both themselves (Q9) and their

school teaching staff (Q10). This means that it was unlikely that the reason for exiting the survey at this point was due to a lack of knowledge and/or sensitivity of the topic and more likely that they were distracted by other pressing school issues.

The mode and median response to this question was the same, with 45.6% of participants agreeing with the statement, 'The Welsh Professional Standards are easy to understand'. Meanwhile, 20.3% of participants disagreed with the statement, and 13.9% neither agreed nor disagreed. Just 8.9% of participants reported that they 'strongly agreed' that the PSTLs were easy to understand, which was the lowest response. Overall, headteachers were more likely to 'agree' than 'disagree' that the PSTLs were easy to understand.

Q11(b) – The PSTLs are useful for my own professional development.

Q11(c) – The PSTLs are useful for my school teaching staff's professional development.

The headteachers who completed the online survey were asked how useful the PSTLs were for their own professional development and the professional development of their teaching staff. There were 79 valid responses to both questions – 11(b) and 11(c) – out of a total of 80 headteachers. Both the mode and median were the same, that they 'agreed' that the PSTLs were useful for themselves and their teaching staff.

When thinking about their own professional development, 46.8% of headteachers agreed with the statement 'The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership are useful for my own professional development'. Meanwhile, when considering the professional development of their teaching staff, 57.0% agreed with the statement, 'The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership are useful for my school teaching staff's professional development', a difference of 10.2%. Less than a quarter of participants (22.8%) reported that they 'disagreed' and 'neither agreed nor disagreed' that the PSTLs were useful for their teaching staff. Just 10.1% of headteachers 'strongly disagreed' that the PSTLs were useful for both them and their teaching staff. Overall, headteachers felt that the PSTLs were more useful for their teaching staff than themselves, a difference of 10.2%.

Q11(d) – The Welsh PSTLs help me in meeting Welsh Government policy initiatives.

The headteachers who took part in this survey were asked whether the PSTLs helped them meet WG policy initiatives. There were 79 valid responses to this question out of a total of 80 headteachers. The mode and median responses were the same, with 31.6% of participants stating that they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' that the PSTLs were helpful in meeting WG policy initiatives. Similarly, just over a third of headteachers 'agreed or strongly agreed' with the statement (36.7%), while a slightly lower percentage (31.7%) 'disagreed or strongly disagreed'.

Q12(a) – The Welsh PSTLs are relevant in supporting me in my school leadership role.

Q12(b) – The Welsh PSTLs are relevant in supporting my school teaching staff in their professional learning and development.

The headteachers in the survey sample were also asked to indicate how relevant the PSTLs were in supporting professional development both for themselves and their teaching staff. There were 75 responses received for each of these two questions out of a total of 80 headteachers. Five headteachers chose not to answer this question, but four answered subsequent questions and one exited the survey from Q11a (see appendices). Possible reasons for the four participants not answering could be one of the following: distraction during the survey with other pressing school issues, lack of knowledge of the topic or sensitivity of the topic.

The mode response was 'agreed' for both their own professional development (42.7%) and the professional development of their teaching staff (50.7%). Over 50% of headteachers answered that they 'agreed or strongly agreed' that the PSTLs were relevant for both themselves (56.0%) and their school teaching staff (60.0%). A difference of 4.0% of headteachers felt they were more relevant to their teaching staff than to themselves. Just 13.3% 'strongly disagreed' that they were relevant to themselves, and 12.0% 'strongly disagreed' that they were relevant for their teaching staff. Overall, participants felt that the PSTLs were relevant to professional learning and development for both them and their teaching staff.

Q12(c) – It is important to support my school teaching staff in gaining a good understanding of the Welsh PSTLs.

The headteachers who took part in this survey were asked how important it was to support their school teaching staff to gain a good understanding of the PSTLs for their professional learning and development. A total of 74 responses were received for this question out of a total of 80 headteachers. One additional headteacher chose not to answer this question but did go on to answer all subsequent questions in the survey. Possible reasons for not answering could be one of the following: distraction during the survey with other pressing school issues, lack of knowledge of the topic or sensitivity of the topic.

Both the mode and median were the same, with most respondents (56.8%) agreeing with the statement, 'It is important to support my school teaching staff in gaining a good understanding of the PSTLs'. Nearly three-quarters of headteachers answered that they agreed (56.8%) or strongly agreed (16.2%) with the statement, and just 10.8% strongly disagreed with the statement. Overall, more respondents felt it was important to support their school teaching staff to understand the PSTLs in their professional learning and development.

Q14 – How familiar are you with the five formal leadership elements within the Welsh PSTLs – pedagogy, leadership, professional learning, innovation, collaboration.

The headteachers who took part in this survey were asked how familiar they were with the five formal leadership elements in the PSTLs. The response rate increased for this question, a total of 79 responses out of a total of 80 headteachers. The one headteacher who didn't respond was the participant who exited the survey from Q11(a) onwards (see data analysis Q11(a) for possible explanation). The mode response was 'very familiar' at 44.3% and the median response 'familiar', which was selected by 43.0% of the respondents. Just 1.3% were 'very unfamiliar' with the five formal leadership elements within the Welsh PSTLs, while 8.9% reported being 'somewhat familiar' and 2.5% 'unfamiliar'. Overall, more headteachers reported that they were familiar with the five formal leadership elements within the Welsh PSTLs than those who reporting being unfamiliar.

Participants who reported that they were ‘unfamiliar’ or ‘very unfamiliar’ were directed to question 17, while those with some level of familiarity proceeded to questions 15 and 16.

Q15 – These leadership elements have formal leadership descriptors attached. How familiar are you with these?

The headteachers in this survey were asked how familiar they were with the five formal leadership descriptors attached to the leadership elements of the PSTLs. A total of 73 responses were received for this question out of a total of 80 headteachers. Seven headteachers did not respond to this question, 1 headteacher exited at Q11(a) (see data analysis 11 (a) for possible explanation), and a further 6 headteachers who identified that they were either ‘unfamiliar’ or ‘very unfamiliar’ with the five formal leadership elements within the Welsh PSTLs in Q14 were directed by skip logic to Q17. This is because they would have been unlikely to answer this question because of their lack of familiarity with the leadership elements of the PSTLs.

The median and mode were the same, with 38.4% of the participants answering that they were ‘familiar’ with the formal leadership descriptors. Almost 30% answered that they were ‘very familiar’ and ‘somewhat familiar’, respectively. A total of 97.3% of headteachers answered that they were either ‘very familiar’, ‘familiar’ or ‘somewhat familiar’, in comparison to 2.7% who answered that they were ‘unfamiliar’.

The headteachers who completed the survey were asked whether they ‘strongly agreed’, ‘agreed’, ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’, ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ with the following five statements on the formal leadership descriptors of the PSTLs.

- Q16(a) – The formal leadership descriptors help me to identify my professional learning and development goals.
- Q16(b) – The formal leadership descriptors help me to take responsibility for my professional development.
- Q16(c) – The formal leadership descriptors help me promote professional dialogue between me and others.

- Q16(d) – The formal leadership descriptors help me to be reflective in my leadership role.
- Q16(e) – The formal leadership descriptors are well aligned to my current professional and development needs.

A total of 72 responses were gathered for all five statements out of a total of 80 headteachers. The mode for each of the four statements on the formal leadership descriptors was ‘agree’. The median response was ‘neither agree nor disagree’ for Q16(a), Q16(c) and Q16(e) and ‘agree’ for Q16(b) and Q16(d). Overall, more headteachers ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the five statements.

The headteachers who completed the survey were asked the following three questions on the NAEL:

- Q18 – How familiar are you with the NAEL?
- Q19 – How important is the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?
- Q20 – How relevant is the work of the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?

A total of 75 responses were received for Q18, ‘How familiar are you with the NAEL?’, out of a total of 80 headteachers. Five headteachers did not answer this question. Possible reasons for not answering could be one of the following: distraction during the survey with other pressing school issues, lack of knowledge of the topic or sensitivity of the topic. Those headteachers who answered ‘very unfamiliar’ or ‘unfamiliar’ for Q18 were directed to Q21, as they would have been unlikely to answer further questions on the NAEL due to their low levels of familiarity.

The modal response for Q18 was ‘somewhat familiar’ (30.7%), while the modal response for Q19 was ‘extremely important’ (22.0%) and for Q20 ‘not relevant’ (28.8%). The median responses for all three questions also differed: Q18 ‘somewhat familiar’, Q19 ‘slightly important’ and Q20 ‘relevant’. Overall, more headteachers were ‘familiar’ (24.0%) or ‘very familiar’ (25.3%) with the statements compared to those who were unfamiliar’ (13.3%) ‘or ‘very unfamiliar’ (6.7%). While over half of headteachers who completed the survey felt that the NAEL was ‘extremely important’ (22.0%), ‘fairly important’ (15.3%) or ‘slightly important’ (20.3%), a total of

28.8% of headteachers felt that the work of the NAEL was ‘not relevant’ in supporting them in their professional learning and development needs.

6.3 Bivariate Analysis

In this section, findings from the bivariate analysis of the Wales online survey are presented. Specifically, Spearman’s rank order correlation coefficients were calculated. These were used to calculate the strength and direction of the relationship between key variables and to confirm whether these associations were statistically significant. Questions were grouped together for their association relating to the three research questions. For example, Questions 9, 10 and 11(a–c) related to headteachers’ understanding and use of the PSTLs either for their own professional learning and development or their school teaching staff which aligns to RQ2 – ‘What are headteachers’ understandings and use of the PSTLs for their own and their school teaching staff’s professional development?’

Table 6.3 Bivariate analysis table of Wales online survey

Survey Question No.	Survey Question	Bivariate Level Analysis	Test	Statistical Significance
8 9	Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the PSTLs? How often do you use the PSTLs for yourself as a school leader?	Hypothesis – There is a relationship between levels of familiarity and usage for headteachers’ own professional learning and development. Null Hypothesis – There is no relationship between levels of familiarity and usage for headteachers’ own professional learning and development.	Spearman’s correlation	rs=0.3, p<0.05
8 10	Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the PSTLs? How often do you use the PSTLs with your school teaching staff?	Hypothesis – There is a relationship between levels of familiarity and usage for headteachers’ teaching staff’s professional learning and development. Null Hypothesis – There is no relationship between	Spearman’s correlation	rs=0.3, p<0.05

		levels of familiarity and usage for headteachers' teaching staff's professional learning and development.		

16(c)	The formal leadership descriptors help me promote professional dialogue between me and others	Hypothesis – There is a relationship between levels of usage for headteachers with their teaching staff and promoting professional dialogue. Null Hypothesis – There is no relationship between levels of usage for headteachers with their teaching staff and promoting professional dialogue.	Spearman's correlation	rs=0.5, p<0.05
11(a) 11(b)	The PSTLs are easy to understand. The PSTLs are useful for my own professional learning and development.	Hypothesis – There is a relationship between understanding and usage of the PSTLs for headteachers' own professional learning and development. Null Hypothesis – There is no relationship between understanding and usage of the PSTLs for headteachers' own professional learning and development.	Spearman's correlation	rs=0.7, p<0.05
11(a) 11(c)	The PSTLs are easy to understand. The PSTLs are useful for my school teaching staff's professional learning and development.	Hypothesis – There is a relationship between understanding and usage of the PSTLs for headteachers' school teaching staff and their professional learning and development. Null Hypothesis – There no relationship between understanding and usage of the PSTLs for headteachers' school teaching staff and their professional learning and development.	Spearman's correlation	rs=0.8, p<0.05

16(b) 11(b)	The formal leadership descriptors help me take responsibility for my professional development. The PSTLs are useful for my own professional learning and development.	Hypothesis – There is a relationship between usefulness and headteachers taking responsibility for their own professional learning. Null Hypothesis – There is no relationship between usefulness and headteachers taking responsibility for their own professional learning.	Spearman's correlation	rs=0.9, p<0.05
16(d) 11(b)	The formal leadership descriptors help me to be reflective in my leadership role. The PSTLs are useful for my own professional learning and development.	Hypothesis – There is a relationship between usefulness and headteachers using the PSTLs to be reflective on their professional learning. Null Hypothesis – There is no relationship between usefulness and headteachers using the PSTLs to be reflective on their professional learning.	Spearman's correlation	rs=0.8, p<0.05
18 19	How familiar are you with the NAEL? How important is the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?	Hypothesis – There is a relationship between levels of familiarity with the NAEL and levels of support for headteachers in their professional learning and development. Null Hypothesis – There is no relationship between levels of familiarity with the NAEL and levels of support for headteachers in their professional learning and development.	Spearman's correlation	rs=0.5, p<0.05

18 20	How familiar are you with the NAEL? How relevant is the work of the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?	Hypothesis – There is a relationship between levels of familiarity with the NAEL and relevance of headteachers' professional learning and development. Null Hypothesis – There is no relationship between levels of familiarity with the NAEL and relevance of headteachers' professional learning and development.	Spearman's correlation	rs=0.5, p<0.05

Each online survey question from the bivariate data analysis in Table 6.3 will be discussed in the following section.

6.3.1 Data Analysis of Bivariate Data Collection

Q8 – Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the PSTLs?

Q9 – How often do you use the PSTLs for yourself as a school leader?

A Spearman's rank order correlation was run to determine the relationship between 80 headteachers' levels of familiarity and frequency of use of the PSTLs for their own professional learning and development. There was a weak to moderate positive correlation (0.3) between headteachers' levels of familiarity and usage of the PSTLs for their own professional learning and development, which was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This means that as the headteachers' and acting headteachers' familiarity with the PSTLs increased, level of usage of the PSTLs also increased.

Q8 – Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the PSTLs?

Q10 – How often do you use the PSTLs with your teaching staff?

A Spearman's rank order correlation was run to determine the relationship between 80 headteachers' levels of familiarity and frequency of use of the PSTLs for their school teaching staff's professional learning and development. There was a weak

positive correlation (0.2) between headteachers' levels of familiarity with the PSTLs and usage of the PSTLs for the school teaching staff's professional learning and development, which was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This means that as headteachers' familiarity with the PSTLs increased, the usage of the PSTLs with their school teaching staff also increased.

Q10 – How often do you use the PSTLs with your teaching staff?

Q16(c) – The formal leadership descriptors help me promote professional dialogue between me and others.

A Spearman's rank order correlation was run to determine the relationship between 72 headteachers' perceived usefulness of the PSTLs with their teaching staff and promoting professional dialogue. There was a moderate positive correlation (0.5) between participants' perceived usefulness of the PSTLs for their teaching staff and promoting professional dialogue, which was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). While there is a relationship between these two variables, headteachers who used the PSTLs with their teaching staff experienced an increase in professional dialogue similarly to those headteachers who did not promote professional dialogue with their teaching staff.

Q11(a) – The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership are easy to understand.

Q11(b) – The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership are useful for my own professional development.

A Spearman's rank order correlation was run to determine the relationship between 79 headteachers' understanding and use of the PSTLs for their own professional learning and development. There was a moderately, strong positive correlation (0.7) between participants' understanding and usefulness of the PSTLs for their own professional learning and development, which was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This means that as the headteachers' reported level of understanding of the PSTLs increased, the extent to which they agreed that the PSTLs were useful for their own professional development also increased.

Q11(a) – The PSTLs are easy to understand.

Q11(c) – The PSTLs are useful for my school teaching staff's professional learning and development.

A Spearman's rank order correlation was run to determine the relationship between 79 headteachers' understanding and usefulness of the PSTLs for their school teaching staff's professional learning and development. There was a moderately, strong positive correlation (0.7) between headteachers' understanding and perceived usefulness of the PSTLs for their school teaching staff's professional learning and development, which was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This means that as the headteachers' reported levels of understanding of the PSTLs increased, the extent to which they agreed that they were useful for their school teaching staff's professional development also increased.

Q16(b) – The formal leadership descriptors help me take responsibility for my professional development.

Q11(b) – The PSTLs are useful for my own professional learning and development.

A Spearman's rank order correlation was run to determine the relationship between 72 headteachers' perceived usefulness of the PSTLs for their own professional learning and development and those who felt that the formal leadership descriptors helped them take responsibility for their professional learning. There was a strong positive correlation (0.8) between headteachers' perceived usefulness of the PSTLs for their own professional learning and levels of responsibility, which was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This means that as headteachers' reported level of responsibility increased, the extent to which they agreed that the PSTLs were useful for their own professional development also increased.

Q16(d) – The formal leadership descriptors help me to be reflective in my leadership role.

11(b) – The PSTLs are useful for my own professional development.

A Spearman's rank order correlation was run to determine the relationship between 79 headteachers' perceived usefulness of the PSTLs for their own professional learning and development and those who felt that the formal leadership descriptors helped them to be reflective in their leadership role. There was a strong positive

correlation (0.8) between headteachers' perceived usefulness of the PSTLs for their own professional learning and levels of reflectivity, which was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This means that as the headteachers' reported level of reflectivity increased, the extent to which they agreed that the PSTLs were useful for their own professional development also increased.

Q18 – How familiar are you with the NAEL?

Q19 – How important is the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?

A Spearman's rank order correlation analysis was conducted to assess the association between familiarity levels of headteachers with the NAEL and the perceived importance of the NAEL in supporting their professional learning and development requirements. There was a moderate positive (0.5) relationship between headteachers' levels of familiarity of and importance of the NAEL in supporting headteachers in their own professional learning and development, which was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This means that as headteachers' reported level of familiarity with the NAEL increased, the extent to which they agreed that the NAEL was important in supporting them in their own professional learning also increased.

Q18 – How familiar are you with the NAEL?

Q20 – How relevant is the work of the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?

A Spearman's rank order correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between the familiarity levels of headteachers with the NAEL and the perceived relevance of the NAEL in supporting their professional learning and development needs. There was a moderate positive correlation (0.5) between headteachers' levels of familiarity with the NAEL and how relevant headteachers felt the NAEL was in supporting them in their professional learning, which was statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This means that as headteachers' reported levels of familiarity increased, the extent to which they agreed that the NAEL was relevant for their own professional development also increased.

6.4 Conclusion

To summarise, the analysis of the online survey showed that:

- More headteachers were familiar (40.0%) or very familiar (41.3%) with the PSTLs.
- More headteachers were familiar (97.3%) with the five formal leadership descriptors of the PSTLs and agreed or strongly agreed that they helped them identify their professional goals, take responsibility for their own professional learning, promote professional dialogue with colleagues, and be reflective, and that they were well aligned to current professional learning and development needs.
- More headteachers used the PSTLs more frequently for their school teaching staff (58.8%) than for themselves (51.2%), with once a term being the most popular response option. Also, more headteachers felt that the PSTLs were more useful for their school teaching staff than themselves, despite (58.5%) agreeing that they were easy to understand.
- More headteachers felt it was important to support their school teaching staff to understand the PSTLs in their professional learning and development.
- More headteachers felt that the PSTLs were relevant to both their own professional learning and development than their school teaching staff.
- More headteachers reported that they were ‘familiar’ (24.0%) or ‘very familiar’ (25.3%) with the work of the NAEL. While over half of headteachers felt that the NAEL was important to their professional learning and development, a total of 28.8% of headteachers felt that the work of the NAEL was ‘not relevant’ in supporting them in their professional learning and development needs.
- As headteachers increased their use of the PSTLs, they gained more familiarity, increasing their own understanding as well as that of their school teaching staff. This implied that there is a positive relationship between levels of familiarity, usefulness and relevance of the PSTLs for headteachers’ own professional learning and development and the professional learning and development of their school teaching staff.

6.5 Modifications for Phase Three: Headteacher Interviews

From this quantitative analysis, I developed the following headteacher interview questions for further exploration and to provide clarity to this research.

Online survey question

- How often do you use the PSTLs for yourself as a school leader? (Every day, every week, at least once a term, once a year, never)

Responses from the online survey revealed that headteachers reported using the PSTLs less frequently for themselves than for their school teaching staff. However, more than half of the headteachers agreed that the PSTLs were easy to understand but required further probing during interview.

Modified headteacher interview question

- Do you use the PSTLs for yourself? If not, why?
- When do you use the PSTLs for yourself?
- Why do you use the PSTLs for yourself?

Online survey question

- How often do you use the PSTLs with your school teaching staff? (every day, every week, at least once a term, once a year, never)

Modified headteacher interview question

- Do you use the PSTLs for your school teaching staff?
- When do you use the PSTLs for your school teaching staff?
- Why do you use the PSTLs for your school teaching staff?

Online survey question

- How important is the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?
- How relevant is the work of the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?

Responses from the online survey identified that over half of headteachers who completed the online survey felt that the NAEL was ‘extremely important’ (22.0%),

‘fairly important’ (15.3%) or ‘slightly important’ (20.3%). However, 28.8% of headteachers felt that the work of the NAEL was ‘not relevant’ in supporting them in their professional learning and development needs.

Modified headteacher interview question

- Do you think the NAEL is important in supporting you in your professional learning and development? If so, why?
- Do you think the NAEL is relevant in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs. If so, how?

The interview modifications above were explored further in Phase Three: Headteacher Interviews (see Appendix H Headteacher Interview Schedule and Modifications). The findings from the headteachers’ interviews will be analysed in the next chapter of this study.

Chapter 7: Findings 3 (Headteachers Interviews)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will present and analyse the findings from Phase Three: Headteachers Interviews, which will be informed by the data collected in Phases One and Two.

The data presented in this findings chapter was based on interviews with sixteen headteachers from a variety of school settings across Wales. These interviews aimed to gather headteachers' perspectives on the understanding and use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTLs) and their attitudes towards professional learning and development for headteachers in Wales. Each headteacher interviewee has been allocated a number which corresponds with the order in which they were interviewed, i.e. 1 refers to the headteacher who was interviewed first, 2 refers to the headteacher who was interviewed second and so on.

These interviews added rich qualitative data to the findings collected in Phase Two: Online Survey of this study. The main themes drawn from the data of the headteacher interviews are understanding and use of the PSTLs in relation to performance management, the timing of the PSTLs implementation within the wider reform agenda, and the effects of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) policy initiative and the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the analysis explores the influences of meso-level accountability, including the role of various statutory and non-statutory organisations and regulatory bodies in shaping the policy discourse surrounding PSTLs for both headteachers and their school teaching staff. These headteacher findings also examine the role of the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) as a meso-level partner within the 'messy middle' in relation to the PSTLs and headteachers' professional learning and development. The themes will be explored through the analytical lens of occupational and organisational models of professionalism, utilising this typology to interpret and understand the data (Evetts 2011).

7.2 Meso Levels of Accountability

The literature review and Phase One of this study suggested that within the third wave of policymaking in Wales attempts have been made to introduce accountability mechanisms more aligned with occupational understandings of professional work. Professional learning and development have seen a move from a high external

accountability system in Wave 2 towards an internal accountability system in Wave 3. This section will examine how the various organisations and regulatory bodies, both statutory and non-statutory, have shaped the policy discourse surrounding PSTLs for headteachers and their school teaching staff. In the past, there has been contestation within Wales in relation to where support for headteachers' professional learning and development should be located. During the Wave 2 era there was a series of intermediary bodies parallel to the local authorities (LAs), which was the reason for a congested middle tier in Wave 3.

> *I don't think within that middle tier, above or below, I don't think they're talking to each other. I don't think there's enough consistency. You've got Estyn saying one thing. You've got NAEL saying another. You've got EWC saying something else. That's not all being informed to schools below, in the tier below. Not all schools are getting the information from this middle tier, but I do think there are gaps between the middle tier when talking. Are they working together? Are they collaborating to develop, you know, a high-quality workforce? (Headteacher 4)*

This data illustrated how the various Welsh Government (WG) policy priorities embedded within the different waves of reform frame the enactment of the PSTLs. From the perspective of headteachers, there is a lack of coherence within the different meso-level bodies, both internally and in their communication with headteachers. Experts discussing meso-level bodies also highlighted varied understandings and orientations within these middle-tier organisations. This variability has influenced how headteachers perceived and understood the PSTLs, not only in the context of the wider reform agenda but also as a framework for personal growth and development.

More recently, the addition of the NAEL as a middle-tier partner aimed at fostering leadership development as part of the professional learning and wider reform agenda (Donaldson 2015; OECD 2017, 2021) has added to this complexity with regards to the professional learning and development and support of headteachers in Wales.

> *How crowded the middle tier was and there are still more, and more organisations pop up every day and you think, where have these guys*

> *been for the last three years? Who are they? I think the academy's prominence has increased over the last year or two because I think that though leadership work is a niche, that they've been able to develop and to be quite unique on that respect. (Headteacher 12)*

Headteacher 12 expressed frustration and concerns about the growing number of organisations in the middle tier. They highlighted the overcrowding and continuous emergence of new middle-tier partners, which only added to what Headteacher 12 perceived as a lack of coherence and clarity for headteachers. This headteacher illustrates the perception that the middle tier is overcrowded and that roles within it have not been communicating effectively to headteachers. However, from this headteacher's perspective the role of the NAEL is becoming clearer to them in promoting leadership, which they perceive to be a 'niche' area.

Additionally, some headteachers expressed during interviews that the retention of what they perceived as too many LAs hinders meso-level coherence:

> *I think the middle sphere, it's too cluttered if I'm totally honest. There's a lot of money there. I think sometimes the partnerships could be developed in a more realistic way. I think some of them are quite forced partnerships. (Headteacher 10)*

> *I'll be completely honest with you, it's absolutely bloated. The fact that we can't go down from twenty-two local authorities in Wales takes money out of schools, and it's as simple as that. It's a simplistic solution that nobody in the middle tier is willing to entertain because they have vested interests; those vested interests mean that education's increasingly politicised and that people with vested interests, the turkeys, are not gonna vote for Christmas. (Headteacher 5)*

This data indicates that the perception of the middle tier of education governance in Wales is not only messy and muddled but 'bloated' and 'cluttered'. There is a perception among headteachers that this is not only causing confusion but that it is wasting resources that could be used in other areas of the education system.

These perspectives expressed by headteachers are aligned with earlier concerns by the OECD (2014, 2017, 2021) emphasising the importance of coherence in reform initiatives. The OECD highlighted the need for the WG to articulate how various reforms and policies interrelate, facilitating headteachers' engagement with the wider reform agenda. Considering the adoption of occupationally oriented practices by the WG was demonstrated in national initiatives such as the New Curriculum (Donaldson 2015) and the PSTLs. One suggestion that headteachers made in relation to promoting and fostering the agency of headteachers was that they should work more closely with LAs so that there is a feeling of ownership:

> *I think it needs to be reviewed. The local authority will still be there because there are those statutory things which need to be done. (Headteacher 13)*

> *I think that the LA is offering some of the right stuff, but perhaps that could be packaged in a different way now. The LA should feel as if it's owned by all leaders in Wales; it's not there yet. So, I would say the LA needs to tackle that that, it needs to feel as if it's owned by all the school leaders and that they have a voice in it and that they can express their voice through it and that it is more and more shaped by them. (Headteacher 6)*

These perspectives have highlighted that Wave 2 reforms created uncertainty in relation to the role and function of the LAs, for example, the fulfilling of statutory obligations and responsibilities related to school budgets, governing bodies and other administrative services within education. While the data acknowledged the importance of LAs in meeting these statutory roles, some headteachers questioned whether LAs provided value for money, calling for a more streamlined system. Other intermediary bodies, such as school governing bodies, have professional learning statutory responsibilities. However, headteachers felt that governors needed to be aware of the PSTLs, though they argued that the interpretation and 'understanding' of them rested with headteachers:

> *They are not au fait with the standards, I think they should have an awareness of them. But I don't think governors should be expected to understand fully the standards and the dispositions. (Headteacher 9)*

More awareness rather than an understanding of them, and I think the understanding of them sits with us as heads. (Headteacher 4)

If I said to my governors I'd like to do this leadership programme and they be like, 'Actually, what do you want to do that for?' Well, it links to the standards, so there's no awareness there. (Headteacher 8)

Headteachers perceived the role of the governing body as having an awareness of the PSTLs, but there was a consensus from the data that the main responsibility rests with themselves as headteachers. The need for school governing bodies is set out in law and their roles defined by the WG (2018). In terms of accountability the headteacher is accountable to their governing body for carrying out their leadership roles effectively. The Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (2011) clearly designates the statutory responsibility for headteachers' performance management lies with the school's governing body and the LA. The guidance for headteachers' performance management specifies that individuals conducting the performance management review must have the appropriate skills, knowledge and behaviours to carry out the role effectively. Knowledge of the professional standards would therefore seem essential. The responsibility for ensuring governors have the training and information to fulfil their roles competently (Connolly et al. 2018) rests with the LAs.

The role of Estyn functioning as a school inspectorate service sitting within the middle tier was perceived by headteachers as an accountability organisation, which headteachers felt was one of the biggest pressures in carrying out their daily roles. These headteachers had their own views:

There doesn't seem to be the same degree of high-stakes accountability in the wider system right now; however, there's still Estyn, isn't there? However, we know if we were to have a phone call to say that Estyn were coming in a few weeks' time, it would be, 'Oh! let's sharpen everything up.' So yeah, the political landscapes have changed over time and leadership has therefore changed. (Headteacher 6)

I would say there is less accountability now, but things are different. I do, but I'm still worried on a Monday morning am I going to get that phone call from Estyn which is fine, you know. (Headteacher 10)

'Cause that's the biggest thing that holds us to account as heads and causes probably the most panic and consternation in terms of challenging Estyn, I think. (Headteacher 12)

Headteachers acknowledged that there was reduced accountability; however, the presence of Estyn still holds significant weight. The data highlighted the pressures that headteachers faced in managing and responding to different accountability systems within the middle tier. Regarding professional learning, Estyn's role pertains to ensuring compliance with statutory performance management requirements. This involved evaluating whether schools adhere to the School Teacher (Wales) Appraisal Regulations (2011) and verifying their alignment with the PSTLs. Meeting the statutory requirements is the responsibility of both the governing body and the headteacher.

7.3 The Role of the NAEL as a Meso-Level Partner

The establishment of the NAEL was a key strategy in Wave 3 aimed at fostering leadership development as part of the professional learning and wider reform agenda (Donaldson 2015; OECD 2017, 2021). The NAEL sits within the middle tier and is considered a coherent body working collaboratively with other meso-level organisations (LA, regional consortia (RC), Estyn, Education Workforce Council (EWC)). Within this framework, a lack of clarity of professional learning roles and responsibilities of these meso-level bodies has resulted in what was described earlier as the 'messy middle' (OECD 2017; Connolly 2018). The online survey identified that most headteachers were 'familiar' (24.0%) or 'very familiar' (25.3%) with the NAEL, compared to 13.3% who were 'unfamiliar' or 6.7% who were 'very unfamiliar'.

Over half of the surveyed headteachers expressed varying degrees of importance regarding the NAEL, ranging from 'extremely important' (22.0%) to 'slightly important' (20.3%). However, nearly one-third of headteachers (28.8%) felt that the NAEL's work was not relevant to their professional learning and development needs

Additionally, the positioning of the NAEL as an 'arm's length body' of the WG operating as a public institution and its placement in relation to the PSTLs has caused some headteachers to question the role of the NAEL and where their responsibility to headteachers lies.

For instance, in the interviews Headteachers 12, 9 and 11 expressed the following:

> *Maybe it's tricky as well because they want to be the voice of headteachers; at the same time can you be the person who's putting it across? (Headteacher 12)*

> *So where is their voice? Where is their voice? And that voice needs to be out in the system much more. I'm probably not wording it properly, but I just think there's a huge group of heads who are not heard at all, you know. The heads who are driving to school in tears, who are sitting in the bath and can't get out of the bath because they're so exhausted. You know the heads who are fearful of saying anything to their staff in case they upset them. Those voices need to be heard as much, and I think that if, yes, the academy needs to be on those middle-tier things, but I just think you need to be careful about what they're saying, and I don't know how you judge that. (Headteacher 9)*

> *It's not necessarily something that represents us, but if it wants to be the voice of leaders, then it needs to be able to show that it can have robust conversations with Estyn as well. So, I think challenging and having good conversations with Estyn around categorisation, gradings, standards, things like that would be a role for it in terms of its development as well. (Headteacher 11)*

The headteachers' data suggests that headteachers are experiencing high levels of stress and need support (Baldwin 2022). While they recognise the NAEL's role in professional development, they also see it as having a function in advocating for headteachers. All three headteachers used the term 'voice' metaphorically to convey the idea of representation by the NAEL from different perspectives. One headteacher (Headteacher 12) perceived the NAEL as having a dual responsibility: firstly, to the WG as an 'arm's length body' in meeting policy implementation, and secondly, to headteachers in supporting them in their leadership development. This headteacher found this representation 'tricky', suggesting a perceived challenge where the NAEL may be seen as representing either the WG or headteachers, viewed as separate entities.

Another headteacher (Headteacher 11) conveyed uncertainty about the NAEL's role, using phrases like 'it's not necessarily something that represents us' and 'but if it wants to be the voice of leaders', which indicated a lack of clarity regarding the purpose and role of the NAEL. This headteacher viewed the NAEL's role as an intermediary body that challenged other meso-level partners, such as Estyn, on headteachers' issues. This implied the belief that headteachers might not feel confident to communicate effectively and directly with organisations such as Estyn about school leadership issues. Similar sentiments were expressed by Headteacher 9, who also saw the NAEL as a middle-tier body representative of headteachers and expressed concern that some headteachers were struggling in their leadership roles, with others in the system being unaware of these challenges.

The data from the three headteachers showed disparities in representation, which suggests that some headteachers are still uncertain of the role of the NAEL and its position as an intermediary body within the wider reform agenda. This perspective was reflected in the expert data by Expert 1, who highlighted the challenges faced by the NAEL, particularly its placement in the middle tier and the need for clarity regarding its role in connection with the WG and other meso-level bodies.

However, despite these variations, both the headteachers' and experts' data has shown that the NAEL is perceived as an important organisation for leadership development. This was reflected in the online survey, where over 50% of headteachers felt that the NAEL was' important' for their professional learning and development needs. The online survey identified that there was a moderate positive correlation between headteachers' levels of familiarity and the importance of the NAEL in supporting headteachers in their professional learning and development. This indicated that as headteachers' familiarity with the NAEL increased, the extent to which they agreed that the NAEL was important also increased. A total of 80% of respondents reported that they were 'somewhat familiar', 'familiar' or 'very familiar' with the NAEL, and less than a quarter were either 'unfamiliar' or 'very unfamiliar'.

> *I kept on meaning to have a look at everything that they do, and I hate the thought now of seeming as if I don't feel the academy have got anything to teach me. And I certainly feel I'm not the finished article and maybe I should have looked more closely. (Headteacher 14)*

> *Some heads don't even know the academy, which is I think a big part of the problem, is everybody thinks that the National Academy is just a group of headteachers, elite headteachers, which it's not. It's not elite headteachers at all and it shouldn't be, and I know they've opened it up now to youth work etc. I don't know if enough work's been done from a school capacity yet for us to actually for it to have made an impact. (Headteacher 4)*

Both headteachers 14 and 4 reflected on differences in levels of familiarity with the NAEL, which provided an insight into how they perceived the NAEL in terms of leadership development. One headteacher (Headteacher 14) expressed regret that they had not explored everything that the NAEL had to offer headteachers and disliked the idea of appearing indifferent. The use of the phrase 'I'm not the finished article' suggested a willingness to engage with the NAEL for their professional growth and development and a realisation that they needed to look more closely at the work of the NAEL. This data suggested a low level of familiarity with the NAEL.

Another headteacher (Headteacher 4) showed a high level of familiarity when they discussed the organisational structure of the NAEL to dispel a misconception that some headteachers might hold about the academy. Headteacher 4 clarified that the NAEL was not exclusively designed for a specific group of headteachers but included all sectors of education, including youth workers. This headteacher raised the question of whether some headteachers have made sufficient efforts to engage in the NAEL, suggesting that a better awareness could help dispel misunderstandings about the role and purpose of the NAEL.

On the other hand, some headteachers reported positive experiences which reflected the NAEL's role and purpose in fostering professional growth and development among headteachers. This sentiment was also reflected by Experts 1 and 5. During their interviews, they highlighted the NAEL's role as a support for headteachers through the facilitation of leadership conversations and the endorsement, validation and quality assurance of leadership practices.

> *I have engaged in quite a few of their events. Purely again just through being proactive as an individual, to be honest with you. It does provide that platform; it also provides a wealth of opportunities for professional*

development and research that can develop your practice. My experience so far has been positive. (Headteacher 4)

Yeah, so for me the leadership academy provides the professional learning that I like to see, it feels fresh on point that it listens to leaders and delivers the kind of PL that I feel I want as leaders right now. (Headteacher 6)

Both headteachers' data highlighted a common theme of the NAEL being viewed as a valuable organisation for headteachers which provides a platform for collaboration and leadership support. Headteacher 4 expressed a high level of engagement with the NAEL and talked about *'*a listening ear' and 'a sounding board', suggesting the importance of having a supportive network. Another headteacher described the relevance of the NAEL for professional learning as 'fresh on point', which indicated that the leadership support offered by the NAEL is relevant to the challenges and demands faced by headteachers. While these headteachers experiences and engagement with the NAEL was positive, 28.3% of the survey participants did not feel that the NAEL was relevant to their professional learning needs. Further data analysis identified that there was a moderate positive correlation between headteachers' levels of familiarity and how relevant headteachers felt the NAEL was in supporting them in their professional learning. This means that as headteachers' reported levels of familiarity increased, the extent to which they agreed that the NAEL was relevant for their own professional development also increased. This would suggest that when headteachers were aware of and engaged with the NAEL, they saw its value in relation to their own professional learning and development.

Certainly, this was the case with headteachers 4 and 6. During their interviews, when they described the NAEL they used phrases such as 'and delivers the kind of PL that I feel I want as leaders right now' (Headteacher 6) and 'it also provides a wealth of opportunities for professional development and research that can develop your practice' (Headteacher 4).

However, as this study has shown, there are variations in how headteachers perceived the role and purpose of the NAEL within the middle tier. This could be attributed to recent challenges posed by 'the messy middle' and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have further complicated headteachers' understanding of the

NAEL. Consequently, some headteachers perceived the NAEL as being 'too far removed' from the day-to-day realities that headteachers face at school level.

All headteachers in this study understood and acknowledged the importance of external accountability from middle-tier partners. However, analysis of the interview data indicated a lack of rigour in the role of the governing body and the RC in relation to the type of support offered for the implementation of the PSTLs. One of the possible causes of confusion acknowledged by headteachers was the proliferation of middle-tier partners with the same organisational agenda, which has resulted in a complex ecosystem of professional learning support in Wales, making it challenging for headteachers to navigate effectively.

7.4 Understanding and Use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership in Relation to Performance Management

The purpose of professional standards has been debated extensively, most especially in relation to their role and use with regards to performance management. Sachs (2008) suggests that while the aim of professional standards should be developmental, it is crucial to strike a balance between meeting the demands of regulatory frameworks such as performance management and raising educational standards.

These debates in relation to professional standards as tools for professional development or resources for performance management was highlighted in the expert interviews, which revealed two main perspectives. The first perspective aligned the PSTLs within traditional understandings of performance management and their position within the wider reform agenda. The second expert viewpoint perceived PSTLs as a tool to sensitise headteachers with occupational practices, promoting subsidiarity and headteacher agency in professional development, consistent with what Evetts (2011) has categorised as occupational professionalism. For the latter, the experts had an awareness that performance management could potentially hinder headteachers' engagement with the PSTLs and suggested that performance management needed to be aligned with the PSTLs.

These contrasting understandings are reflected within the statutory regulation of teachers' professional performance and development in Wales. The regulation of performance is delineated in the Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (2011) and

has remained unchanged for more than ten years. The introduction of these appraisals coincided with Wales entering what this research identified as Wave 2, considered an era of high accountability as a way of improving systemic performance.

The role of the PSTLs was to serve as a framework and as a reference and guide for fulfilling statutory requirements. As stated in the literature review, the performance management of headteachers and teachers comes under the jurisdiction of the WG in line with the School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (2011). Therefore, it is the statutory responsibility of the governing body and headteachers to meet these statutory requirements. The primary aim of the regulations is governance of the performance management process, for example who carries out the appraisal and when; the review process; and the process for appeals, which is set out in the Performance Management Policy for schools. Although the PSTLs themselves are aimed at fostering the agency of headteachers and teachers and are a move away from the accountability model of Wave 2, they are still aligned statutorily to a Wave 2 performance management approach.

Headteachers were encouraged to utilise the PSTLs to set objectives and goals for their own professional growth as well as that of their school teaching staff, aligning with the priorities outlined in their school improvement plans. However, the navigation of these three educational policies and frameworks (Performance Management Policy 2011; The Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (2011); PSTLs 2018) within the organisational and occupational professional practices models (Evetts 2011) has presented challenges for headteachers, as shown in the interview data.

> *I think the standards, they don't particularly develop heads at this moment in time purely because our performance management system is still very, very structured, and to me it is very much the old way of doing things. (Headteacher 16)*
>
> *And I think that it was absolutely the right decision to change them. But I think there are still, um, massive blockers for them actually working, you know, because there are other parts of legislation and policy that hasn't changed along with them. (Headteacher 16)*

> *However, we're still caught up in performance management looking like it always has, which has led to that kind of box ticking accountability all tied up kind of thing, which is unfortunate really, isn't it? (Headteacher 6)*

The interview data revealed two distinct perspectives regarding headteachers' views on the efficacy of the PSTLs within the existing performance management framework. Headteacher 16 showed concerns about the PSTLs' ability to foster professional development among headteachers, attributing this limitation to the rigidity of the existing performance management system. Despite acknowledging the importance of revising the PSTLs, Headteacher 16 also noted that their effectiveness is hindered by legislative and policy frameworks which have not evolved alongside the PSTLs.

Similarly, Headteacher 6 echoed concerns about the disconnect between performance management practices and the move towards occupationally oriented practices as part of the wider reform agenda. They illustrated the persistence of previous accountability measures, characterised by a 'box ticking' approach which they perceived as counterproductive to fostering professional development among headteachers.

One of the reasons why performance management and the PSTLs were not revised in tandem was attributed by the experts to timing. According to the experts, the WG prioritised revising the PSTLs to align with the implementation of the CfW (Donaldson 2015), viewing it as a catalyst for promoting occupational practices within the wider reform agenda. Although this strategic decision aimed to promote the adoption of occupationally oriented practices, as the headteachers' data has shown, it only hindered progress in how headteachers understood and implemented these policies (OECD 2021) and highlighted the disparities between the two systems. (See Section 7.5 Timing of the PSTLs for further exploration of the CfW).

In practice, this resulted in headteachers questioning the effectiveness of the performance management cycle itself as a framework for appraising their own professional development and growth.

> *So, performance management in itself I find challenging. It feels like at times a bit of a waste of time. That does sound kind of arrogant. (Headteacher 12)*

We did try really hard to look at them, but now if we look at them for performance management, it's more of a token trying to find something I can pin onto them rather than them driving things. (Headteacher 1)

I find my performance management hard in terms of a bit like when I was a child my father was a staunch Catholic and I'd sit in on the pew waiting to go into confession, thinking, 'What can I say I've done this week? I'd better say I've eaten meat on a Friday.' Well, I hadn't but I had to say something 'cause I said I told a lie last week, which I hadn't. (Headteacher 14)

Headteachers did not see the performance management appraisal for their own professional development as beneficial or feel that it aligned with their needs as school leaders. This perspective is exemplified by Headteacher 14, who likened their experience with performance management to a childhood scenario in which they felt obliged to confess 'sins' that they hadn't actually committed. This comparison suggested that some headteachers were not leveraging the PSTLs to drive their own professional growth but rather retrofitting and employing them post hoc solely to meet statutory requirements.

However, it falls upon the LA and school governing bodies to uphold accountability in meeting performance statutory regulations. The LA has statutory responsibility for fulfilling the Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (2011) for headteachers, and it is a statutory requirement that the objectives set for headteachers align with the PSTLs. In appointing the best-placed individuals to support headteachers and governors, the LAs have the flexibility to invite school improvement officers from the RC to facilitate the process (WG 2023).

Over the past decade, due to changing political landscapes the role of the RC in relation to performance management has become less apparent to headteachers. Under the WG reform agenda, regional-level working for schools emerged during Wave 2 era as part of a review to reduce the geographic and socio-economical variances within schools across Wales. An example of this was in the type of RC support offered to schools. During Wave 2 era, the role of the RC was established to challenge schools towards improvement, aligning with an organisational practice model.

As well as looking towards school governors, headteachers in this study argued that the RC should be proactively promoting and using the PSTLs as part of their professional and learning development role:

> *We tailor ourselves to the audience we've got, don't we? If it's something that governors and challenge advisors are not promoting and using particularly, then I think it's – yeah, we're always busy, aren't we? As heads and stuff. (Headteacher 6)*

> *The challenge advisor needs to be kind of promoting and pushing that as a kind of language to be used around performance management for headteachers 'cause they're the professionals in the room, effectively. (Headteacher 11)*

> *They don't have a very good in-depth understanding of the standards, so they don't challenge me on the standards. They don't ask me where I am sitting within the standards. I've never had a conversation as a headteacher with anybody about where I sit professionally in the standards. I've never once been asked about the standards as a head in the last five years. (Headteacher 16)*

The data revealed differences in the understandings of the role of their school improvement partners within the RC. As Headteacher 11 explained in their interview, 'the challenge advisor needs to be kind of promoting and pushing' the PSTLs Similarly, Headteacher 16 through their experiences perceived a lack of understanding of the role of the PSTLs in relation to their school improvement partner. The use of the term 'challenge advisor' also indicated that some headteachers viewed the role of the RC as still rooted in organisational practices, very much a Wave 2 discourse. In contrast, another headteacher used the term 'school improvement partner' to describe the role of the RC, which illustrated an example of good practice indicative of Wave 3 occupational practices. This shift in terminology from 'challenge' to 'improvement' mirrors the evolving role of the RC towards a more supportive 'enhanced' role for school improvement partners in fostering school improvement.

On the other hand, one headteacher had an alternative view:

> *I've got a very good school improvement partner who looks at those with me. We've used them to create a two-way dialogue, and that's how we identify how the school can support me. I think you need to keep readdressing the standards. I need to know where I am as an individual. Rome wasn't built in a day. (Headteacher 5)*

The phrases 'looks at with me' and 'we've used them to create a two-way dialogue' clarified that this headteacher understood the role of the PSTLs as a 'developmental and self-regulatory tool', which is a characteristic of occupational professional practice. However, what this qualitative data indicates is that there has been uneven use of the PSTLs and variances in approaches to professional learning and development across the RC. This data reflects the online survey findings, which showed that most headteachers either 'agree' (43.1%) or 'strongly agree' (9.7%) that the PSTLs help them take responsibility for their own professional learning and development. However, this qualitative data also indicates that there has been uneven use of PSTLs and variances in approaches to professional learning and development across the RC.

Headteacher 5 also had a good understanding of the role of the RC as a meso-level partner in their professional learning and development. The interview data does not conclusively indicate whether Headteacher 5's effective practice was influenced by a thorough understanding of their school improvement partner's role, described by Expert 3 using the language of Hoyle as an *'*enhanced' role in headteachers' professional development, or if it aligned with the expectations of the headteacher's RC. However, the majority of headteachers still operated within the Wave 2 performance management model, as illustrated by Headteacher 11, who perceived the primary responsibility for the PSTLs lies with the RC, viewing them as the 'professionals' in the room.

What it does show is that some headteachers from certain RC had moved to promoting subsidiarity, in which fostering professional dialogue is perceived as an occupational practice. This indicated a shift by some headteachers towards Wave 3 occupational practices, where they recognised the value of PSTLs as tools for professional dialogue within the meso-level support framework of the Wave 3 occupational model.

It opens up a very meaningful, constructive dialogue, in my opinion.

(Headteacher 14)

I actually use the five standards; we've got a leadership for all approach. We don't call them performance management; we call them professional conversations, which are very much based on the standards. We ensure that when we are having our professional learning conversations that the five professional standards are there as the focus. (Headteacher 11)

I think they're very relevant to me both to my staff in terms of their own performance management. Also to me, as I said, in creating a common language with them and identifying how to support them better through the management process. (Headteacher 12)

The interview data identified that some headteachers found the PSTLs effective in fostering professional dialogue between themselves and their school teaching staff. This finding was consistent with the online survey results, which found that more headteachers reported that the PSTLs helped them promote professional dialogue.

Over 45% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'The formal leadership descriptors help me promote professional dialogue between me and others' (see Q16(c) in Table 6.2 Univariate Analysis of Wales Online Survey section 5.0). The online survey also indicated a moderate to positive correlation between headteachers' perceptions of the PSTLs usefulness for their school teaching staff and their effectiveness in fostering professional dialogue for themselves and others.

Examples of this in practice are shown in the interview data when all three of these headteachers (Headteachers 14, 11 and 12) engaged with the PSTLs in a way which had a positive impact on their professional learning and development. The common theme from the interview data was that the PSTLs had facilitated meaningful and constructive professional conversations with colleagues/school teaching staff. For example, Headteacher 11 changed their performance management system in school to 'professional conversations'. This idea is grounded in the PSTLs and aims to promote 'talk' around professional practice ideas, something which emerged from the expert interviews. This way of thinking aligns with the Schools as Learning

Organisations (SLO) agenda to promote professional conversations among headteachers and teachers (OECD 2018).

Nevertheless, the example of positive practice in implementing the PSTLs discussed earlier by Headteacher 5 indicated progress within the system: 'I've got a very good school improvement partner who looks at those with me.'

Therefore, for the WG to effectively harness the PSTLs as a catalyst for promoting these practices, there must be sufficient time, resources and support available for headteachers. This reflected some of the challenges that faced headteachers within the meso-level partnerships.

However, if some headteachers' perceptions of the PSTLs remain grounded in organisational practices, this can, according to Evans (2023), lead to misinterpretation and adoption of different professional practices. An example of this was how headteachers understood and used the PSTLs for themselves and their school teaching staff. The online survey data identified that a higher percentage of headteachers found the PSTLs more useful for their school teaching staff (57.0%) than themselves (46.8%), a difference of 10.2%. These findings were reinforced by an online survey comment: 'pressures of current primary headship and the challenges it entails means my own professional development is not a priority'.

On the other hand, a total of 81.3% of headteachers stated they were either 'very familiar' or 'familiar' with the PSTLs. Despite this awareness, the perception from headteachers who were interviewed was that the PSTLs were not useful for their own professional learning and development.

> *Yeah! Yeah! it's a self-reflection tool, its nothing formal, I don't go away and think, 'Right, where I am going next?' Useful more for my staff. I see it as something that we have to do. (Headteacher 3)*
>
> *For me, I have not used them personally for my own professional development, really. I've obviously used it with my staff, but because I'm at a point – maybe if I was obviously deputy head or in early headship, I'd be looking at it. But I suppose because I am referring to them with my staff, I haven't really thought personally how I use them. What do I need to use them personally for? (Headteacher 2)*

I'm familiar in as much as I read them when I do my perf management; I read them when I'm training the staff. (Headteacher 7)

If I was perfectly frank, I probably use them biannually at best. As a head you tend to put your staff first and put yourself second. I'd say my staff use them slightly more regularly than I do, and it provides them greater insight, I think. Reflecting on your own leadership is a difficult thing because it's just so multifaceted and it's very hard to pin down into a framework. (Headteacher 6)

The interview data showed differences in how the headteachers utilised the PSTLs for their own professional development compared to their utilisation for their school teaching staff. Headteachers indicated a greater frequency of PSTL usage for their school teaching staff than for themselves, a finding consistent with the online survey data, where more headteachers (58.8%) used the PSTLs more frequently for their school teaching staff than for themselves (51.2%), with 'once a term' being the most popular for headteachers using the PSTLs with their school teaching staff. This could be reflective of some headteachers' belief that their own professional learning and development is secondary to their school teaching staff or, for some headteachers, that professional development was not needed in the role. A possible reason for these two perceptions, as mentioned previously, is that some headteachers' understandings of professional learning and development remain rooted in organisational professional practices (Evans 2023). For example, Headteacher 2 perceived the PSTLs as a professional learning model intended for teachers at the start of their career rather than being suitable for more experienced headteachers. This view is exemplified by the phrase 'What do I need to use them personally for?', indicating a belief that the PSTLs are more suitable for teachers at an earlier career stage. As reported in the expert interviews, the underlying principle of the revised PSTLs was to establish a professional learning model that fostered the growth of all school leaders and teachers, irrespective of their professional position or experience.

Headteachers talked about their contrasting experiences in the adoption of the PSTLs with their school teaching staff, particularly with newly qualified teachers (NQTs) versus more experienced teaching staff. This perception was also captured in the online survey when one headteacher stated that 'the only members of staff

who are familiar are my NQTs'. Likewise, in the interviews, Headteacher 10 and Headteacher 14 stated:

> *With NQTs we use them all the time… (Headteacher 10)*
>
> *The teachers that were most familiar were the new teachers, the new to the post, 'cause they are actually documenting their journey and how they were doing against these standards. Perhaps the most difficult were those people that had been in post for a long time and trying to get them to use the passport. (Headteacher 14)*

Both Headteacher 10 and Headteacher 14 highlighted a generational divide in adopting the PSTLs, observing that newer teachers were more receptive and engaged with the standards, while experienced teachers felt they needed additional support to fully embrace them. Headteacher 14 suggested that this lower engagement among experienced teachers might stem from a reluctance to change long-standing professional practices tied to previous standards and a resistance to using the Professional Learning Passports (PLPs) due to these ingrained habits. This divide presents challenges for both headteachers and the WG in ensuring consistent engagement with the PSTLs across all levels of teaching experience. The challenge is further compounded in schools where headteachers prioritise their staff's engagement with the PSTLs over their own, particularly among those experienced headteachers whose understanding of professional standards is deeply entrenched in previous organisational practices, which characterised Wave 2 (Evans 2023).

Both headteachers (Headteachers 10 and14) observed that NQTs were more familiar with the PSTLs compared to their more experienced colleagues. Headteacher 10 stated, 'with NQTs, we use them all the time', indicating that NQTs frequently engage with the PSTLs, likely due to their integration into their induction requirements. Similarly, Headteacher 14 mentioned that NQTs' engagement with the PSTLs was driven by the need to document their professional learning journey using the PLPs. These insights align with findings from Arad (2021, 2023), which reported that long-serving teachers were the least engaged with the PSTLs, viewing them mainly as tools for those at the beginning of their teaching careers. This concern was

also highlighted by experts discussing the long-term sustainability of the PSTLs, emphasising the importance of embedding them into the system.

Headteachers faced further challenges when they struggled to connect with and appreciate the value of the PSTLs, partly due to a perception that the PSTLs were not integrated into the wider reform agenda and perceived as a series of reforms, movements and changes which resulted in some headteachers being unable to see how the reforms fitted coherently together. Headteacher 8 and Headteacher 13, for example, said:

> *No, we don't use professional standards. So, for performance management, for myself, it's just linked to school improvement priorities. They are set with the school improvement partner. We don't look at any specific standards. We don't look at the professional standards or anything like that to help shape those currently. (Headteacher 8)*
>
> *I don't use them at all, really, at present. I think it's more traditional, my performance management, in that they almost go back to what they were, the standards. (Headteacher 13)*

The statements from Headteachers 8 and 13 highlight a disconnect between the use of the PSTLs and their performance management approaches. Headteacher 8 explicitly mentions that the PSTLs are not utilised in their performance management process. Instead, they focus on aligning their performance management goals with school improvement priorities, as set with their school improvement partner. This interview data contradicted the findings of the survey data as discussed in the online survey, which indicated that a higher percentage of headteachers found the PSTLs beneficial in identifying their professional learning and development goals, with nearly 50% either 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing'. Headteacher 13 also indicated a minimal use of the PSTLs, describing their performance management approach as 'more traditional' and 'what they were', which suggests a reliance on familiar, more outdated methods more in keeping with organisational professional practices in preference to occupational practices as seen in the PSTLs.

Potential explanations for why some headteachers did not perceive the PSTLs as beneficial may mirror those reasons put forward by the experts in Phase One. Expert 2 identified that, as a legacy of Wave 2 policies there was a residual perception of

professional learning and development as the ‘done to model’. This was reflected in the account given by Headteacher 8, ‘they are set with the school improvement partner’, which indicates that Headteacher 8 perceived the PSTLs the responsibility of the RC.

The data revealed varying understandings of the PSTLs as a tool for professional growth and development. Of the sixteen headteachers interviewed, two (Headteachers 8 and 13) did not use the PSTLs at all, either for performance management arrangements or as a means to promote professional learning and development in their schools. These perceptions could be attributed to the role of the PSTLs in performance management, with both headteachers failing to appreciate their value as part of the wider reform agenda. Instead, they perceived the PSTLs as isolated from other systemic changes, resulting in a lack of coherence and understanding regarding the alignment of these reforms. These perceptions are consistent with the expert interview findings, where Expert 1 categorised the role of performance management within ‘traditional understandings’ rather than as catalysts to foster agency and autonomy.

However, one headteacher (Headteacher 9) demonstrated a solid understanding of using the PSTLs within the performance management framework for their teaching staff. This finding aligned with the data from Phase Two: Online Survey, where headteachers were asked about the importance of supporting their school teaching staff in gaining a good understanding of the PSTLs. More than 56.8% of headteachers ‘agreed’ and 16.2% ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement.

> *I did it in staff meetings. We unpicked it and looked at it, but then I also did it at an individual level; when I was undertaking performance management and discussions, we always referred back to the standards, I asked for feedback, and staff felt that their performance management meetings during the year had been more of a professional standard. (Headteacher 9)*
>
> *They were focused and there was a rationale behind the performance management targets, and there was also a noticeable increase in the research element. (Headteacher 9)*

Headteacher 9 described their approach to implementing performance management within their school for their school teaching staff, which involved both group and individual engagement with the PSTLs. By 'unpicking' the PSTLs and using them as a point of reference, Headteacher 9 ensured that the school teaching staff had a clear understanding of the expectations and objectives outlined in the PSTLs and that performance management was productive and beneficial for all those involved.

7.5 Timing of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership

The timing of the implementation of the PSTLs has emerged as one of the key debates within this study, particularly in their positioning within the wider reform agenda. This was first raised as a debate within the expert interviews. One view put forward by the experts was that the PSTLs were not considered by the WG as a standalone policy document but rather as a catalyst to drive systemic reform within the context of the third wave of educational change in Wales. Expert 3 argued that the PSTLs could be released first to help precipitate this change. However, with some exceptions, the headteacher data suggests that this is not how the PSTLs have been received: rather than the PSTLs being seen holistically as part of a wider reform agenda, they are seen by headteachers as freestanding, and this has only amplified and exacerbated the sense of being overwhelmed. Other experts saw that the intellectual and professional framework in which the PSTLs sat needed to be consistent with the principles of the CfW for headteachers to value the importance of the PSTLs as a tool for professional learning and development. These experts argued that the PSTLs should have been released alongside CfW reforms.

The approach taken in relation to the PSTLs was more in line with the 'vanguard' or catalyst perspective advocated by Expert 1. However, many of the headteachers who were interviewed did not perceive the PSTLs as being part of a new approach and instead viewed them as being another reform within a raft of reforms, which resulted in 'reform fatigue'. This has resulted in policy fatigue caused by the overlapping of WG policy initiatives and insufficient resources (OECD 2018).

> *There's white noise, it's confusing; the most experienced or more experienced headteachers than me are confused at what we're supposed to be doing, there is a definite initiative overload. In terms of professional*

> *learning needs let's synthesise it down to what is actually needed, let's take stock of where are; it's not business as usual. (Headteacher 5)*
>
> *In all reality, there is such an enormity to everything that schools are trying to deal with at the moment, an overwhelming enormity, and I can honestly say with the standards, it's just a case of juggling everything now. (Headteacher 9)*

Both headteachers illustrated confusion and feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of WG initiatives and information which they are expected to navigate. Headteacher 9 described 'the overwhelming enormity' of the challenges that schools currently faced. The term 'enormity' conveyed the magnitude and scale of these challenges, which indicated that the headteacher was daunted. This is further expressed in the phrase 'it's just a case of juggling everything now', which indicated that over time headteachers would effectively engage in the new initiatives. Headteacher 5 expressed this confusion as 'white noise', indicating that the lack of co-ordination and the influx of excessive and irrelevant information had confused even the more experienced headteachers in the system. The suggestion to 'take stock of where we are' and 'synthesise it down to what is actually needed' indicated the call for the WG to consider a more streamlined policy approach.

One of the key tensions is that the PSTLs are not perceived by headteachers as part of the wider reform agenda; instead, they are viewed as obstacles taking them away from their daily leadership roles. However, it could be argued that the timing of the roll-out of the PSTLs was somewhat marginalised by two significant factors: the impact of the pandemic (see Section 7.7 Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic) and the introduction of the New Curriculum.

> *Everything within the system, time, time plays a big part. I'd love to revisit them three times a year, maybe more than that, but again you're limited. There's a hierarchy of need in terms of what you're implementing, such as Curriculum for Wales; there's more multi-layered elements to that that you have to consider. (Headteacher 5)*
>
> *It's a tough, tough place to work at the moment, Welsh education; it's severely underfunded and morale is low. It's very, very difficult, then, to be*

a cheerleader for new initiatives when you think, 'Why don't you just leave us alone to teach children?' (Headteacher 6)

The workload element of it and the initial fatigue and the general policy combine harvester that come out of Welsh Government is a big part of our well-being. (Headteacher 8)

Headteachers talked about' *initiative fatigue'* and described how it was 'difficult to be a cheerleader for new initiatives', which suggested a degree of resistance to change due to overwhelming workloads. Additionally, the phrase 'morale is low' indicated that headteachers' enthusiasm for these new initiatives had waned, affecting their overall well-being (Baldwin 2022). The use of the metaphor 'combine harvester' by Headteacher 6 strongly indicated that headteachers are tired of the constant changes with no clarity of the purpose of this change. One headteacher (Headteacher 6) viewed the changes as an interference in carrying out their day-to-day duties: 'Why don't you just leave us alone to teach children?'

These perspectives expressed headteachers' frustration at operating within two professional practice models, one emphasising agency and autonomy and the other rooted in administrative bureaucracy. This dichotomy has resulted in headteachers feeling fatigued, perceiving new WG initiatives as constant changes rather than drivers to achieve the goals in the wider reform agenda. Nevertheless, data from interviews with some headteachers showed that specific occupational practices within Wave 3 have fostered a sense of 'professionalism', as stated by Headteacher 14, who noted how the PSTLs facilitated 'a very meaningful, constructive dialogue, in my opinion', and Headteacher 11, who described a 'leadership for all approach' when using the PSTLs with their school teaching staff.

The experts interviewed in Phase One emphasised the importance of professional agency, showing a renewed sense of agency and professional competence rooted in collaboration through subsidiarity. Expert 5 specifically mentioned a 'sense of loss' experienced by headteachers. When discussing the preferred PSTL model to implement, four of the experts opted for a developmental model, while one expert favoured a more organisational model. However, this section on 'timing' has identified that most headteachers did not view the PSTLs as part of the wider reform agenda, instead perceiving them as just another WG initiative, which has contributed

to headteachers feeling fatigued. The data also showed that some headteachers had made progress towards occupational professional practices such as the role and relation of the PSTLs to the CfW agenda.

7.6 Curriculum for Wales

The CfW was a key policy driver by the WG in fostering the occupational practices adopted in Wave 3, and the PSTLs were an important element of the shift towards these occupational practices. The timing of these key policies was significant for the WG, influenced by several key policies: the Donaldson Report (2015), the OECD (2017) and the SLO agenda (2018). As outlined above, the decision for the WG was where the PSTLs sat in the wider reform agenda – as a method to foster professional agency, as a 'catalyst' or 'vanguard', or should they come later when the new CfW was in place? On the other hand, there was a concern that the PSTLs would be overshadowed, and it was – by the CfW but also the COVID-19 pandemic. Expert 5 initially thought the PSTLs were two years too early, as the PSTLs may have been more welcomed and 'grabbed by more people' if implementation had been later. However, Expert 5 acknowledged that the PSTLs had informed other aspects of the reform agenda such as the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL, 2018).

The idea behind WG thinking was that introducing the PSTLs first would support headteachers and teachers in preparing their role in the New Curriculum, to adopt the necessary skills, knowledge and behaviours. The online survey showed that most headteachers, when asked whether the PSTLs had helped them implement WG national initiatives, were either positive or neutral, with 7.6% 'strongly agreeing', 29.1% 'agreeing' and 31.6% 'neither agreeing nor disagreeing'. Some headteachers perceived the PSTLs as part of the wider reform agenda.

Despite this, there was clear recognition among headteachers that the PSTLs aligned with the aims of the CfW:

> *This model fits in very much with Curriculum for Wales. (Headteacher 11)*
>
> *Yeah, I think we were at the point in the profession where we needed something; we needed to upskill people, and we needed to have a framework to work to. They've been, you know, had professional input*

which I think was critical from the start, a bit like with Curriculum for Wales. (Headteacher 10)

It's a very different model, but I think this model fits in very much with the CfW. You've got your four core purposes, the statements of what matter, everything you can bring in. (Headteacher 10)

Headteachers recognised the importance of alignment between the PSTLs and the CfW. Headteacher 11 identified that the model fitted well with the CfW, and Headteacher 10 emphasised the need for upskilling within the profession and recognised the importance of the PSTLs to support this development. By referencing the four core purposes of the CfW, this indicated that Headteacher 10 had a good understanding of the need to align the CfW with the PSTLs.

On the other hand, some headteachers saw a disconnect with the PSTLs and the CfW, seeing them in isolation and not working in alignment with each other:

But it comes down to time, time and inclination and morale amongst my middle leaders is not good, and they don't want anything else. They just want to try and get through the day. They want to try and get to grips with the CfW. They do not want anything else. (Headteacher 9)

You just haven't got the headspace with all the changes going on to just take the time yourself to learn about something like that. It's hard enough with the curriculum now. I haven't even got my head around everything in the curriculum yet. (Headteacher 2)

Both headteachers highlighted significant concerns related to time constraints and how they felt overwhelmed by the educational reforms. One of the main tensions was that finding time was a challenge within already demanding daily roles. Headteacher 9 expressed concern about the morale of their middle leaders, noting that they are primarily focused on managing their daily workload and adjusting to the requirements of the CfW. These perceptions show a sense of disillusionment among middle leaders which could affect to their willingness to engage with the PSTLs.

7.7 Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Other significant factors which influenced the progress of the PSTLs for headteachers included the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the demands this

placed on headteachers, which only added to headteachers feeling overwhelmed and fatigued.

> *I do think that the implementation of the standards was overshadowed by COVID and the New Curriculum. (Headteacher 8)*
>
> *As an experienced head, just the managing of everything through that pandemic, going out of the pandemic there's been a massive amount of illness. Just even managing the school, never mind leading the school, has been a pretty much really hundred per cent job. And like everything else, everything seems normal, but it's certainly not back to pre-COVID in school. (Headteacher 14)*
>
> *I think that COVID has impacted hugely; we're still picking up that, we're still picking up mental health issues with children. I've got one of my counsellors in school every week now, and I have never, ever had it before. (Headteacher 10)*

The interview data clearly indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had a substantial influence on headteachers and their schools. It was evident that leading a school during COVID-19 demanded headteachers' full attention, often diverting them away from WG initiatives such as the PSTLs. This was due to the urgent and disruptive changes required to adapt to the pandemic's challenges, including addressing the mental health of pupils. The use of the term 'overshadowed' by Headteacher 8 suggested that both COVID-19 and the New Curriculum took precedence over the PSTLs. This data showed that this headteacher did not see the PSTL framework aligned to the New Curriculum but perceived the PSTLs as something separate.

Headteachers' sense of risk and isolation intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, causing pressure on headteachers to make decisions:

> *So, it's been full on, I'd say. And I know I'm not the only head who's going home and saying that there's not even time in the week to have any rest time because there's so much to do onsite. And then you get home and there's a flood of emails that you need to cope with, and that's become more. The paperwork burden has become more and more. (Headteacher 3)*

> *I've just been firefighting, as a head I am doing well more management than leadership, and it does just feel like firefighting. So, I'm reactive, I'm not proactive enough and I think, in order to use the standards properly for myself, you need to be in that proactive stage, and I haven't been in that proactive stage for a while. (Headteacher 7)*
>
> *It's an absolute pig's ear out here with curriculum, absolute pig's ear, and I feel like I'm going round in circles. I want to say that all schools are under pressure how to manage professional learning financially and those boring bits around redundancies, but also how the support systems that are in place to support you doing that; you know, it comes to, where do you go to for help? who do you help? who helps you? (Headteacher 10)*

Headteacher 3 expressed feeling overwhelmed by the workload, identifying the lack of time for rest due to the demands of onsite tasks and the inundation of emails. On the other hand, Headteacher 7 described a sense of being consumed by managerial tasks, feeling 'reactive' rather than 'proactive' in their approach to their leadership role. This aligns with the views of Harris (2020), who argue that headteachers experienced shifts in school leadership practices due to constant demands of the pandemic. The term 'firefighting' (Headteacher 7) was used metaphorically to describe the struggle of balancing administrative duties with the strategic thinking required for effective leadership.

Headteacher 10 felt highly accountable for the potential risk associated with making a wrong decision and the possible repercussions this could have on their school. The phrase 'absolute pig's ear' metaphorically indicated that the headteacher felt overwhelmed and under pressure to make important decisions and suggested that the situation was messy, confused and difficult to navigate. Wave 3 has promoted subsidiarity as a model for fostering the agency of teachers within an occupational model. However, rather than fostering agency, this headteacher argued that he has no guidance or support and feels that he is 'going round in circles'. Of course, when considering the timing and roll-out of the PSTLs, the WG could not have foreseen the COVID-19 pandemic or predicated the impact that this would have upon schools. There is, however, little doubt that the feeling of 'crisis management' precipitated by the pandemic was not conducive to fostering the agency of headteachers.

7.8 Conclusion

The findings from the headteachers revealed significant challenges in implementing recent national initiatives in Wales. The timing of the PSTLs alongside the implementation of the CfW led to headteachers perceiving the PSTLs as isolated and not seen as an initiative which forms part of the wider reform agenda in Wales. These views only added to the 'reform fatigue' among headteachers, who generally felt overwhelmed by an 'overload' of reform initiatives. Additionally, navigation of the middle tier and inadequate resources only added to the 'overload' perceived by headteachers.

These challenges were especially heightened due to the middle-tier partnerships, particularly the roles of RC, LAs and governing bodies. From the perspective of headteachers, there is a lack of coherence within the different meso-level bodies, both internally and in their communication with headteachers. Experts discussing these meso-level bodies also highlighted varied understandings and orientations within these middle-tier organisations. This variability has influenced how headteachers perceived and understood the PSTLs, not only in the context of the wider reform agenda but also as a framework for personal growth and development. These perspectives expressed by headteachers are aligned with earlier concerns voiced by the OECD (2014, 2017, 2021) emphasising the importance of coherence in reform initiatives. In addition, the complexity of the middle tier has further complicated matters, particularly in relation to performance management.

The interview data gathered from headteachers revealed two main distinct perspectives regarding the PSTLs and performance management. Firstly, the PSTLs' ability to foster headteachers' professional learning and development was hindered by the School Teacher (Wales) Appraisal Regulations (2011) and legislative and policy frameworks that had not evolved alongside the PSTLs. Secondly, headteachers viewed a disconnect between performance management practices and the shift towards occupational professional practices adopted in Wave 3.

The performance management guidance for headteachers specifies that those conducting performance reviews should possess the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their roles effectively. Given this, familiarity with the professional standards is essential. Findings from the headteacher interviews show that meeting

statutory performance management requirements for themselves and their school teaching staff was problematic. The PSTLs are grounded in occupational professional practices versus a performance management system still rooted in organisational professional practices (Evetts 2011). Findings indicated that variations in understanding within the meso-level partnerships have influenced headteachers' comprehension and use of the PSTLs.

Headteachers generally perceive the governing body as having some awareness of the PSTLs, yet there is a consensus that the primary responsibility for implementing and managing the PSTLs falls on the headteachers themselves. Responsibility for ensuring that governors receive the appropriate training and information to competently fulfil their roles lie with LAs (Connolly et al. 2018). This adds another layer of complexity to the role of headteachers, who must navigate not only the PSTLs themselves but also governance and training. This data has highlighted the need for a more streamlined middle-tier system and better training for governing bodies.

These perspectives identified that these issues were barriers to headteachers and teachers' engagement with the PSTLs, which were counterproductive to fostering professional growth for headteachers within the existing performance management system. Additionally, experienced headteachers and teachers were the least engaged in the PSTLs in comparison to those headteachers and teachers new to the profession. The data identified that possible reasons for this were navigation within the middle tier to access appropriate professional learning resources and experiences of professional standards rooted in the Wave 2 era.

Within this middle tier, the NAEL has received mixed reviews, with over half of headteachers recognising its importance for professional growth and development, though some headteachers found the NAEL's role irrelevant due to their perceptions of its professional learning role, both within the middle tier and as an arm's length organisation of the WG. However, headteachers aware of the NAEL's role engaged with it and saw its value in relation to their professional learning and development, while others perceived the NAEL as being 'too far removed' from the day-to-day demands of headteachers' roles.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic further diverted attention from WG initiatives, including the PSTLs, as headteachers prioritised immediate challenges such as mental health and crisis management. This disruption, coupled with outdated performance management frameworks and inconsistent support, has complicated the effective integration and application of the PSTLs, revealing a need for more streamlined policies and better alignment with current WG initiatives.

Chapter 8: Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This study has argued that the new Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTLs) were an element within a change in educational policy direction in the Welsh Government (WG), which was identified as a third wave of policymaking. Theoretically, the study drew on wider literature which considered professional practice generally and identified two approaches: organisational and occupational. This study argued that Wave 3 saw the reintroduction of approaches to professional work associated with occupational professional practice (Evetts 2011).

This study framed the introduction of the revised PSTLs within the context of the third wave by analysing headteachers' professional learning and development in relation to how the revised PSTLs were implemented and understood in Wales.

This discussion chapter will address each of the three research questions in turn, and they will be explored individually using data from interviews with the experts and headteachers as well as data from the online survey. These findings will be discussed in line with current literature and two professional theoretical frameworks categorised by Evetts (2011) as occupational and organisational professional practice. The limitations of the data and suggested areas for further research and enquiry will be discussed at the end of this discussion chapter.

8.2 How Do the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership Fit within the Wider Reform Agenda in Wales?

A key finding from the data was that most headteachers felt that WG had not adequately considered how educational policies were articulated and how headteachers would manage the implementation of national initiatives alongside their already demanding leadership roles. Moreover, the experts highlighted that the strategic placement of the PSTLs within the reform agenda was a critical decision made by the WG to facilitate headteachers' engagement in occupational professional practices. The decision revolved around whether to implement the PSTLs after the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) was established or whether they would be best positioned to support headteachers in preparing for the CfW. Initially, some experts believed that the PSTLs occurred prematurely, proposing that the CfW should have preceded it. However, this was reconsidered to align with the delivering of the CfW.

At the same time, the WG was under obligation to meet the recommendations of the Donaldson (2015) report and the OECD (2017) recommendations, which urged for an accelerated development of the PSTLs as part of the reform efforts.

The timing and positioning of the PSTLs and where they sat within this wider reform agenda has been one of the key issues which have emerged from both the expert and headteacher data. The findings indicated two perspectives: firstly, the PSTLs were seen as a standalone policy, and secondly, as a catalyst to drive systemic reform in Wales. The approach taken was to use the PSTLs as a catalyst for change. However, partly due to unforeseen circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic and patchy communication and uneven approaches in the middle tier, many headteachers did not view the revised PSTLs in this way but perceived them merely as a collection of isolated policies. In practice, the findings showed that headteachers were left feeling 'fatigued' and 'overwhelmed', which was not helped by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All headteachers who were interviewed as part of this study reported experiencing significant impact on their daily leadership responsibilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a temporary shift of focus away from WG national initiatives (Harris 2020). This resonated with findings from the recent report by the Education Workforce Council (EWC) (2021) which highlighted how the pandemic affected headteachers' daily leadership duties and overall well-being as they navigated both their demanding leadership responsibilities and the challenges brought about by the pandemic. The pandemic response highlighted the tension between accountability and risk taking. Headteachers in this study expressed that managing internal accountability, prioritising the safety of their pupils and staff, and ensuring the continuity of effective online and blended learning added to their already demanding leadership roles. This made it increasingly difficult to initiate a new approach to professional learning and development that fostered agency when headteachers' sense of risk and exposure were amplified (as well as their capacity and time to develop this approach).

Concerns were indeed raised by the experts that the PSTLs would be overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the debate is that the CfW and the PSTLs are part of the wider reform agenda in Wales, and the pandemic was not anticipated in the

roll-out of the CfW and the PSTLs. However, although the pandemic made an impact on headteachers, the timing of the implementation of the PSTLs was also influenced by the reports of Donaldson (2015) and Furlong (2015), promoting agency within the teaching profession through the fostering of active and creative professionals.

Therefore, the discussion does not just centre around the articulation of the PSTLs but also encompasses the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) agenda and the CfW. These initiatives collectively aimed to cultivate a culture of professional learning characterised by agency, collaboration and self-reflection, qualities inherent in occupational professional practice (Evetts 2011). The headteacher data indicated that these aspirations were not understood or appreciated by headteachers, as the vast majority of headteachers were unaware of the revised PSTLs. In addition, while some headteachers saw the PSTLs as part of this wider Wave 3 reform agenda, many viewed them in isolation or as another reform. These headteachers felt fatigued and overwhelmed instead of empowered and enthused by these policies, contradicting the intended outcomes envisioned by the WG. These findings reinforced those of the OECD (2014, p. 66), which noted that 'the challenge for Wales was not in the willingness of the profession but rather in the timing', with professionals feeling increasingly overwhelmed by the high pace of change. This sentiment was reiterated in two further OECD reports (2017, 2021), emphasising the need for the WG to consider how policies within the reform agenda interrelate to facilitate headteachers' engagement with the wider reform agenda.

Experts perceived both the SLO agenda and the PSTLs as crucial for effectively implementing the CfW, albeit for different reasons. The SLO was perceived as empowering headteachers to bring the CfW to fruition through a thriving professional learning culture, while the PSTLs were perceived to equip headteachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver the CfW effectively. The CfW was not perceived as a standalone policy by the experts, and both the PSTLs and the SLO agenda were perceived as gatekeepers to its successful implementation. However, the headteacher data has shown that one of the challenges which faced headteachers was that they perceived the PSTLs as a standalone policy due to other overriding factors, such as the meso-level partnerships (see Section 7.4 Understanding and Use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership in Relation to Performance Management).

Headteachers in this study perceived that the continuous policy fluctuations in professional learning and development over the past two decades had only succeeded in blurring their perspectives on professionalism in their leadership roles. While some headteachers had clarity in relation to this change in policy direction and were able to locate the PSTLs within a wider framework, the headteacher data suggested that there was not a clear narrative which located the revised PSTLs as part of broader policy changes.

Any attempt to reset evaluation and accountability structures must begin by building the professional capital of its school leaders (Fullan et al. 2015). However, findings from this study suggested that the accountability structures introduced in Wave 2 resulted in low levels of trust, hindering the development of professional capacity for its headteachers and teachers. This was evidenced in the headteacher interview findings, where some headteachers expressed dissatisfaction with the Wave 2 accountability system, describing it as overly reliant on school league tables to gauge performance. One expert reinforced this sentiment, describing the Wave 2 era as a '*fearful environment'* for headteachers, characterised by risk aversion, low levels of trust and limited agency.

One reason for this, as this study found, was that Wave 2 was driven by unsatisfactory Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results in 2009, prompting a shift towards external accountability and performativity as a strategy to regain international recognition. Both the expert and headteacher data acknowledged there were consequences of the external accountability in Wave 2 era. As Reid (2011) argued, an emphasis on governance accountability can compromise the sense of professionalisation, leading to a sense of deprofessionalisation. This study corroborates Reid's theory (2011), with both headteachers and experts viewing Wave 2 as a period marked by diminishing professionalism and deprofessionalisation (Donaldson 2015). However, what Wales is experiencing is a move away from, not towards, more centralised accountability. While there has been a wealth of research on the move towards performative accountability (Ball 2015; Sachs 2016), little work has been done regarding headteachers' experiences when policies attempt to shift in the opposite direction. A significant aspect of this study is to directly gather insights from headteachers to address this gap (Torrance 2015).

The data in this study has shown that while this move would be supported by headteachers, it is not a simple process. Expert interviews suggested that the higher accountability model adopted in Wave 2 resulted not only in a reconfiguration or 'reduction' in headteachers' professional agency but also in a process that hollows out the system and militates against trust between WG and the profession. Both the survey and interviews strongly indicated that this was the case.

The headteachers' interview data indicated that Wave 2 policies led to an understanding of 'teacher professionalism' that offered limited opportunities for professional development. The data suggested that the organisationally aligned and accountability-driven approaches within Wave 2 may have resulted in 'reduced' understandings of their own professional work (Hoyle 1974). The data also illustrated that the revision of PSTLs were an attempt to improve this and act as a catalyst for the wider systemic reform in Wales. Headteachers acknowledged that a major challenge for the WG would be convincing headteachers to view "professionalism" as equivalent to personal growth and development. This aligns with the shift in Wave 3 towards more occupationally oriented approaches to professional development, aiming to foster the capacity and agency of teachers. Within this, the PSTLs were seen as a resource for professional dialogue, not a framework for 'ticking' competency boxes.

An example of this was the use of the term 'standards', which prompted discussions among experts with diverging opinions. Some experts favoured replacing the term with 'personal growth', contending that it better reflected the occupational professional practice model (Evetts 2011). Similarly, Egan et al. (2018, p. 5) also suggested that the term 'standards' could be prone to misinterpretation and misunderstanding as they were not conventional standards but rather a series of five overarching headings (collaboration, pedagogy, innovation, leadership, professional learning), each encompassed behind a range of descriptors. These five 'standards' could be more aptly associated with 'areas of professional learning' or 'nodes'. Further research indicated that the term 'standards' was linked to organisational professional practices perceived as a set of agreed rules by which teaching professionals conformed (Bowker and Star 1999). Similarly, in this study the more experienced headteachers associated the PSTLs with Wave 2, and a lack of clarity around the term only added to the confusion felt by some headteachers.

This study has identified that ensuring policy coherence has posed a challenge for the WG, particularly evident in the transition from Wave 2 to Wave 3. In Wave 2 challenges arose in articulating leadership programmes such as the Primary Headship Induction Programme (PHIP) and the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) (Egan and James 2003). The survey and interview data illustrated how moving to a new approach raised issues, not least in aligning the CfW, SLO and PSTLs. Specifically, the articulation of the SLO agenda to headteachers became a focal point of criticism, leading to recommendations outlined in the OECD, SLO Wales report (2018). Among these recommendations was the need for a communication strategy (Egan et al. 2018, p. 2) to provide clarity for headteachers behind the rationale of the SLO agenda and its alignment with the CfW and other related policies, including the PSTLs. While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted all policy implementation, the headteachers' data suggests that headteachers were not aware of the overarching rationale behind the revision of the PSTLs. One of the ways of ensuring policy coherence which was upheld by the experts was the co-construction process employed in the inception and design of the PSTLs, which involved key stakeholders including headteachers. According to Viennet and Pont (2017), the inclusion of key stakeholders in the design and implementation phase is crucial for the success of any policy.

According to Fullan et al. (2015), changes in accountability systems present significant challenges. One major issue in shifting from an external accountability system based on performativity to an internal system fostering agency is the need to develop leadership capacity to manage these changes. This requires a collective understanding of new approaches and a shared responsibility for policymaking. Priestley et al. (2015) argue that the concept of capacity building can be misleading, as it suggests that teacher agency lies solely with the individual rather than what headteachers and teachers bring to a setting or what the setting provides for them. Attention, according to Priestley et al. (2015, p. 135), should be paid to the 'cultural and structural domains' of the environment, including resources and appropriate support. In Wales, the WG's commitment to occupational professional practices is recognised, and the approach taken for the CfW endorses this shift in thinking. Additionally, the implementation of the PSTLs by the WG illustrates this commitment to improving teaching standards alongside the CfW. However, as Priestley et al.

(2015) argue, if we want headteachers and teachers to achieve teacher agency, simply relying on autonomy through a new curriculum is insufficient. Appropriate support and resources are needed for long-term sustainability.

These views align with Sachs (2016, p. 419) in that external accountability systems are short term and the opportunity for developing professional practice and improving systems is limited if headteachers and teachers are perceived purely as 'technicians' to serve governments. According to Sachs (2016, p. 215), accountability is a 'two-sided sword'. On one side there is the teaching profession, and on the other, the government, with each side holding contrasting perspectives on accountability. Sachs (2016) suggested that both views should be aligned; however, the argument lies in how a balance can be maintained to ensure that excess demands are not placed on headteachers.

It is clear from the findings of both the experts and headteachers that the accountability system in the Wave 2 era represented a reframing of professional learning in Wales. A significant outcome of the Wave 2 era was the impact it had on Wave 3, not only influencing headteachers' perceptions of accountability but also shaping the WG's approach to driving the wider reform agenda into the Wave 3 era. This issue was reinforced by the experts when questioned about the approach taken to occupational practice in Wave 3. The findings from the experts indicated that a key issue revolved around whether, given the low level of trust stemming from Wave 2, headteachers would be willing to trust the WG again to adopt occupational practices in Wave 3.

One of the key characteristics of an occupational model is a high level of trust and confidence within the system: trust and confidence from the WG in implementing the policy changes and trust and confidence in headteachers in enacting the policy changes (Evetts 2011). The findings from the experts acknowledged this challenge faced by the WG in encouraging headteachers to adopt a system that had been previously described as 'a fearful environment'. According to Evetts (2011), occupational professionalism is sustainable if agency and autonomy are central to its system. However, as Priestley et al. (2015) argue, this is only conducive if the appropriate support and resources are provided as a framework that enables agency and autonomy rather than restricting professional learning and development. The

external environment is, therefore, a key factor in sustaining agency and autonomy (Evetts 2011). These views by Evetts (2011) were upheld by the findings from the experts, who all acknowledged that agency and autonomy were key to fostering occupational practice.

However, the data revealed that agency was a concern among the experts, with some expressing the belief that ownership was tied to headteachers' perceptions of trust in the system. While there was evidence of moves towards such a model, this was inconsistent. Many of the headteachers framed the PSTLs in terms of performance management within the policy discourse of 'school improvement'. The data also suggested that this understanding was evident within some regional consortia (RC). One of the issues raised in this study was who has responsibility for the PSTLs at a meso level. Unlike most other countries, 'ownership' of the PSTLs was not vested within the professional body representing teachers. This has left the PSTLs remaining under the control of the WG, which has only added to the frustrations faced by headteachers in this study. As the experts' data illustrated, there was a disjunction between the promotion of agency and ownership within the third wave and the PSTLs not being assigned to the professional body charged with accreditation of headteachers and teachers. This mixed approach was also evident in relation to how the PSTLs related to statutory requirements in relation to performance management.

The debate centres on the inconsistency of the WG's agency over the PSTLs with occupational professional practice. The critical issue involves analysing how agency and autonomy are reflected in the PSTLs and the extent to which headteachers and their school teaching staff can shape their professional practices within this framework. Although headteachers theoretically agreed with the principles, the findings from the headteachers' online survey revealed that they perceived the PSTLs as a standalone policy more beneficial for their school teaching staff than for themselves, and not as a framework to support curriculum and policy development. According to the OECD (021, p. 32), the focus of professional learning for headteachers and teachers should be the four core purposes of the CfW to raise educational standards for pupils. This could constrain headteachers' and teachers' autonomy, but citing the PSTLs as a framework within the SLO agenda gives autonomy, focus and value (OECD 2021). The experts' data highlighted concerns

that a lack of understanding of the PSTLs and their relationship to the CfW and the SLO agenda could lead to misuse and undermine the PSTLs' fundamental principles and other reform policies. Data from the survey and headteacher interviews indicated these concerns were valid, as many headteachers did not see the broader policy narrative or relate the PSTLs to other elements within Wave 3 approaches.

While agency and autonomy are a core discourse within Wave 3 research (OECD 2019 TALIS), it has been suggested that headteachers' engagement in professional learning is influenced by four primary factors: heavy workload, limited incentives, lack of relevance and financial costs. The findings of this study indicated that the majority of headteachers cited workload (particularly during the pandemic) as the primary reason for not engaging with the PSTLs. Additional research (Baldwin 2022) also emphasised that the quick turnover of Welsh educational policy had placed significant pressure on headteachers, leaving them with limited time to assess the appropriateness of these policies within their school contexts. According to Priestley et al. (2015, p. 135), headteachers' agency and autonomy can be undermined if the environment in which they operate is disregarded, especially through what he terms 'back door regulation' such as school inspections and the use of performative data. This type of regulation has eroded teacher autonomy even more than the organisational, performative strategies (Priestley et al. 2015) observed in Wave 2 in Wales.

Similarly, Arad Research (2021) reported that a lack of coherence had affected headteachers' understanding of the PSTLs as a framework for personal growth and development, which had influenced their perception and engagement with the PSTLs. In this study 45% of headteachers surveyed reported that the PSTLs were easy to understand, and there was a moderate to strong correlation between headteachers' understanding of the PSTLs and use of the PSTLs. However, more headteachers felt that the PSTLs were useful for their school teaching staff (53.5%) than themselves (43.5%, despite over 40% agreeing that the PSTLs are easy to understand). The main reason for this, which will be discussed in the next section, was meeting the statutory requirements of performance management for their school teaching staff.

8.3 What Are Headteachers' Understanding and Use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership for Their Own and Their School Teaching Staff's Professional Learning and Development?

One of the primary concerns from the experts' data was how they could engage headteachers in the understanding and use of the PSTLs not just for themselves but also their school teaching staff. Findings in this study identified that both the experts and headteachers found that the school teaching staff who were most engaged with the PSTLs were those early in their teaching career, the newly qualified teachers (NQTs). There were two reasons for this. Firstly, as part of their induction requirements NQTs had to engage in the PSTLs while developing their reflective practice, and secondly, in the uploading of evidence to their Professional Learning Passports (PLPs) they were required to demonstrate their teaching competences against the PSTLs. These findings were consistent with Arad (2021, 2023) and EWC (2021).

Findings from this study identified a generational divide in those school teaching staff who engaged in the PSTLs in comparison to experienced teachers. One of the reasons for this, as found in the headteachers' data, was that more experienced teachers were grounded in organisational practices rooted in the Wave 2 era. One of the key debates from the experts was the engagement of not just headteachers but also their school teaching staff. On the one hand, the experts were promoting a PSTL framework that stemmed from occupational professional practice where responsibility for professional growth and development lies with headteachers and teachers. On the other hand, how to engage teachers from all experiences and settings to understand and use the PSTLs within an occupational framework was identified as a challenge. One solution offered by the experts was to 'build it into the system' for the long-term sustainability of the PSTLs. This implies that emphasis was placed on those in initial teacher education (ITE) and NQTs to make the PSTLs sustainable. One consideration is that NQTs are reliant on 'structure' to navigate their roles within an occupational professional practice model. However, Priestley et al. (2015) argue that teacher agency needs support and resources for long-term sustainability, which has been one of the key issues in the implementation of the PSTLs.

The headteachers' interviews identified that experienced headteachers found it a challenge to engage with the PSTLs, as most headteachers' understanding of the PSTLs was grounded in meeting performance management requirements. Similarly, the Arad (2023) report identified that there was a disconnect with the PSTLs and performance management arrangements. Only a minority of headteachers understood the broader role of the PSTLs in relation to the SLO agenda and the CfW. There were two major influences that could have contributed to these findings. The first was the emergence of meso-level organisations in Wave 2, often referred to as the 'messy middle' due to overlapping roles and responsibilities, which has resulted in a lack of coherence within these entities (OECD 2017; Connolly et al. 2018). This lack of clarity has led to differing interpretations impacting how headteachers perceived and utilised the PSTLs, especially in harnessing the professional learning roles of the RC, local authorities (LAs) and governing bodies. The second influence was headteachers having to meet performance management requirements within two different frameworks: regulatory and non-regulatory.

The data has shown that most headteachers' perspectives are still entrenched in Wave 2 and that headteachers found the transition to occupational practice theory in Wave 3 challenging. This perception was further complicated by how professional teaching standards were regarded in Wave 2 within organisational professional practices (Evetts, 2011). According to Ball (2003), Connell (2009) and most recently Mulcahy (2011), professional standards were used as a strategy by governments to improve teacher quality to achieve international recognition in the PISA rankings. In Wales, this was also the case in Wave 2 and where the more experienced headteachers interviewed in this study still associated the use of professional standards almost solely with performance management.

The headteachers' interview data highlighted that the role of the PSTLs in relation to performance management was a challenge for the majority of headteachers in this study. The main challenge which headteachers faced was the navigation between two frameworks: one regulatory and one non-regulatory. The debate lies in headteachers struggling to fulfil statutory responsibilities of a performance management system rooted in Wave 2 organisational practices, while simultaneously implementing a PSTL framework rooted in occupational professional practices.

In the interviews, headteachers revealed that they were uncertain about the PSTLs' role and function concerning the LA, RC and their governing bodies in performance management, with most headteachers continuing to operate within the Wave 2 framework. This lack of clarity has led most headteachers to question the value of the performance management cycle, viewing it as beneficial only for their teaching staff rather than for themselves. This aligns with previous research carried out by Arad (2021, 2023), which stated that experienced headteachers did not see the benefits of performance management for themselves. All headteachers in this study identified that school leaders play a key role in supporting their school teaching staff to gain a good understanding of the PSTLs.

Only a few headteachers who were interviewed understood the role and function of the PSTLs in relation to the performance management system. The issue seemed to lie in headteachers navigating two distinct professional practice frameworks: the developmental, collaborative nature of the PSTLs (occupational) versus the statutory requirements of the School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations (2011) (organisational).

Experts also acknowledged that the performance management framework was rooted in two different professional practices and anticipated this as a challenge for headteachers. Sachs (2016) highlighted the importance of striking a balance between regulatory demands such as performance management and implementing the PSTLs. Egan et al. (2018) cautioned that if driven primarily by performance management approaches, the utilisation of the PSTLs could jeopardise the trust and thinking themes integral to the SLO agenda. The findings of this study indicate that some of Egan et al.'s (2018) fears may have been realised. The ambiguity surrounding the role of the RC in the performance management process and the application of the PSTLs has exacerbated the lack of understanding and use of the PSTLs in this context.

According to the OECD (2021), moving from a national system of school evaluation towards an internal accountability system which promoted a self-regulatory model of self-evaluation is more beneficial because it encourages headteachers to take agency of school improvement through their own professional learning. In this study, the majority of headteachers surveyed indicated that they perceived the PSTLs as a

self-evaluation tool for planning their own goals (43.1% ‘agreed’, 6.9% ‘strongly agreed’), while 18.1% ‘disagreed’ and 9.7% ‘strongly disagreed’.

Within the broader reform agenda, two key policies supported headteachers in transitioning towards an internal self-reflective system: the SLO agenda and the PSTLs. The role of the PSTLs was to aid headteachers in assessing their professional learning as they ‘shape how we want teachers to be reflecting and also feed into performance management’ (OECD 2021 p. 36). However, a report by Egan et al. (2018) stated that only 40% of schools had engaged with the SLO model to some extent, partly due to varying understandings and interpretations of the model by schools. Earl and Timperley (2015) argued that headteachers required support to enhance their evaluative thinking skills for critical self-evaluation of their professional learning and its alignment with wider school objectives. The difficulty in making this transition was evident within the survey, where just over 50% of headteachers who responded ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that the formal leadership descriptors had helped them to be reflective in their leadership role.

The experts’ data showed that the design of the PSTLs is based on self-regulation, with the expectation that headteachers would adopt the PSTL model as part of their professional role with no need for any support, as they were ‘professionals’. The survey data showed that 42.5% of headteachers ‘agreed’ and 9.6% ‘strongly agreed’ that the formal leadership descriptors helped them to take responsibility for their own professional learning and development. While this is promising, it does indicate that almost half of headteachers surveyed did not feel that the leadership descriptors enabled them to be responsible for their own professional learning and development. While many headteachers did not value the PSTLs for their own development, they did view them as a useful tool in the professional learning and development of their school teaching staff: the survey found that more headteachers (56.3%) ‘agreed’ (46.3%) or ‘strongly agreed’ (10%) that the PSTLs were more useful for their school teaching staff than themselves.

One reason identified in the headteachers’ interview data was that their engagement with the standards was ‘overshadowed’ by the implementation of the CfW and the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, findings from the Arad (2023) report identified that practitioners’ awareness of the PSTLs had been overshadowed both by COVID-19

and the CfW. These factors, along with difficulties in navigating the middle tier, contributed to their lack of engagement with the PSTLs. Nonetheless, one criticism by the OECD (2021) is that such support for headteachers must originate from the meso-level partnerships of the middle tier. This study revealed that headteachers perceived navigating the middle tier to access suitable professional learning as one of the primary challenges to using or understanding the standards. As argued by Sachs (2008, p. 591), developing and implementing teaching professional standards that have 'currency' is a challenging task. This challenge is particularly evident when navigating the complexities of an evolving educational policy agenda.

Likewise, Evans (2023) contended that navigating through a disorganised and poorly co-ordinated professional support system which lacked clear direction had only exacerbated the problems faced by the professional learning agenda in Wales. Evans (2023) further argued that the confusion of navigation within the middle tier had also cost the WG valuable time which could have been better spent on other forms of reform development. This confusion over professional roles and responsibilities within the middle tier was felt by headteachers in this study, who when interviewed expressed doubts about the dependability of certain intermediary bodies, particularly the changing professional learning roles and responsibilities of the RC and the LA. While the data indicated that there were exemplars of good practice, meso-level support was patchy and the use of the PSTLs as a reference point for professional dialogue was uneven.

An example of this was the transition in the role of the challenge advisor to school improvement partners within the RC, which resulted in uncertainty regarding the PSTLs' role in meeting performance management requirements. Headteachers also grappled with ambiguity concerning the governing body's role in relation to the PSTLs and performance management, not only for themselves but also for their school teaching staff. The confusion experienced by headteachers was compounded by a lack of clarity regarding the roles of the RC and the LA regarding the utilisation of the PSTLs. This study has identified that changes to the infrastructure in Wales was part of the wider reform agenda to regain teacher professionalism. Part of this shift in approach to professional learning was driven by Donaldson's vision (2015) for a coherent, well-co-ordinated and sustained professional learning programme. Interview data in this study has only highlighted the frustrations and feelings of

mistrust faced by some headteachers in trying to navigate what are considered poorly co-ordinated professional learning roles and responsibilities within the meso-level partnerships, which has resulted in calls for clarity and support (Estyn 2020). The development of a new national entitlement of professional learning and a streamlining of the middle tier is considered by Miles (2022b) to be one solution to the lack of coherent meso-level support in Wave 3.

However, while Miles (2022b) perceived the National Entitlement Agenda as new, this study has shown that the entitlement agenda was promoted as a WG strategy in Waves 1 and 2. This was delivered through the implementation of the Continuing Professional Development: An Entitlement for All (2002) policy and again in Wave 2 with several entitlement policies and organisations (General Teaching Council for Wales, 2001; School Effectiveness Framework, 2008) to promote coherence in the professional learning agenda in Wales. However, in Wave 2 while 'professional entitlement for all' was a driver for raising standards, the organisational professional practices adopted within this wave hindered its progress. In Wave 3 the 'New Entitlement Agenda' promoted by Miles (2022) is more in keeping with the occupational professional practices adopted in this Wave.

8.4 What Is Headteachers' Understanding of the Role of the NAEL in Relation to Their Professional Learning and Development?

The establishment of the NAEL was a key strategy by the WG during Wave 3 to build leadership capacity and promote leadership development as part of the professional learning policy in Wales (Donaldson 2015; OECD 2017, 2021). This study has highlighted issues emerging from both the experts' and headteachers' data around the positioning of the NAEL: where the academy sits within the middle tier alongside other meso-level partners, the role of the NAEL within the professional development of headteachers, and the academy's relationship to the profession and its arm's length status from the WG. The creation of the NAEL in the Wave 3 era was part of a broader professional learning agenda in Wales, prompted by various reports highlighting deficiencies in leadership development and identifying a lack of focus on developing leadership capital within the Welsh education system (Hill 2013; OECD 2014, 2017). The NAEL's primary purpose was leadership development in Wales, acting as a coherent body to work in collaboration with other meso-level partnerships to support headteachers in their professional learning and development.

This coherent role emerged from recommendations outlined in Wave 3 (Donaldson 2015; OECD 2017, 2021), marking it as one of the two fundamental reforms for professional learning and development alongside the implementation of the revised PSTLs (WG 2017a). The National Mission served as a cornerstone policy document, providing the foundation for occupational professional practices and reflecting a collaborative approach to Welsh policymaking (Milton et al. 2020). Objective 2 of the National Mission (2017) emphasised the importance of the NAEL in realising the renewed vision for Wales. The experts' data aligned with these initial reports, suggesting that the NAEL should primarily function as a facilitator for leadership development, focusing on supporting 'professional relationships, processes and conversations' rather than directly providing professional learning opportunities.

Nonetheless, there is a commitment by the NAEL to the SLO agenda as well as supporting headteachers in further developing their leadership skills, confidence and capabilities to facilitate the implementation of the CfW. This study identified that the SLO agenda plays a pivotal role as a framework to foster the culture of self-evaluation of professional learning for headteachers. As reported by the OECD (OECD 2021), the NAEL was perceived as a crucial factor in supporting headteachers in the self-evaluation of the PSTLs for the CfW. Egan et al. (2018, p. 2) noted a limited 'synergy' between the PSTLs and the elements of the SLO agenda, indicating a need for further clarity. However, both frameworks can contribute to the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL, 2018), but further clarity is needed. This suggests that a more robust culture around self-evaluation is needed for effective internal accountability.

This study identified that challenges arose regarding the NAEL's role as a 'cohering body' within the middle tier, particularly in its interactions with the RC (OECD 2014, 2017, 2021), referred to earlier as the 'messy middle' (Connolly et al. 2018). The interview data revealed that some headteachers perceived the NAEL's role as targeting a select group of experienced headteachers known as academy associates, while others viewed the NAEL as representing the voice of all headteachers. These findings align with the OECD TPL report (2021), which noted concerns about the NAEL's poorly understood role in schools and suggested that the small scale of the organisation could hinder its potential. The survey data identified that more headteachers were 'familiar' (26.7%) or 'very familiar' (26.3%) with the

work of the NAEL. While just over half the headteachers surveyed were either familiar or very familiar with the NAEL a total of 28.3% of headteachers felt that the work of the NAEL was 'not relevant' in supporting them in their professional learning and development needs. This may be linked to confusion surrounding the NAEL's professional learning and development roles for headteachers. Moreover, there was also uncertainty about the respective roles of the NAEL and the RC.

In Donaldson's report (2015, p. 118), the NAEL's role is depicted as 'an arm's length structure to carry out day-to-day leadership'. However, the addition of the NAEL as an arm's length organisation in the middle tier has only added to the complexity of the meso-level partnerships and exacerbated the confusion experienced by headteachers, as evidenced in this study. Headteachers struggled to define the perceived 'dual' role of the NAEL as both an organisation for leadership development and an 'arm's length body' of the WG. The majority of headteachers in this study perceived the NAEL as two distinct entities representing either the WG or headteachers themselves, although in practice the NAEL's position is intended to be more nuanced. The headteachers' survey data revealed that only 23.3% considered the NAEL to be 'important', while 15% viewed it as 'fairly important' for their professional learning and development. These low percentages may reflect perceptions of the NAEL's role among headteachers. Similarly, the OECD (2021, p. 36) described Wales as 'a complex ecosystem' with the middle tier causing 'some confusion about the respective roles of the leadership academy and the RC'. Some headteachers had positive experiences with the NAEL, recognising its role in fostering professional growth and development. For example, findings from the experts' interviews identified the NAEL's contributions of collaborative networking of headteachers and the endorsement, validation and quality assurance of leadership practices as positive.

The initial remit of the NAEL under Kirsty Williams (2016–2021) was to contribute to the development of the professional capabilities of current and aspiring headteachers, to act as a thought leader and to be a respected and active member of the middle tier. A change of education minister further reinforced the NAELs role as a 'critical element of the middle tier' (Miles, 2022–present) collaborating closely with other meso-level partners such as the RC, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the EWC and Estyn. More recently, the second remit (Miles, 2022–2024) shows a

closer association of the NAEL supporting national initiatives, including the well-being of headteachers and a strong emphasis on the NAEL playing a key role in the NAPL agenda. The survey data showed that only 7.6% of headteachers 'strongly agreed' and 29.1% of headteachers 'agreed' that the PSTLs helped them in meeting WG national initiatives. As this study has shown, there is a strong correlation between the understanding and use of the PSTLs and raising educational standards. A closer association of the NAEL as a strategy to implement national initiatives could not only support headteachers in aligning the PSTLs alongside key initiatives but also help clarify for headteachers its positioning within the middle tier.

8.5 Study Limitations

This study on the professional learning and development of headteachers in understanding and using the PSTLs, while offering valuable insights, is not without limitations. These limitations reflect potential weaknesses or challenges encountered during the research process. By acknowledging these limitations, this study aims to provide valuable guidance for future research in similar areas. It is important to note that this research was relatively small in scale, involving sixteen headteacher interviews, five expert interviews and a national online survey of a relatively small sample of headteachers (n=80). One significant limitation lies in the scope and depth of the data collected, which may not have fully captured the diverse experiences and perspectives of all headteachers across different contexts. Additionally, the study not only focused on headteachers but also examined how their school teaching staff understand and use the PSTLs.

Another limitation concerns the collection of qualitative data from both experts and headteachers during interviews, where participants may have introduced biases by presenting their leadership practices in a more favourable or unfavourable light. The representation of headteachers from different educational settings also posed a challenge, with primary schools (10) being the most represented in the interviews, followed by secondary schools (5). Special schools (1) and pupil referral units (0) had the least representation, raising concerns about the comprehensive representation of headteachers from various educational contexts. It could be argued that headteachers from various geographical settings in Wales were not fully represented in the interviews, although this was considered when designing the interview schedule, and headteachers had the opportunity to participate through the

online survey. Similarly, in the online survey, representation of headteachers from different educational settings was limited, with primary (67.9%) predominating, followed by secondary (22.9%), while special schools (4,6%), pupil referral units (1.8%) and others, which included faith-based schools (1.8%), were the least represented.

Another limitation was that the online survey responses and headteacher interviews were not analysed based on variables such as phase, socio- economic background, or language context (English/Welsh medium). Additionally, middle-tier partners, including LAs, RCs, and ITE institutions, were excluded from the data collection. The survey design also did not account for geographical representation within the identified RCs and LAs, as it was conducted anonymously as I felt that including questions about RC and LA affiliation might have discouraged headteachers from participating. Furthermore, the primary focus of this study was to evaluate headteachers' understanding and application of the PSTLs within the broader reform agenda, rather than emphasizing geographical representation.

The findings from this study are not fully representative of all headteachers in Wales, as most of the interviewees were self-selected, and only 80 headteachers participated in the online survey, compared to a total of 1,510 (School Workforce Annual Census, WG 2023/24).

8.6 Future Study Recommendations

This study could benefit from undertaking a larger-scale study. For example, a comparative analysis of different geographical and educational settings across Wales where the PSTLs are implemented could reveal local and regional variations in understanding and application. This approach would offer deeper insights into the overall impact and effectiveness of the PSTLs, particularly in relation to educational phases, socioeconomic factors, and language contexts (English/Welsh medium).

Another potential study could involve longitudinal research to monitor the long-term sustainability of PSTLs, particularly by comparing NQTs and those in ITE with more experienced headteachers and teachers, who this study identified were least engaged with the PSTLs. Additionally, exploring the experiences of experienced headteachers and teachers who were least engaged with the PSTLs, possibly due to their professional practices being shaped by earlier, Wave 2 organisational practices,

could offer valuable perspectives on the challenges and barriers to widespread adoption and effective utilisation of the PSTLs. Involving the NAEL in the future study recommendations would be advantageous for headteachers, particularly those less familiar with the NAEL. This involvement could enhance the NAEL's leadership presence and emphasise its role in supporting the professional learning and development of headteachers as a key middle-tier partner.

After thoroughly examining the findings of this study and their connection to broader research, the next chapter will outline the conclusion and recommendations derived from this study.

Chapter 9: Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has highlighted the complex and multifaceted challenges associated with the implementation of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTLs) within the wider educational reform agenda in Wales. It reveals a significant disparity between aspirations for the PSTLs as catalysts for systemic reform and headteachers' experiences, where the PSTLs are often seen as an isolated framework removed from other reform policies such as the Schools as Learning Organisations agenda (SLO) and Curriculum for Wales (CfW).

The lack of clarity with regards to the responsibilities of meso-level organisations, overlapping roles and the post-COVID timing affected the transitioning from Wave 2's organisational practices to Wave 3's occupational approach (Evetts 2011). This study identified that some experienced headteachers are still grounded in the organisational practices evidenced in the Wave 2 era. Likewise, headteachers identified that there was a generational difference in engagement with the PSTLs. Namely, experienced teachers within their school were least engaged in comparison to newly qualified teachers (NQTs), who had a thorough understanding of the PSTLs due to their induction requirements. NQTs were perceived as the initial main stakeholders as one way of achieving long-term sustainability for the PSTLs by building it into the system.

Engaging headteachers in the PSTLs, particularly those more experienced and their school teaching staff, has been a primary concern, with most headteachers involved in this study viewing the PSTLs through the lens of performance management rather than as a framework for professional growth and development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted headteachers' engagement with the PSTLs, overshadowing their intended role within the CfW and the SLO agenda. Despite these challenges, some headteachers in the study did see the PSTLs as part of the Wave 3 landscape and used them as part of their own and their school teaching staff's professional development. The shift towards a model that reduces accountability while increasing teacher agency and autonomy is evident in the New Curriculum. The PSTLs are seen as a critical element of the New Curriculum framework for fostering professional dialogue and enhancing the professional learning and development of both headteachers and teachers.

Building professional capital, enhancing trust, and fostering agency and autonomy are critical for the success of these reforms. Findings from the expert interviews identified that a co-constructive way of policy working for headteachers would highlight the practical challenges that headteachers face, such as workload and the rapid pace of policy changes. This study has highlighted the need for greater clarity and coherence in policy articulation, ensuring that headteachers can effectively have a balanced approach to regulatory demands and the development of the PSTLs to support headteachers in integrating the PSTLs within their daily practices. Therefore, aligning the PSTLs with the New Curriculum and SLO agenda is essential for fostering a professional learning culture that empowers headteachers.

A recent independent review by the Welsh Government (WG 2024) on the roles and responsibilities of education partners and the delivery of school improvement arrangements highlighted similar concerns among headteachers that have also been found in this study. For example, many headteachers felt overwhelmed by the pace of change within the reform agenda and the lack of clarity in implementing national initiatives such as the CfW. Headteachers also raised concerns about the unclear roles and responsibilities of the middle tier, viewing some requests from middle-tier partners as unnecessary, counterproductive, and bureaucratic. Additionally, both headteachers and their staff found the current professional learning arrangements to be overwhelming, inaccessible, and of inconsistent quality.

The establishment of the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) by the Welsh Government (WG) during Wave 3 has been a pivotal strategy to build leadership capacity and promote leadership development, as highlighted by various reports (Donaldson 2015; OECD 2017, 2021). This study identifies two primary debates regarding the NAEL's positioning: its role as a cohering entity within the middle tier alongside other meso-level partners and its function as an arm's length organisation (Evetts 2011; Sachs 2016). This dual role of the NAEL as both a leadership development organisation and an arm's length body of the WG has added to the complexity of meso-level partnerships, causing confusion among headteachers (Donaldson 2015). While the data showed that headteachers were on the whole supportive of the NAEL, there was a lack of clarity in relation to its role in supporting headteachers' professional learning and development. Many of the

headteachers felt that the NAEL should advocate for headteachers and even represent their interests to the WG. These findings mirror the recent independent review (WG 2024) which highlighted that headteachers also expressed concerns about the NAEL's current role and its contribution to the professional learning agenda in Wales.

One of these challenges has been the NAEL's position within the middle tier, particularly in its interactions with the regional consortia (RC), leading to misunderstandings among headteachers about its purpose (OECD 2021). While some headteachers view the NAEL as beneficial for their professional growth, others perceive it as irrelevant or aimed only at academy associates (experienced headteachers). The findings from the experts in this study suggest that the NAEL should focus on facilitating leadership development by building professional relationships with headteachers, which aligns with the views of Egan and Keane (2018a) that the NAEL should play a mediating role between the teaching profession it seeks to represent and the WG and middle-tier partners such as the RC.

Overall, this study found that the NAEL is committed to supporting headteachers' professional learning and development, playing a crucial role in the SLO agenda and the self-evaluation of the PSTLs for the CfW. However, greater clarity regarding the NAEL's role and its relationship with other meso-level partners is needed to foster effective internal accountability and support the wider reform agenda. Specifically, this study has highlighted the need for clearer integration of the PSTLs into the wider educational reform agenda, potentially highlighting a future role for the NAEL in providing this clarity and support.

The recommendations are:

- Align the NAEL's objectives with the PSTLs and other national education policies to support coherence across the system.
- Refine the middle-tier professional learning partnerships to provide clarity and accessibility for headteachers and other educators in enacting the PSTLs.

- Provide clarity for headteachers and their school governing bodies on where the PSTLs sit within the regulatory and non-regulatory frameworks of the performance management system.
- Continue to adopt robust self-evaluation in understanding and using the PSTLs for headteachers and their school teaching staff.
- Continue to engage headteachers in the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) and the National Entitlement for All agenda.

9.1 The Next Steps

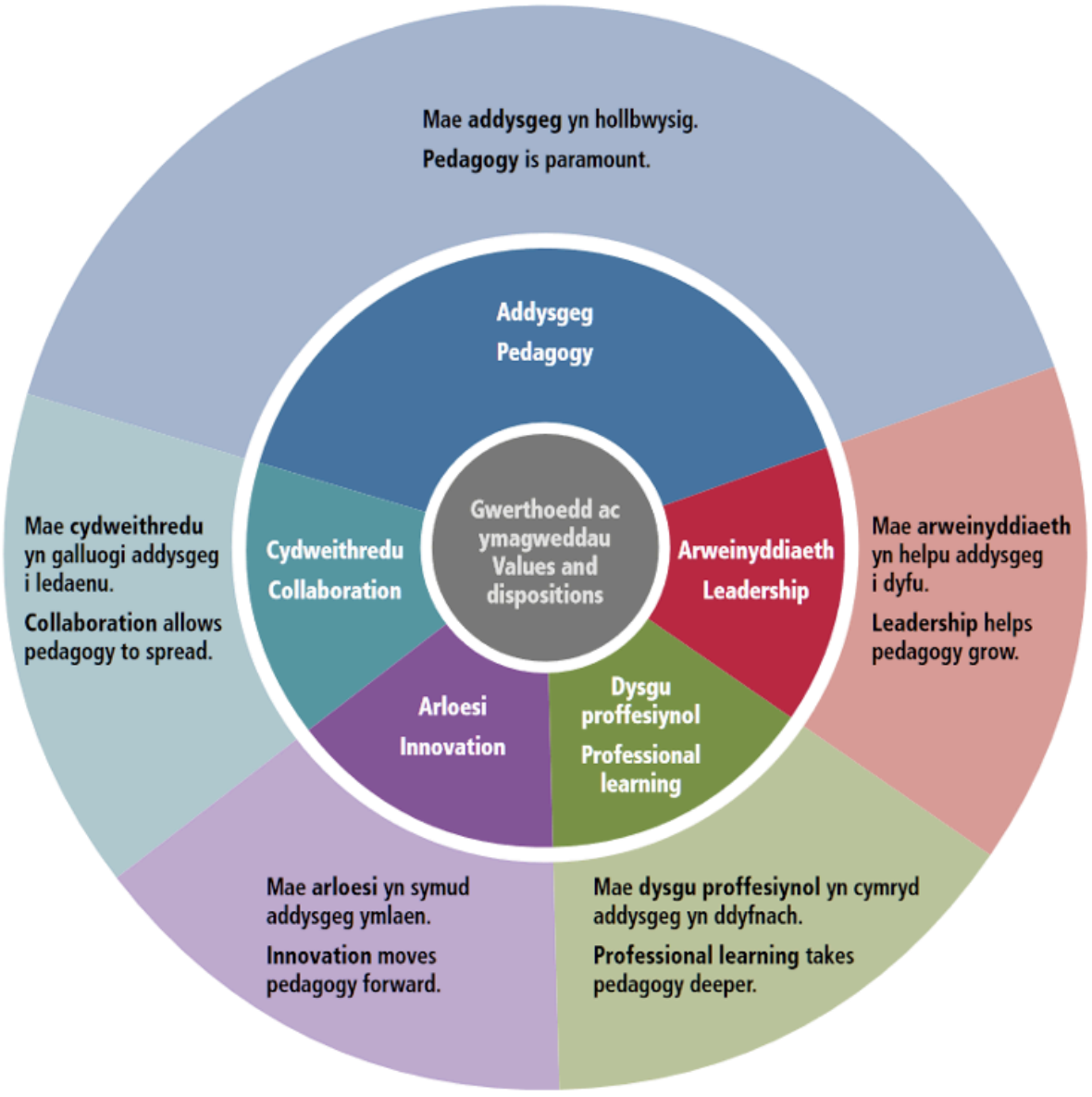
This study has examined how evolving waves of professional teaching and leadership standards have shaped the professional learning and development agenda in Wales for headteachers and their school teaching staff. This study is of timely importance because current evidence suggests that despite the PSTLs being introduced, the impact on learners is limited (Arad 2023). Therefore, this research identified potential challenges and barriers in order to help improve learning experiences for pupils in Wales. A key strength of this research lies in the direct insights gathered from headteachers, providing a deeper understanding of their views, specifically on the PSTLs in relation to their professional learning and development and on the role of the NAEL within these practices, not only as a middle-tier partner but as a key player in leadership development in Wales. The findings of this study aim to influence how the PSTLs can be instrumental in future educational policymaking as a framework for continuing to raise educational standards in Wales. This study has proposed ways to achieve this goal and suggested directions for future research, emphasising the importance of longitudinal and comparative analyses across different geographical and educational contexts, with the NAEL playing a crucial role in the process.

Recently, Lynne Neagle, the Cabinet Secretary for Education (2024), stated that there are currently too many organisations involved in the development and delivery of professional learning and leadership support in Wales. As a solution, a new National Body is being established to incorporate some of the functions of the NAEL, RC, and the local authority responsible for designing and delivering professional learning and development support at a national level.

Appendices

Appendix A

Overview of the standards and five essential elements of effective teaching and leadership (Welsh Government 2018)



Appendix B

Headteachers' and Experts' Introduction to PhD Research Letter

I am a full-time PhD student studying at Cardiff University under the supervision of Dr Mark Connolly and Dr Charlotte Brookfield. I am writing to ask if you would assist me by taking part in my research project on the professional learning and development of headteachers in Wales. This research is sponsored in collaboration with the Welsh Government (WG) via the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) and the Economic, Social and Research Council (ESRC).

Educational leadership has been increasingly recognised as a catalyst for educational reform and school improvement. For Wales this has been an ongoing development initiated by two OECD reports (2014, 2017) which identified that the leadership capacity in Wales was underdeveloped. This was caused by a lack of professional learning opportunities at senior level and a coherent career framework, with both these factors impacting on the recruitment and retention of future leaders (Connolly et al. 2018).

Recent Welsh Government policies have sought to build leadership and professional capital across Wales and recognised the importance of investing in its future leaders: for example, the National Mission for Wales (2017); Schools as Learning Organisations Plan (2017); a National Approach to Professional Learning (2018).

These culminated in a revised set of Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership and the establishment of the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL), which aims to 'secure, nurture and inspire' educational leaders (2018). The foci of this research will assess and feed into two of these central initiatives in Welsh education reform: a. the revision of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership which were revised in 2016 and in use in all schools in September 2018. b. the establishment of the National Academy of Educational Leadership in 2018 an 'arm's length' body focused on headship issues.

I do hope that you will agree to be involved in this research and look forward to hearing from you. Once I receive your notification, I will then prepare consent forms for you to sign and return. Any initial consent does not mean that you are committed to participate and you still have the right to withdraw at any time.

If you have any further questions about this research or the process, please do not hesitate to contact me, Gill Ellis on ellisg5@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix C

Elite and Headteacher Interview Consent Form

The Professional Learning and Development of Headteachers in Wales

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions without any consequence of any kind.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw, and this can be made at any time and for any reason without the need to explain the circumstances (BERA, 2018). I understand if I wish to exercise my right to withdraw the researchers' contact details are at the bottom of this consent form.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that participation will involve being interviewed by the researcher about my involvement in the inception of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2016).

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentiality.

I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of the people I speak about.

I understand that the disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the final PhD research.

I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities, they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be stored on an encrypted computer and any physical copies of anything taken e.g., notes will

be retained for the time of the interview and then later destroyed in line with GDPR procedures.

I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage.

I understand that all consent forms will be digitised and stored on an encrypted computer and the physical copies destroyed. These will be retained for the duration of the project.

I understand that I am free to contact the researcher to seek further clarification and information.

I understand that participation or non-participation in this research will confer no advantage or disadvantage to me personally.

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher, Gill Ellis lead researcher by email to ellisg5@cardiff.ac.uk for any questions.

Signature of research participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Date

Appendix D

Interview Schedule for Elite Interviews

The interview will cover five main topics: involvement and background of the PSTLs; the process of different groups involved; inception of the professional standards; development of the professional standards; understanding and use of the professional standards. This interview will be recorded using a digital recorder and will be transcribed by myself and returned to you in order for you to check the content. The aim of the interview is to seek clarification of the thinking behind the inception and creation of the professional teaching and learning standards model for the professional learning and development of headteachers and their staff.

Number	Interview Question	Prompts, Probes and Follow-Up Questions
1. Involvement and background of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership		
1a	Could you start by describing your background and current role in education?	How long have you been in your current role? What was your role in 2017 when the professional standards were created?
1b	Could you describe in what capacity you were involved in the inception of the professional standards in 2017/2018?	Did you consider yourself a representative of your organisation or was it in a personal capacity that you participated?
1c	Can you describe which educational stakeholders made up the working group?	Was it a true representative sample of the different stakeholders? In your opinion was there a balance of representation from the different educational sectors?
1d	How were you approached to become a representative the working group?	Was this in connection to your role at the time?

2. Process of working group involved in the professional standards (additional theme added from elite pilot interview)		
2a	Could you tell me about the objective of the working group and the process that it was conducted and your role within it?	What part did each of the educational stakeholders play in the process? Was it a collaborative process?
2b	How many times did you meet as a working group and what was the time frame?	Did the same people attend each session, or did this vary? If so, did this affect the working process?
2c	How was the remit of the working group introduced and by whom?	Was it a formal introduction as set by WG or was it tentatively presented?
2d	How were the working group sessions led and managed?	Did you feel that you had a voice and were listened to? How was this part of the process managed? Was sufficient time provided for feedback?
3. Inception of the Professional Teaching and Leadership Standards		
3a	Where did the idea of the professional standards come from?	Was there an international consideration? Were other models looked or was it a completely new innovation for Wales? In what ways do you feel they differ from previous professional standards?
3b	How were the professional standards designed?	What were the considerations of the designing process? Which professional learning model was the professional standards based on? Where does the professional standards model fit?
3c	What were the underlying principles of the professional standards?	How were the principles decided? Who was involved? What do the standards aim to achieve? Relate to national initiatives e.g. New Curriculum, Schools as Learning Organisations
3d	How were the headings for each of the five components decided and their descriptors?	Who decided on the five components? How were they named?

	• Promoting teaching and leadership in Wales. • Exercising corporate responsibility in all colleagues • Empowering others • Delegation and empowerment • Supporting other settings	How were the descriptors created? What was the thinking behind their design?
3e	Were any other working parties involved in the process or was it just the initial working group from start to inception?	Were the professional standards piloted in schools? If so, how was this decided geographically, or was it voluntary carried out on the willingness of headteachers?
4. Development of the professional standards		
4a	How were the teaching standards developed?	How were they compiled? What was the process? Were teacher autonomy and agency a consideration in the professional standards?
4b	How were the leadership standards developed?	How were they compiled? What was the process?
4c	How do they develop headteachers?	Which leadership standards are harder/easier to understand and interpret?
4d	How do they develop others? What type of teaching professional did you design the professional standards model for?	Do you think that the professional standards model is easy for headteachers to use and develop their staff? Where does the headteachers' professional standards sit within the occupational professional practice model?

		How have the professional identities of teachers have been redefined over time? What have been the internal/external pressures? Where do you feel that the NAEL fits in the occupational professional practice of collegiality and fostering of headteachers professional development?
5. Understanding and use of the professional standards		
5a	How were the leadership standards intended to be used by headteachers for the professional learning for themselves and those in their organisation?	How did you imagine they would be used in practice by headteachers? Self-evaluation tool, planning goals reflecting on professional practice? What are the changes in comparison to previous technocratic standards-based model?
5b	Did you anticipate any barriers/challenges in headteachers' understanding and using the standards for themselves and others?	If so, what were they? How were they perceived by those involved in their design to be overcome?
5c	What levels of support were anticipated to be provided to headteachers in understanding and using the professional standards for themselves and their staff?	Support from LA, RC, WG: what was their involvement in the process Did this vary within the different RC and throughout Wales? How was this monitored? Are the professional skills of teachers and headteachers taken into consideration before a policy implementation? If so, could you give me an example of this?
6. Supporting Headteachers in the implementation of the Professional Standards		
6a	What are the key indicators of progress and impact that the WG expected to see?	Was the monitoring and impact of the professional standards part of the initial design process? What did this look like?
6b	How are the Professional standards regulated and by whom?	According to Estyn (2020) there is currently no external professional body

		for the regulation of the Professional Standards.
6c	Where do you feel the NAEL fits in supporting headteachers to implement the PSTLs for themselves and their school staff?	What role do you think that they can play in this for future policymaking? As a middle-tier partner
6d	What role do you feel the RC have in supporting headteachers to implement the PSTLs for headteachers and their school staff?	How effective is this role? How effectively is the middle-tier partnership working?
6e	What are your views on the recently published National Professional Learning Entitlement as a framework of support for the standards for headteachers?	Do you feel that this entitlement agenda aligns with the PSTLs?

Appendix E

Qualtrics Online Survey

Would you like to complete this survey in

English

Cymraeg

This short survey is part of a wider research project in collaboration with the Welsh Government (WG), the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) and the Economic, Social and Research Council (ESRC) exploring the professional learning and development of headteachers in Wales. Specifically, this survey seeks to understand the views and experiences of acting and existing headteachers in Wales in relation to the revision of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) and the establishment of the National Academy of Educational Leadership (NAEL 2018).

I would be very grateful for your time to participate in this short survey.

By clicking the arrow button at the bottom of this page you give consent for your data to be used in this study.

All data collected from this survey will be anonymous. Ethical approval for this research has been granted by Cardiff University's Social Research Ethics Committee.

Please contact me if you have any questions, feedback, or complaints about the survey. Contact details for my supervisor are also provided below.

Lead Researcher: Gill Ellis PhD Student at the School of Social Science,

Cardiff University. Email: ellisg5@cardiff.ac.uk

PhD Supervisors: Dr Mark Connolly. Email: Connollym4@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Charlotte Brookfield. Email: BrookfieldC@cardiff.ac.uk.

This survey will begin by asking you some general information questions about you and your school.

Q4

Are you a headteacher in Wales?

Yes No

Q5

Are you an acting headteacher in Wales

Yes No

Q6

What type of school do you work in?

- Nursery
- Primary
- Secondary
- Special School
- Pupil Referral Unit
- Other, please specify

The following questions will look at the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) for the professional learning and development of yourself and your staff.

Q8

Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018)?

- Very familiar
- Familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Unfamiliar
- Very unfamiliar

Q9

How often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) for yourself as a school leader?

- Every day
- Every week
- At least once a term
- Once a year
- Never

Q10

How often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) with your school teaching staff?

- Every day
- Every week
- At least once a term
- Once a year
- Never

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
Q11(a)	The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) are easy to understand.					
Q11(b)	The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) are useful for my own professional development.					
Q11(c)	The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) are useful for my school teaching staff's professional development.					

Q11(d)	The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) help me in meeting Welsh Government policy initiatives.					

Q12(a)

The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) are relevant in supporting me in my school leadership role.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q12(b)

The PSTLs are relevant in supporting my school teaching staff in their professional learning and development

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q13

It is important to support my school teaching staff in gaining a good understanding of the PSTLs

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The following questions will look at the formal leadership elements and descriptors of the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2017).

Q14

How familiar are you with the five formal leadership elements within the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) – pedagogy, leadership, professional learning, innovation, collaboration?

- Very familiar
- Familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Unfamiliar
- Very unfamiliar

Q15

These leadership elements have formal leadership descriptors attached. How familiar are you with these?

- Very familiar

- Familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Unfamiliar
- Very unfamiliar

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

		Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
Q16(a)	The formal leadership descriptors help me to identify my professional learning and development goals.					
Q16(b)	The formal leadership descriptors help me to take responsibility for my professional development.					
Q16(c)	The formal leadership descriptors promote professional dialogue between me and others.					
Q16(d)	The formal leadership descriptors help me be reflective in my leadership role.					

Q 16(e)	The formal leadership descriptors are well aligned to my current professional learning and development needs.					

The following questions are about the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL).

Q18

How familiar are you with the NAEL?

- Very familiar
- Familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Unfamiliar
- Very unfamiliar

Q18

How important is the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?

- Extremely important
- Fairly important
- Slightly important
- Unimportant
- Not at all important

Q20

How relevant is the work of the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs?

- Extremely relevant
- Very relevant
- Relevant
- Slightly relevant
- Not relevant

Q21

This is the end of the questions in this survey, but please write in the box below anything you would like to add to this survey which you think may be useful for this research. Click the next page arrow to ensure that your responses are submitted.

Thank you for your feedback and time in completing this survey. This survey has used Qualtrics software as a platform to collate and store the information needed for this research and is General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant. Just a reminder that all data collected from this online survey is anonymous and will be deleted from the Qualtrics software platform within ninety days of completion of this survey. This online data will be downloaded and saved to Cardiff University One Drive for analysis and will be retained for no less than five years and then it will be destroyed in accordance with GDPR. If you wish to exercise your rights in relation to personal data or personal information that may have been collected via Qualtrics you should contact the researcher on the contact details below. If you would like to know about this research, there is further information on this link

https://walesdtp.ac.uk/profile/ellis-gill/ or if you would like to find out more about the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL) please click on the following link https://nael.cymru/about/

Please feel to contact myself, my university supervisors or the ethics committee if you have any questions, feedback, or complaints about the survey on the contact details below:

Lead Researcher

Gill Ellis PhD Student at the School of Social Science, Cardiff University.

Email: ellisg5@cardiff.ac.uk

PhD Cardiff University Supervisors at the School of Social Sciences.

Dr Mark Connolly, Connollym4@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Charlotte Brookfield, BrookfieldC@cardiff.ac.uk.

Cardiff University Ethics Committee Socsi-ethics@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix F

Cognitive Protocol for Online Survey

Headteachers' Professional Learning and Development in Wales.

Placing the self-completion questionnaire

I would explain to respondents taking part in the cognitive interview by email that the cognitive interview is in two parts. The first part is the completion of an online survey at a time and place convenient to themselves lasting approximately 15 to 20 minutes. The second part of the process is the cognitive interview which would be carried out by myself as researcher on Zoom lasting approximately 60 minutes. The collating and storing of information from the interview would be General Data Protection Regulation (GCPR) compliant.

The cognitive interview will be conducted in a timely manner after the online survey has been completed in order to capture the data required. The purpose of the cognitive interview is to test the wording of the questions and the usability of the online survey before it is sent to all headteachers and acting headteachers in Wales as part of this research study.

A copy of the online survey in Word will be attached for reference for the respondent to use during the cognitive interview as an aide-memoire.

Cognitive Interview Probing

Aims of Testing

- To explore the usability of the online survey
- To explore whether routing instructions are clear
- To explore the wording of the questions for anomalies and misunderstandings.

General Interview Probes

- Did you find completing this survey easy or difficult?
- Did you find some sections easier or more difficult than others? If so, which ones were more difficult? Which ones were easier? Could you explain why?

- Could the survey be made clearer to complete? If so, how?
- Did you have to go back on any questions and change your answer?
- Did you skip any questions?
- Did the design and layout of the survey enable you to answer the questions in the best way possible?
- Was the survey easy to navigate?

Aims of Testing Q 1

- To explore the comprehension of the word ‘headteacher’.

Interview Probes

- What did you understand by the word ‘headteacher’ when answering this question?
- What does the term ‘headteacher’ mean to you?

Aims of Testing Q 2

- To explore the comprehension of the word ‘acting headteacher’.

Interview Probes

- What did you understand by the word ‘acting headteacher’ when answering this question?
- What does the term ‘acting headteacher’ mean to you?

Q3 is a demographic question and will not be probed because it is contextual information.

Aims of Testing Q4

- To explore comprehension of the phrase ‘familiarity’ with the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018)’
- To explore sensitivity and whether the respondent felt comfortable answering this question.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘familiarity’ when answering this question?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is to this question?

Aims of Testing Q5

- To explore comprehension of the phrase ‘how often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018)?’
- To explore whether the respondent can recall ‘how often’ they have used the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018)
- To explore sensitivity and whether the respondent felt comfortable answering this question.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘how often’ when answering this question?

Retrieval

- How easy or difficult was it to remember ‘how often’?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is to this question?

Aims of Testing Q6

- To explore comprehension of the phrase ‘how often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) with your staff?’
- To explore whether the respondent can recall ‘how often’ they have used the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) with their staff
- To explore sensitivity and whether the respondent felt comfortable answering this question.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘how often’ when answering this question?

Retrieval

- How easy or difficult was it to remember ‘how often’?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is to this question?

Aims of Testing Q7

- To explore comprehension of the question as a whole to see whether the respondent is influenced by the sentence structure.

- To explore whether respondents found the answer categories table user friendly.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What do you think this question is trying to ask you?

Response

- How easy or difficult was it to select an answer from the options provided? Why?
- Why did you tick that particular answer category rather than one of the others?

Aims of Testing Q8

- To explore comprehension of the question as a whole to see whether the respondent is influenced by the sentence structure
- To explore comprehension of the term ‘own professional development’
- To explore whether respondents found the answer categories table user friendly.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What do you think this question is trying to ask you?
- What does the term ‘own professional development’ mean to you?

Response

- How easy or difficult was it to select an answer from the options provided? Why?
- Why did you tick that particular answer category rather than one of the others?

Aims of Testing Q9

- To explore comprehension of the question as a whole to see whether the respondent is influenced by the sentence structure
- To explore comprehension of the term ‘staff’s professional development’
- To explore whether respondents found the answer categories table user friendly.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What do you think this question is trying to ask you?
- What does the term ‘school staff’s professional development’ mean to you?

Response

- How easy or difficult was it to select an answer from the options provided? Why?
- Why did you tick that particular answer category rather than one of the others?

Aims of Testing Q10

- To explore comprehension of the question as a whole to see whether the respondent is influenced by the sentence structure
- To explore comprehension of the term ‘Welsh Government initiatives’
- To explore whether respondents found the answer categories table user friendly.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What do you think this question is trying to ask you?
- What does the term ‘Welsh Government initiatives’ mean to you?

Response

- How easy or difficult was it to select an answer from the options provided? Why?
- Why did you tick that particular answer category rather than one of the others?

Aims of Testing Q11

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘supporting your school leadership role’
- To explore whether the respondent considers that this question is sensitive or embarrassing.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘supporting your school leadership role’ when answering this question?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is?

Aims of Testing Q12

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘supporting your school staff in their professional learning and development’
- To explore whether the respondent considers that this question is sensitive or embarrassing.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘supporting your school staff in their professional learning and development’ when answering this question?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is?

Aims of Testing Q13

- To explore comprehension of the question as a whole to see whether comprehension is influenced by sentence structure
- To explore whether the respondent considers that this question is sensitive or embarrassing.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘supporting your school leadership role’ when answering this question?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How did you work out this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is? How do you know?

Aims of Testing Q14

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘five formal leadership elements’ of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2019)
- To explore whether the respondent considers that this question is sensitive or embarrassing.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the terms ‘pedagogy, leadership, professional learning, innovation, collaboration’ within the five formal leadership elements when answering this question?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How did you work out this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is? How do you know?

Aims of Testing Q15

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘formal leadership descriptors’
- To explore whether the respondent considers that this question is sensitive or embarrassing.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘formal leadership descriptors’ when answering this question?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How did you work out this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is? How do you know?

Aims of Testing Q16

- To explore comprehension of the question as a whole to see whether comprehension is influenced by sentence structure

- To explore whether the respondent considers that this question is sensitive or embarrassing.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- To explore the comprehension of the question as a whole to see if the respondent is influenced by sentence structure and length of the question.

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How did you work out this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is? How do you know?

Aims of Testing Q17

- To explore comprehension of the question as a whole to see whether the respondent is influenced by the sentence structure
- To explore whether respondents found the answer categories table user friendly.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What do you think this question is trying to ask you?

Response

- How easy or difficult was it to select an answer from the options provided? Why?
- Why did you tick that particular answer category rather than one of the others?
- How did you go about answering this question?

Aims of Testing Q18

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘responsibility’
- To explore whether respondents found the answer categories table user friendly.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What do you think this question is trying to ask you?

Response

- How easy or difficult was it to select an answer from the options provided? Why?
- Why did you tick that particular answer category rather than one of the others?

Aims of Testing Q19

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘promoting professional dialogue between me and others’
- To explore whether respondents found the answer categories table user friendly.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What do you think this question is trying to ask you?

Response

- How easy or difficult was it to select an answer from the options provided? Why?
- Why did you tick that particular answer category rather than one of the others?

Aims of Testing Q20

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘reflective in my leadership’
- To explore whether respondents found the answer categories table user friendly.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What do you think this question is trying to ask you?

Response

- How easy or difficult was it to select an answer from the options provided? Why?
- Why did you tick that particular answer category rather than one of the others?

Aims of Testing Q21

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘aligned to my current professional learning and development needs’
- To explore whether respondents found the answer categories table user friendly.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What do you think this question is trying to ask you?

Response

- How easy or difficult was it to select an answer from the options provided? Why?
- Why did you tick that particular answer category rather than one of the others?

Aims of Testing Q22

- To explore comprehension of the phrase ‘familiarity’ in relation to the NAEL
- To explore sensitivity and whether the respondent felt comfortable answering this question.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘familiarity’ when answering this question?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is to this question?

Aims of Testing Q23

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘importance’ in relation to the NAEL
- To explore sensitivity and whether the respondent felt comfortable answering this question.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘familiarity’ when answering this question?
- What do you think this question is trying to ask?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is to this question?

- Did you feel comfortable answering this question?

Aims of Testing Q24

- To explore comprehension of the term ‘relevant’ in relation to the NAEL
- To explore sensitivity and whether the respondent felt comfortable answering this question.

Interview Probes

Comprehension

- What did you understand by the term ‘relevant’ when answering this question?

Judgement

- How did you feel about being asked this question?
- How accurate would you say your answer is to this question?

Appendix G

Cognitive Modifications for Online Survey

Online Survey Questions	Question Modifications
Q4 – Are you a headteacher in Wales?	No changes
Q5 – Are you an acting headteacher in Wales?	No changes
Q6 – What type of school do you work in? • Nursery • Primary • Secondary • Special School • Pupil Referral Unit • Other, please specify	No changes
Q8 – Which of the following best describes your level of familiarity with the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018)? • Very familiar • Familiar • Somewhat familiar • Unfamiliar • Very unfamiliar	No changes

Q9 – How often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) for yourself as a school leader? ● Every day ● Every week ● At least once a term ● Once a year ● Never	No changes
Q10 – How often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) with your school staff?	Changed from ‘school staff’ to ‘school teaching staff’. Possible confusion with ancillary, administrative and teaching assistants. How often do you use the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) with your school teaching staff?
Q11(a) – The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) are easy to understand.	No changes
Q11(b) – The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2019) are useful for my own professional development.	No changes
Q11(c) – The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2019) are useful for my school teaching staff’s professional development.	No changes

Q11 (d) – The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2019) help me in meeting Welsh Government policy initiatives.	No changes
Q12(a) – How important are the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) in supporting your school leadership role? ● Extremely important ● Fairly important ● Slightly important ● Unimportant ● Not all important	The Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) are relevant in supporting me in my school leadership role. ● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Agree ● Strongly agree
Q12(b) – How important are the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018) in supporting your school teaching staff in their professional learning and development? ● Extremely important ● Fairly important ● Slightly important ● Unimportant ● Not at all important	The PSTLs are relevant in supporting my school teaching staff in their professional learning and development ● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree

Q13 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement. How important do you think it is to support your school teaching staff in gaining a good understanding of the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2018)? ● Extremely important ● Fairly important ● Slightly important ● Unimportant ● Not at all important	It is important to support my school teaching staff in gaining a good understanding of the PSTLs ● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree
Q14 – How familiar are you with the five formal leadership elements within the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (2019) – pedagogy, leadership, professional learning, innovation, collaboration? ● Very familiar ● Familiar ● Somewhat familiar ● Unfamiliar ● Very unfamiliar	No changes
Q15 – These leadership elements have formal leadership descriptors attached. How familiar are you with these? ● Very familiar ● Familiar ● Somewhat familiar ● Unfamiliar ● Very unfamiliar	No changes

Q16(a) – The formal leadership descriptors help me to identify my professional learning and development goals. ● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly agree	No changes
Q16(b) – The formal leadership descriptors help me to take responsibility for my professional development. ● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly agree	No changes
Q16(c) – The formal leadership descriptors help me promote professional dialogue between me and others. ● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly agree	No changes

Q16(d) – The formal leadership descriptors help me be reflective in my leadership role ● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly agree	No changes
Q16(e) – The formal leadership descriptors are well aligned to my current professional learning and development needs. ● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly agree	No changes
Q18 – How familiar are you with the NAEL? ● Very familiar ● Familiar ● Somewhat familiar ● Unfamiliar ● Very unfamiliar	No changes

Q19 – How important is the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs? ● Extremely important ● Fairly important ● Slightly important ● Unimportant ● Not at all important	No changes
Q20 – How relevant is the work of the NAEL in supporting you in your professional learning and development needs? ● Extremely relevant ● Very relevant ● Relevant ● Slightly relevant ● Not relevant	No changes
Q21 – This is the end of the questions in this survey, but please write in the box below anything you would like to add to this survey which you think may be useful for this research. Click the next page arrow to ensure that your responses are submitted.	All respondents liked the idea of a box to place any further questions.

Appendix H

Headteacher Interview Schedule and Modifications

The interview will cover three main topics in relation to the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTL)

- Understanding and use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership (PSTL)
- How the PSTL inform professional learning opportunities within the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL)
- The professional development needs of headteachers and their relationship to the NAEL.

This interview will be recorded using a digital recorder and will be transcribed by myself and returned to you in order for you to check the content. The aim of the interview is to seek clarification of the views of existing/acting headteachers on the PSTL and how they perceive the NAEL in supporting them to use the PSTL effectively to meet their professional learning and development needs.

For the purposes of this interview schedule, Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership will be identified as PSTL.

Number	Interview Question	Prompts, Probes and Follow-Up Questions	Modifications to Questions
Context Questions			
	Could you confirm you are either an acting or existing headteacher?	How long have you been in this current post?	
	Could you tell me about the school that you are currently in?	What is the geographical setting of your school? What is the socio-economic status of your school? How many teaching staff do you currently have?	

	What are your roles and responsibilities? Have these roles changed over time? If so, how? In what way?		This question was deleted.
	Briefly describe your route to acting/headship?	When did you first take up the role as acting/headteacher? Were you an acting headteacher first? Have you always been an acting/headteacher in Wales or have you worked in other authorities?	
Research Question 1 How well do headteachers understand and use the leadership standards for their own and their staff's professional development?			
1a	How familiar are you with the PSTL?	What were your initial thoughts when you first saw the PSTL (2018) framework? What were the initial thoughts of your teaching staff when they were introduced to the PSTL? (2018) framework? How accessible do you feel that the PSTL framework is for yourself? How accessible do you feel that the PSTL framework is for your teaching staff? If you feel it is accessible, in what ways? If you feel that it is not accessible, in what ways?	
1b	What approach did you take to	Did you find the PSTL standards framework	

	understand the PSTL for yourself? What approach did you take to understand the PSTL for your teaching staff?	easy/hard to understand? If so, how? What barriers/challenges did you face, if any, in understanding the PSTL for yourself? Did you receive any support in understanding the PSTL for yourself? If so, in what ways? What barriers/challenges did you face, if any, in understanding the PSTL for your teaching staff? In what ways did you support your staff in understanding the PSTL? Which of the five standards are harder/easier to understand and interpret? Why?	
1c	How did you perceive the PSTL to be used for yourself? How did you perceive the PSTL to be used by your school teaching staff? When do you use the PSTLs for your school teaching staff? Why do your school teaching staff use the PSTLs?	What are your views on the leadership element of the PSTL? What are your views on the leadership descriptors of the PSTL?	Change of word ‘perceived’ How did you consider the PSTLs to be used for yourself? How did you consider the PSTLs to be used for your school teaching staff?

1d	Do you feel that the PSTL provides a clear direction for school leaders by setting clear expectations about effective leadership practice? If so, how?	Have you used the PSTL in identifying, planning, and reflecting on your own professional performance? If so in, what ways have you done this?	
1e	What skills and attributes, if any, do you feel that the PSTL promotes for yourself as a school leader?	How do you perceive the overarching values and attributes of the PSTL were intended to be used? How do you use the overarching values and attributes of the PSTL in practice for yourself and your teaching staff? Do you feel the PSTL have enabled you as a school leader to be reflective in your professional practice? If so, how? Does the PSTL make you feel valued? If so, how?	
1f	What factors have supported or affected effective implementation of the PSTL for yourself? What factors have supported or affected effective implementation of the PSTL for your teaching staff? What factors have supported or affected effective	How have these barriers/challenges been overcome for yourself? How have these barriers/challenges been overcome for your teaching staff? What difficulties, if any, do you still feel you face in using the PSTL for yourself? What difficulties, if any, do you still face in using the PSTL for your teaching staff?	

	engagement with the PSTL for yourself and for your teaching staff?		
Research Question 2 What are headteachers' understandings and use of the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership for their own and their school teaching staff's professional learning and development?			
2a	How would you describe the PSTL as a standards framework for professional learning?	Do you feel that this PSTL framework is different in comparison to previous standards models? If so, how? What are your views on the PSTL as a framework to give school leaders autonomy over their professional practices? Have the PSTL engaged headteachers to take responsibility for their own professional learning? In what ways?	
2b	Do you feel that the PSTL develop you in your professional learning? If so, how? Do you feel that the PSTL develop your teaching staff in their professional	Have the PSTL impacted on your own professional practice and contributed to raising standards in your school? How do you think this would look in practice? Can you give me some illustrative examples of this impact on your professional practice? Have the PSTL impacted on your teaching staff's professional practice and	

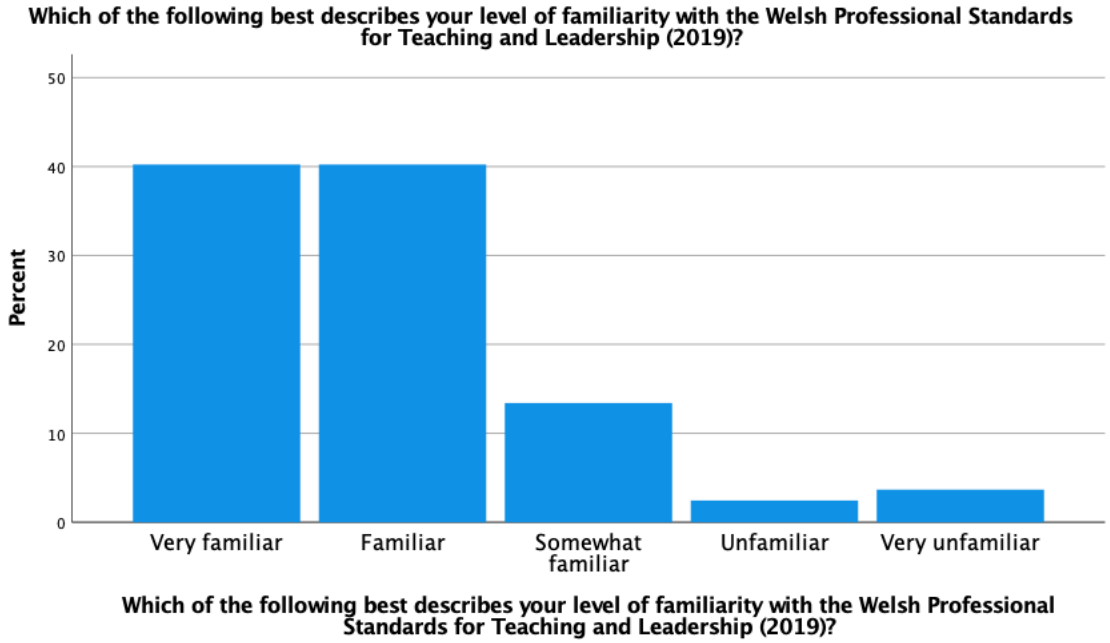
	learning? If so in what ways?	contributed to raising standards in your school? If so, how? Can you give me some illustrative examples of this impact on your teaching staff's professional practice?	
2c	How relevant are the PSTL in meeting your own professional learning and development needs? How relevant are the PSTL in meeting your teaching staff's professional learning and development needs?	Are there some PSTL standards which are more relevant than others? If so, which ones and why? Is there anything missing from the PSTL standards which you feel should be included to meet your professional learning needs and those of your teaching staff? Are there any standards which you feel are not relevant to your current professional learning needs and those of your staff?	
2d	How familiar are you with the NAEL?	How did you first hear about the NAEL? Are you involved in the NAEL in any way? If so, how?	
2e	Do you feel the NAEL has helped you in developing the leadership aspect of the PSTL?	If so, in what way? Have you benefited from any of the NAEL endorsement of leadership training? If so, how?	
2f	Which PSTL standards in your experience are most effective in developing your leadership skills and could inform	Could you give me some illustrative examples of how this has worked for you in practice? In what ways do you feel that the NAEL could contribute	

	the work of the NAEL?	and support these leadership skills? In your view what part do you think, if any, should the NAEL play in supporting headteachers in using the PSTL effectively?	
Research Question 3 What are headteachers' understandings of the role of the NAEL in relation to their professional learning and development?			
3a	Do you consider that your role as a headteacher has changed since you came into post?	If so, how has this changed? In what ways has it changed? Can you give me a concrete example?	
3b	Can you tell me about some of the political changes that impact on your role as a headteacher?	Could you describe what this impact looks like? Do you feel positively or negatively about these impacts? Do you feel that these political changes have promoted a trust or mistrust in the teaching profession? If so, in what ways? Do you feel that political changes have challenged teacher professionalism? If so, in what ways?	
3c	Where do you see the NAEL in terms of your professional learning and development?	In what ways do you see the NAEL supporting you in your professional learning and development? In what ways do you see the NAEL supporting you in effectively using the PSTL	Do you feel that the NAEL meets your professional learning and development needs? If so, how?

		for your own leadership development? In what ways do you see the NAEL supporting you in developing your teaching staff in effectively using the PSTL for their own professional development?	
3d	What are your views on the NAEL as a middle-tier partner from a professional learning perspective?	What experiences have you had, if any, of the NAEL working with other middle-tier partners? How important is the NAEL as a middle-tier partner in supporting you in your professional learning and development for you and your teaching staff?	
3e	What are your views on the recently published National Professional Learning Entitlement to support headteachers with the PSTL?	What part do you feel that the NAEL should play in this entitlement?	
3f	What do you perceive are the professional learning needs of headteachers in Wales in meeting current WG initiatives?	How do you know this? What part do you think the NAEL can play in meeting these professional learning needs for headteachers? Meeting the CfW agenda/SLO agenda	

Appendix I

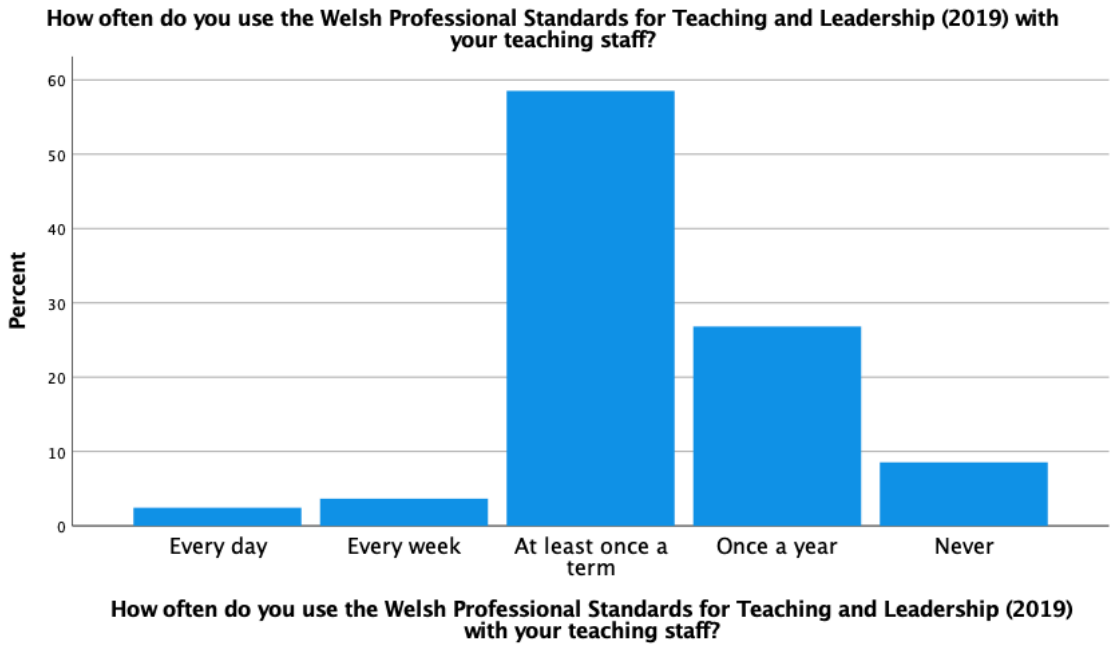
Online Survey Question 8



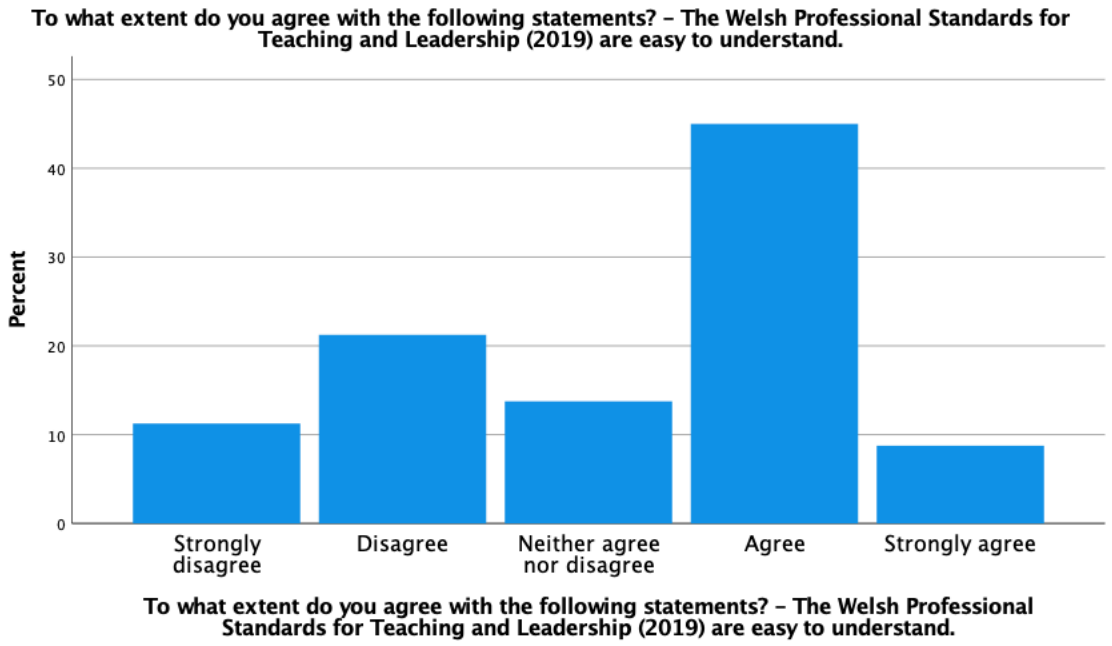
Online Survey Question 9

Appendix J

Online Survey Question 10

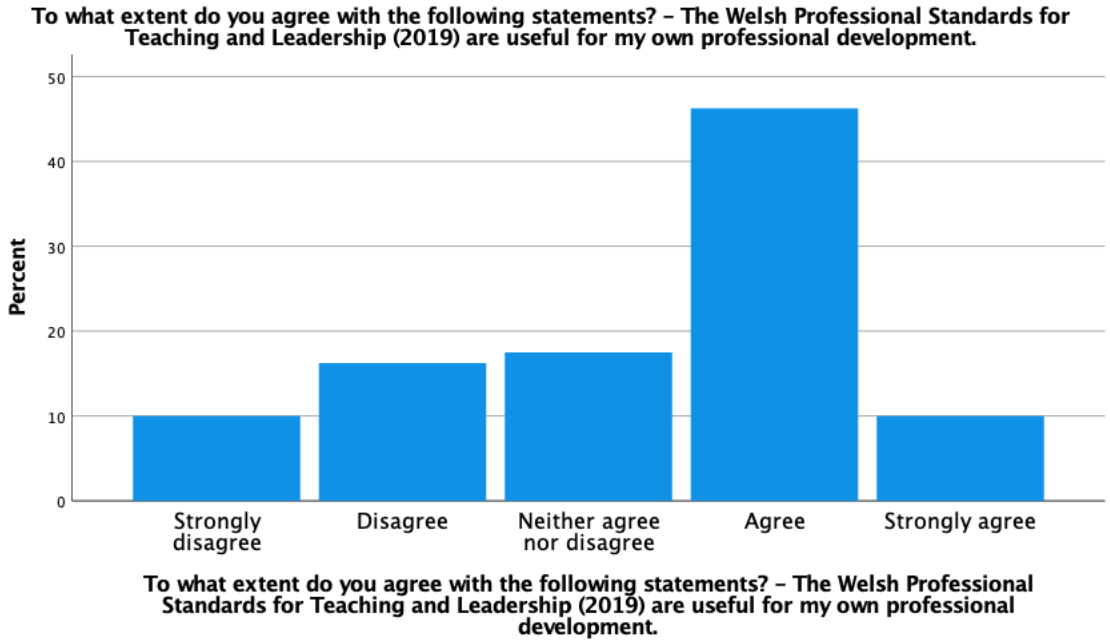


Online Survey Question 11a

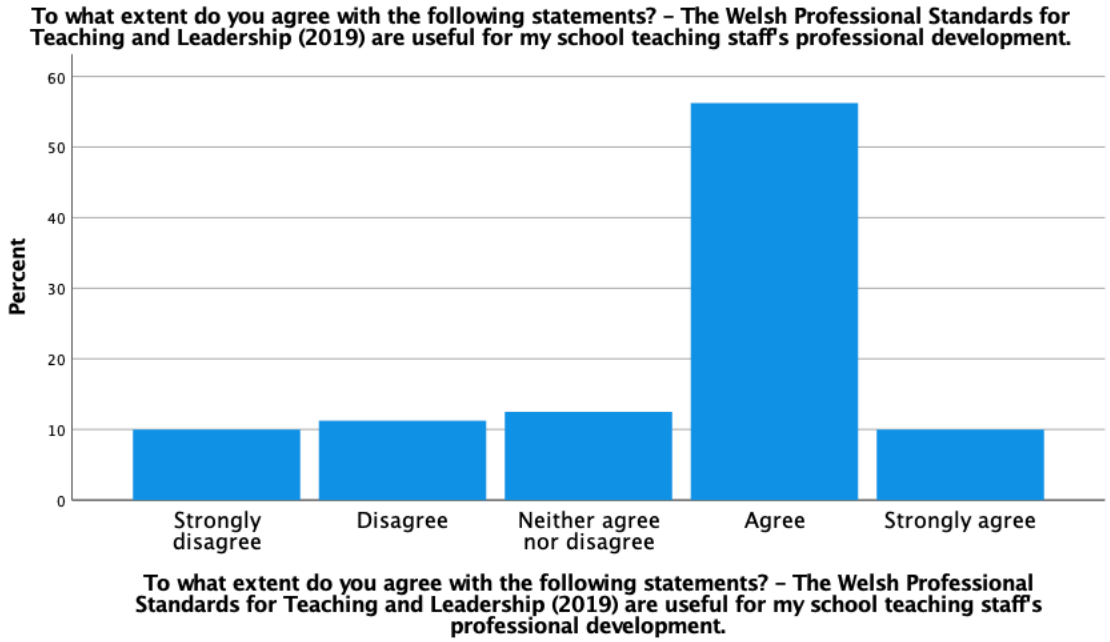


Appendix K

Online Survey Question Q11b

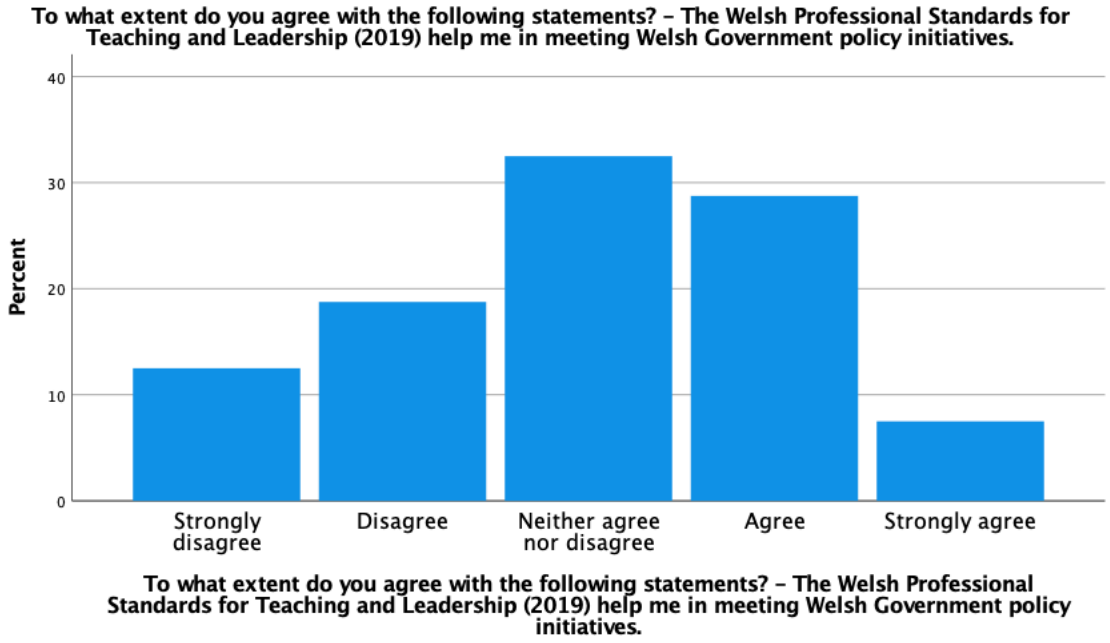


Online Survey Question 11c

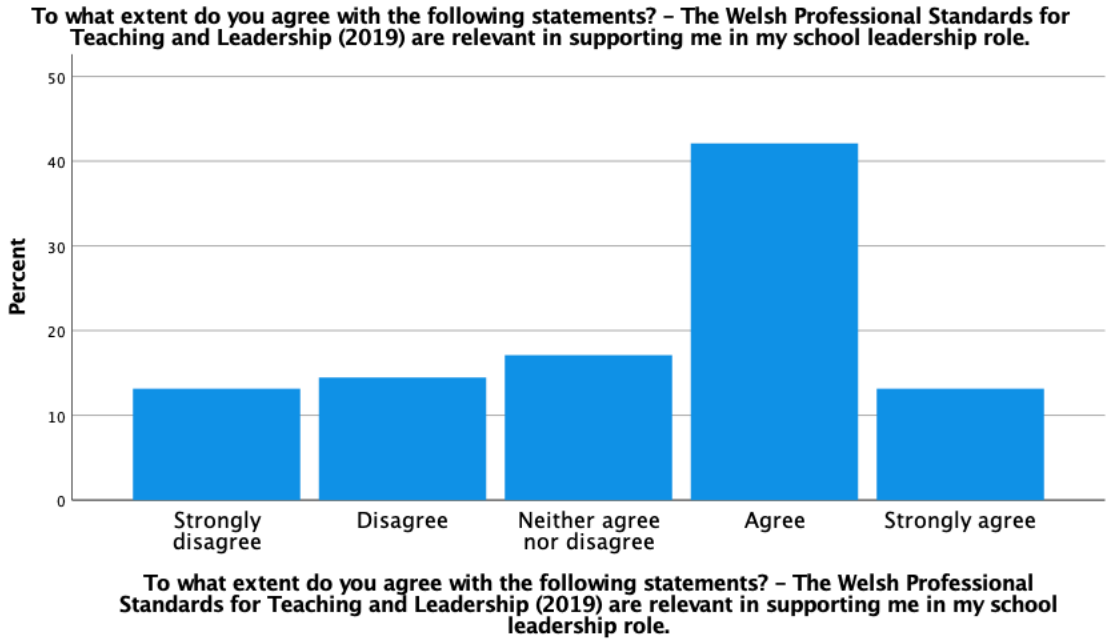


Appendix L

Online Survey Question 11d

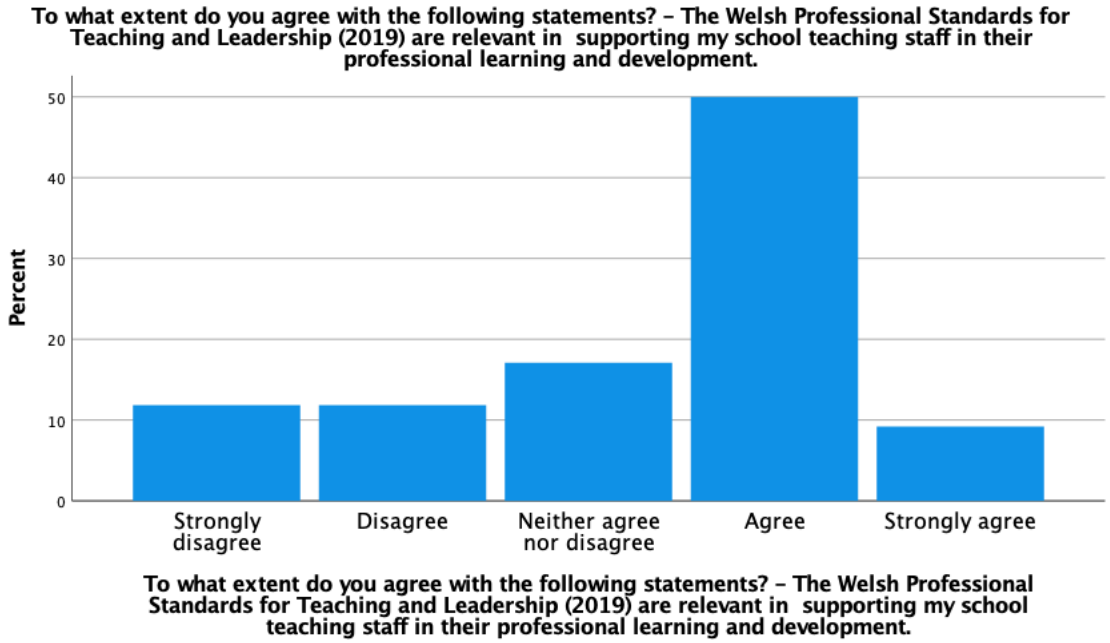


Online Survey Question 12a

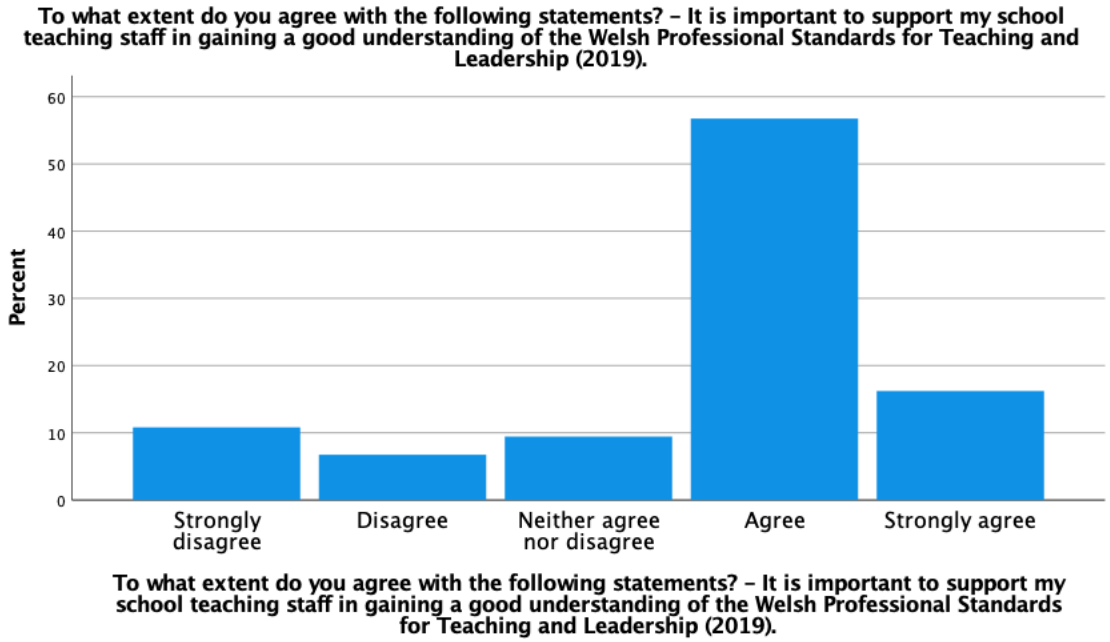


Appendix M

Online Survey Question 12b

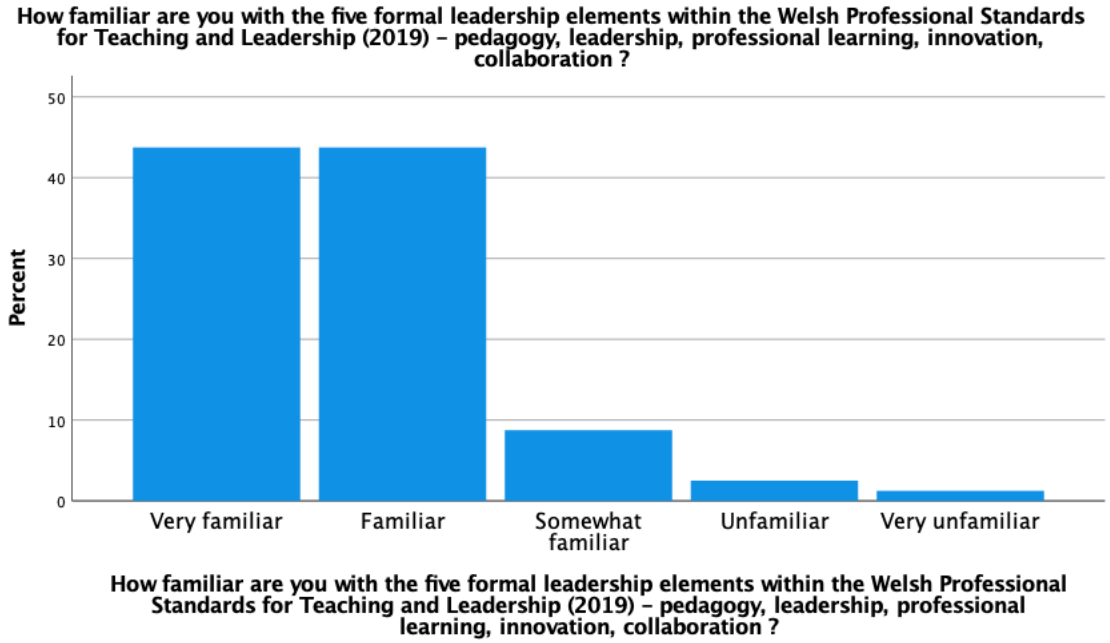


Online Survey Question 13



Appendix N

Online Survey Question 14



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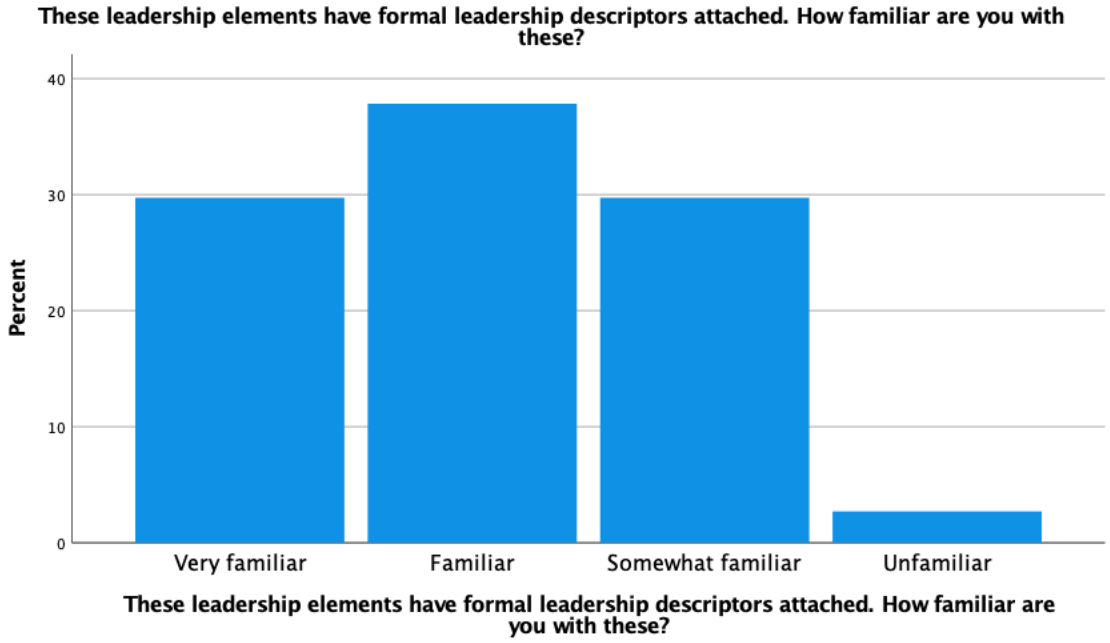
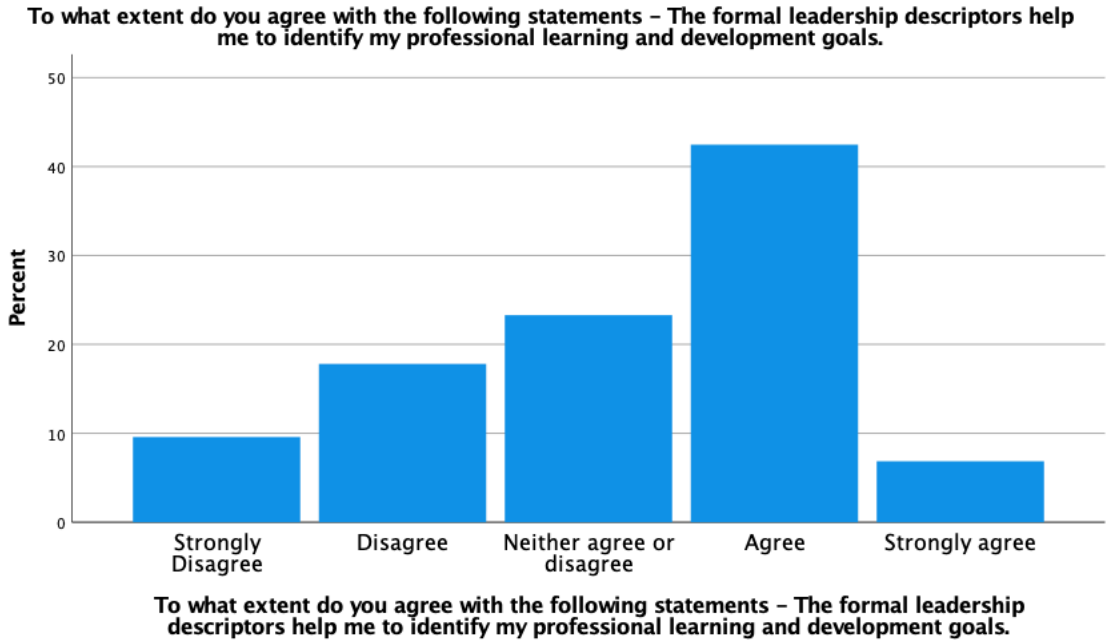


Appendix O

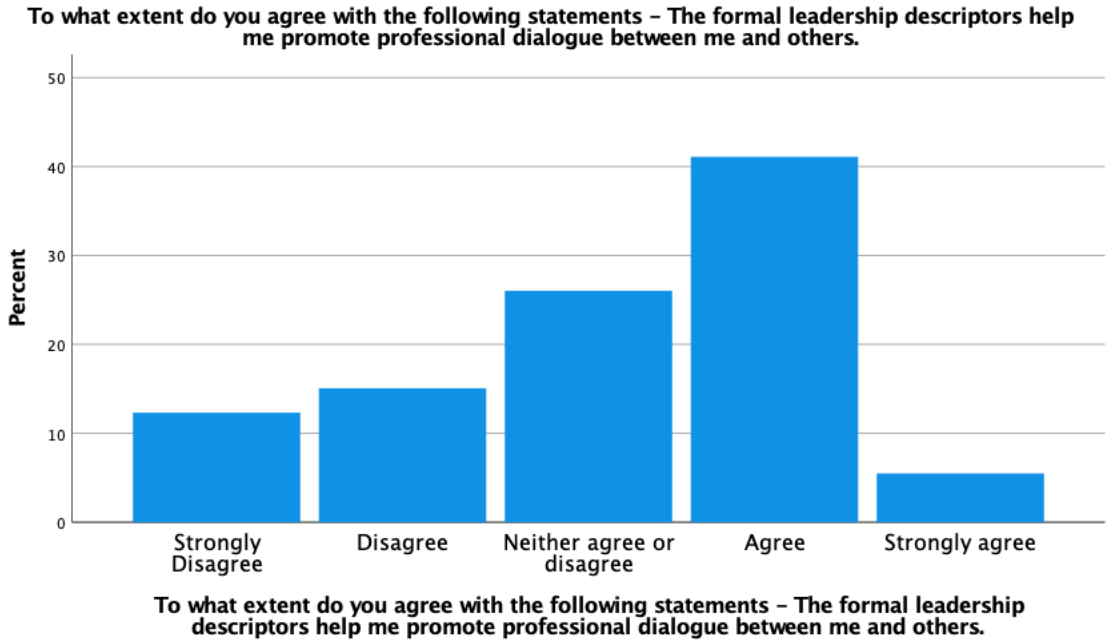
Online Survey Question 16a



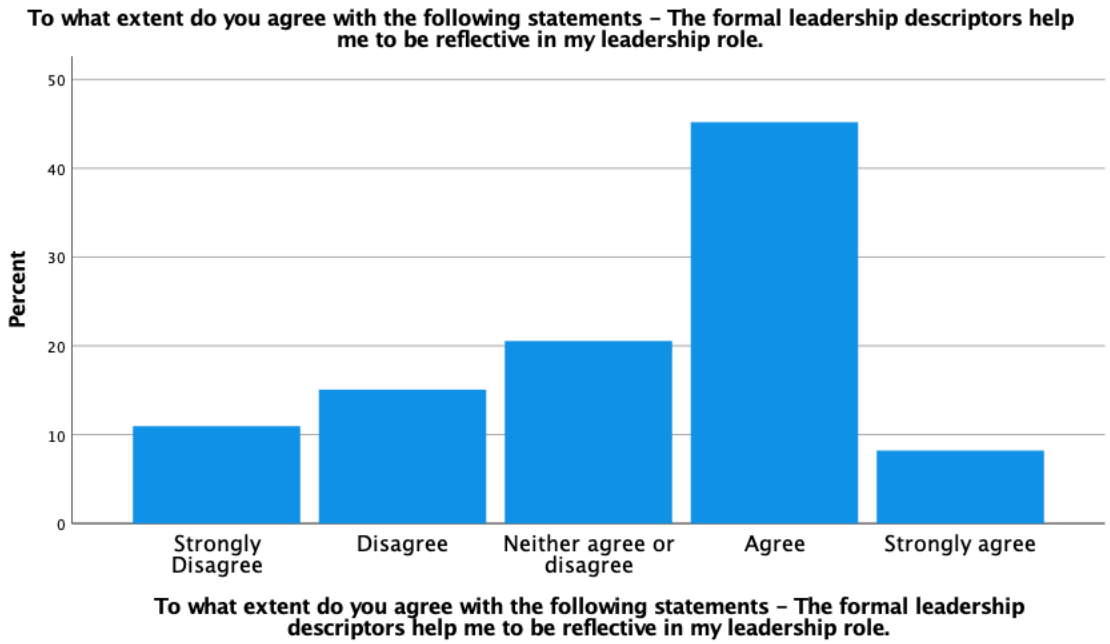
Online Survey Question 16b

Appendix P

Online Survey Question 16c

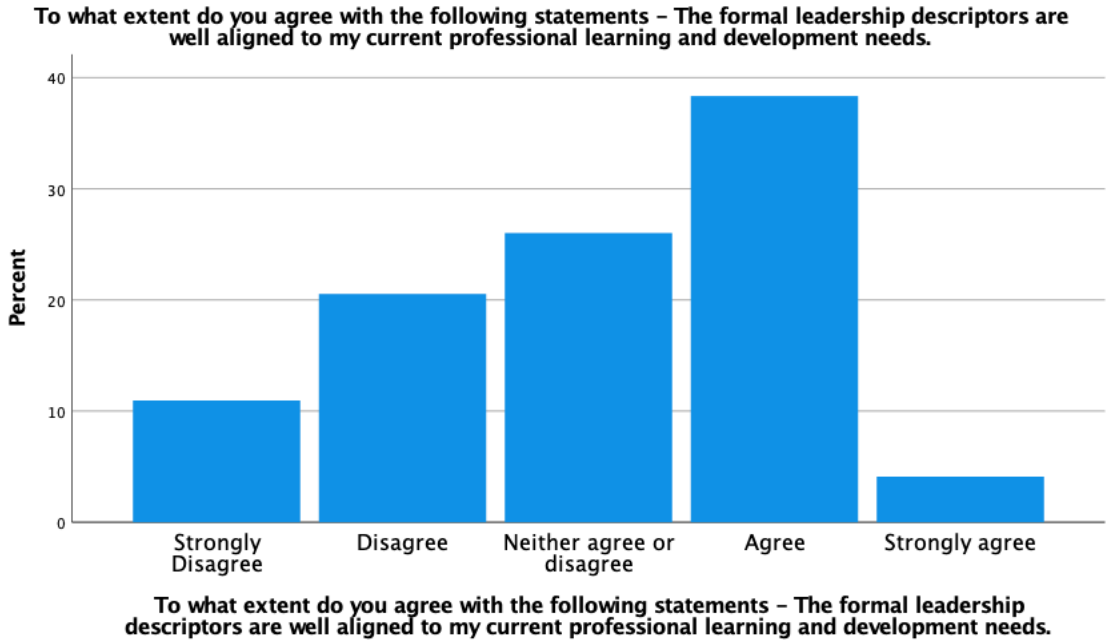


Online Survey Question 16d



Appendix Q

Online Survey Question 16e



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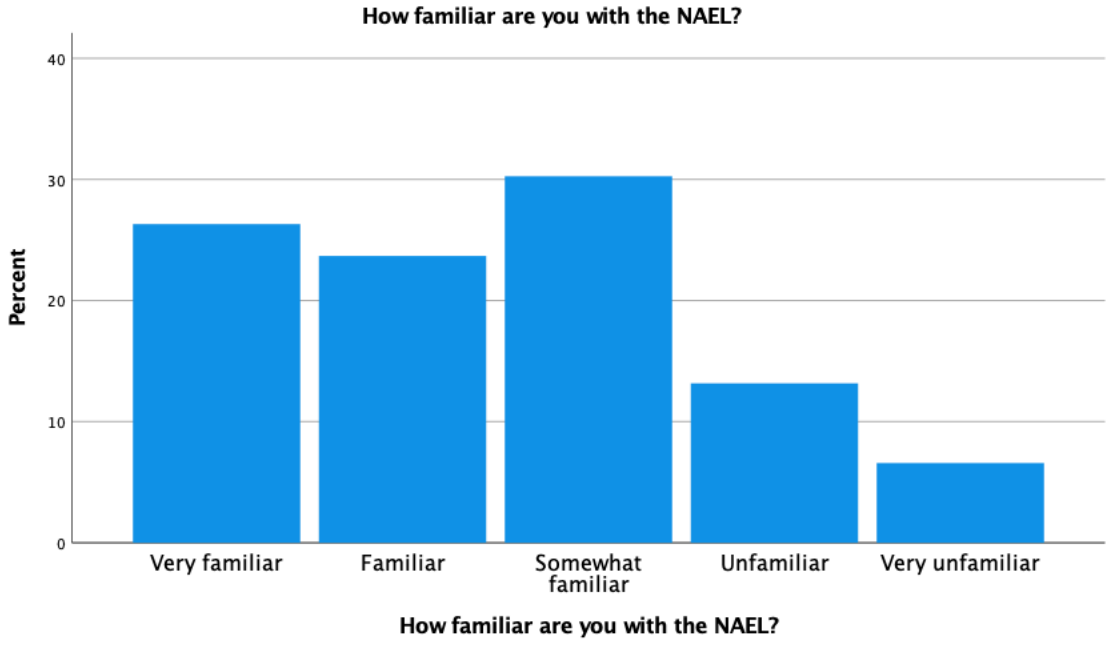
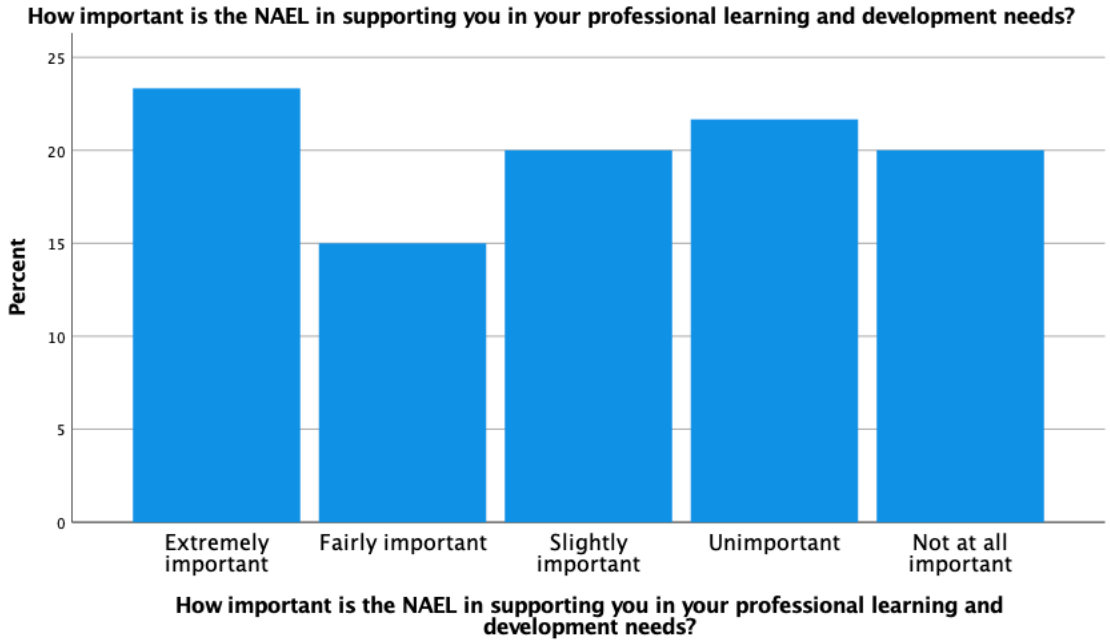


Appendix R

Online Survey Question 19



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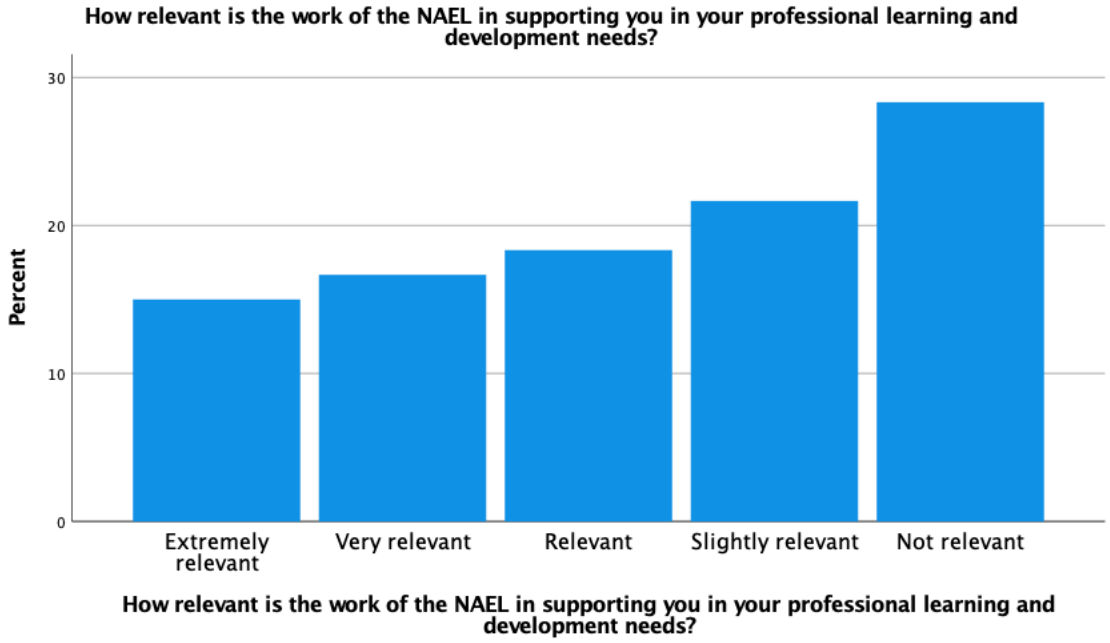

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