



Centre for Education Systems

INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE REVIEW

ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

Summary of country report (3 pages)

Authors: AI generated with human checking
November 2025 v1.0

Wales

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner consisting of several overlapping, curved segments in shades of dark blue, light blue, and light green, resembling a stylized arc or a partial circle.

Authorship. This AI generated summary has been created and checked by the CES team (see ces.partners/resources/methodologies). It is based on the original Country Reports created by EPPI. The author of the full report has not made final checks for accuracy.



About the Centre for Education Systems (CES)

The Centre for Education Systems improves education for all, by helping governments, advisors and campaigners learn from education systems around the world. We describe different policy approaches, their contexts, and their outcomes.

See www.CES.partners



The EPPI Centre

This report is based on a comparative review undertaken by the EPPI Centre - the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Centre, based at University College London (UCL), within the Social Research Institute. EPPI conducts and develops systematic reviews to inform public policy in areas like health and education. Its mission is to promote rigorous evidence for a fairer world through methods for evidence synthesis, user participation in research, and a focus on research impact. To find out more about the work of the EPPI Centre, please visit our website eppi.ioe.ac.uk.



Nuffield Foundation

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare and Justice. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, the Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. The Foundation has funded the project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation.

www.nuffieldfoundation.org

Creative Commons Licence

The publishers of this work wish to encourage wide circulation while retaining the copyright. We therefore have an open access policy which enables anyone to access our content online without charge. Anyone can download, save, perform or distribute this work in any format, including translation, without written permission. Our conditions are:

- The designated author(s) and CES are credited
- This summary is displayed
- The text is not altered and is used in full
- The work is not resold
- A copy of the work or link to its use online is sent to the author(s) and CES.partners

We gratefully acknowledge the work of Creative Commons in inspiring our approach to copyright. To find out more go to www.creativecommons.org

Wales – AI generated Accountability Policy summary

RQ1: Purposes, Values and Aims

The accountability system in Wales aims to monitor evaluation, support school improvement, ensure transparency, and check that systemic concerns are addressed. The framework is shaped by five core values: fairness, which accounts for school context; coherence in its guiding principles; proportionality, ensuring processes are balanced and constructive; transparency of information for public confidence; and inclusivity, with a focus on wellbeing and collective responsibility. Recent trends reflect an increased emphasis on pupil wellbeing, foundational skills, support for disadvantaged learners, and alignment with curriculum reform, all part of a broader shift towards an improvement-focused model.

RQ 2 – Levels, measures, and mechanisms of accountability

Accountability is a multi-layered system involving the Senedd (Welsh Parliament), Estyn (the inspectorate), local authorities, and schools. Key processes include external evaluation via Estyn inspections, which provide narrative feedback rather than single grades; internal self-evaluation through School Development Plans; and system-level monitoring by the Welsh Government. Vertical accountability is driven by statutory inspections and local authority oversight, while horizontal mechanisms promote professional trust and collaboration through peer review and school-to-school partnerships. This structure reflects a move away from high-stakes public ranking, as school league tables were abolished in 2001.

RQ 3 – Managing change and policy processes

The Senedd holds legislative authority, while the Welsh Government develops and implements accountability policy, with Estyn acting as a key advisory body. Policy reform is managed through a process of research, stakeholder consultation, and strategic oversight from a 'Change Board' composed of educational experts. Changes are not bound by a fixed cycle but are aligned with significant educational reforms. New inspection arrangements are piloted by Estyn to gather feedback and ensure they are fit for purpose before full implementation, demonstrating a responsive approach to managing change in the accountability framework.

RQ 4 – Assessments of effectiveness and evaluation

Accountability policy is evaluated through both internal and external reviews, often conducted on an ad hoc basis in response to major reforms. International bodies, notably the OECD, provide external assessments to ensure the system aligns with global best practices. Evaluation criteria include pupil progress and wellbeing, teaching quality, and

stakeholder feedback. These evaluations are intended to be developmental; for example, feedback from an independent review led Estyn to introduce a narrative-based inspection model to better support school improvement. The process also involves targeted consultations with stakeholders whenever key policy changes are proposed.

RQ 5 – Historical, cultural, and political influences

The Welsh accountability system is shaped by its post-devolution context, marking a deliberate divergence from the English model to reflect distinct Welsh values of localism, collaboration, and trust. Historically, the system has transitioned from a centralised, punitive approach towards a more supportive, decentralised model focused on school self-evaluation. A key driver for reform has been PISA performance, with the portrayal of the Welsh education system following disappointing results acting as a catalyst for changes aimed at raising standards. The system is also influenced by the tension between traditional Welsh values and the pressures of neoliberalism, which has shaped the political discourse around performance and accountability.

RQ 6 – Impact on outcomes and workforce

Research indicates a significant disconnect between the stated aims of the accountability system and the experiences of stakeholders. While the policy intends to foster collaborative improvement, educators report high levels of stress, anxiety, and increased workload due to a high-stakes culture of performativity. Inspections are often perceived as adversarial and punitive rather than constructive, leading to fear and disruption that can constrain innovation. This creates a misalignment between the intended supportive mechanisms and the reality of high-stakes pressure felt by school leaders and teachers. The reviewed studies did not report on the impact of the accountability system on student attainment.

Timeline- recent accountability reforms

- **2001 Abolition of League Tables:** Rationale: To move away from a "high stakes" accountability culture. Key Features: The Welsh Government abolished the publication of school league tables, marking an early divergence from the English system.
- **2014, 2017, 2022, 2024 Inspection Reforms:** Rationale: To align inspection with evolving policies. Key Features: Estyn's inspection framework underwent significant reforms to ensure it remained focused on self-evaluation, a school's capacity to improve, and alignment with the Curriculum for Wales.
- **2017–2021 Our National Mission:** Rationale: To better use contextualised data to support with assessment of schools. Key Features: An action plan that ended the

publication of teacher assessments and test results, shifting focus towards a school-led evaluation and improvement approach.

- **2021 Curriculum for Wales Alignment:** Rationale: To integrate curriculum and accountability. Key Features: Reforms aimed to strengthen school autonomy and continuous growth by aligning the accountability system with the new Curriculum for Wales, supported by a national "data ecosystem".