

Briefing Paper: Wales

Unlike those of Scotland and Northern Ireland, the history of education in Wales is often conflated with that of England. Despite often-fraught confrontations between local authorities and central government, the Welsh system has lain within Whitehall's purview since the 19th century and in consequence has slowly evolved a system of mass education structurally aligned with its English counterpart. Indeed, in many post-1945 education reports it is difficult to find mention of Wales separate from England (when referenced independently it is often in relation to the teaching of Welsh, e.g. Norwood, 1943). Yet, while the post-1944 expansion of secondary education across England and Wales has frequently been depicted as an accelerating process of 'synchronicity', this should not obscure distinct and enduring features within the Welsh system that emerged before 1939 when the more fragmented nature of educational administration allowed local circumstances and agendas greater influence in shaping provision [Jones & Roderick, 153, 2003; Phillips & Daugherty, 88, 2000]. Subsequently, it is the period before the Butler Act that has drawn most attention from historians of education interested specifically in Wales [Raftery et al, 58-60, 2008]. Detailed studies exist of pre-1939 Welsh intermediate schools, educational class differentiation, the relationship between changing educational structures and the Welsh economy, and the gendered dynamics of education in Wales before 1914 and a few more that push into the interwar period; however, few progress past 1945 and only Jones & Roderick's 2003 study offers a broad narrative overview of Welsh education from AD400 to the new millennium.

An exception to this pattern emerges in terms of studies examining education and the Welsh language, which have proliferated since devolution. Still, these tend to concentrate on the relationship between education, language, and nation, with only passing reference to the social experience of Welsh pupils more broadly after 1945 [e.g. Ford, 2016]. For many Welsh commentators the narrative of Welsh education has been viewed primarily through a lens of English imposition and domination; however, as Gareth Elwyn Jones, the preeminent scholar of 20th century Welsh education, argues, this is too reductive. While he remains keenly attentive to the creeping centralization of power by successive governments after 1945 at the expense of local authorities and the attendant imposition of national structures in Wales, he is less willing to see this in strictly nationalistic terms. Instead, he stresses the need to understand the fluctuating relationship between Wales' economic, cultural, and educational development and to be able to situate this within wider UK-wide contexts, an approach that works particularly well in his 1997 collection of essays *The Education of a Nation* [Jones, 1997]. While existing studies provide detailed coverage of structural and political change, on the one hand, and broad data surveys, on the other [e.g. Gorard, 2000], far fewer address broader questions surrounding pupils and parents' experience, which lie at the heart of the project.

Welsh Education before 1939

As a result of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889, secondary provision in Wales far outstripped that in England before the Second World War. The legislation enacted several of the proposals made by the 1881 Aberdare Committee, appointed to enquire into 'the state of intermediate and higher education in Wales', and was one of the first pieces to apply to Wales alone. The Committee recommended the founding of two university colleges in Wales (University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire in Cardiff, 1883 and University College of North Wales in Bangor, 1884), and stressed the general dissatisfaction with secondary level provision in Wales. In response, the Act created a system of publicly funded intermediate (selective secondary) schools in Wales along with a new system of local administration, and, in so doing, established a firm precedent for ongoing claims over the next century that Wales had distinct educational needs from those across the border. This sense of Welsh educational exceptionalism drew upon the wider social and cultural impulses from which the 1889 reforms emerged: the prominence of the chapel in community life and nonconformity as a political force, the unifying effect of the Welsh language, particularly in rural communities, and the growth of

unionism merged to foster an atmosphere in which a collective sense of altruism and mutual support was mobilised in the cause of education as a basis for social mobility. The founding of the intermediate schools is often seen to have precipitated a Welsh renaissance, producing a new Welsh educated class, many of whom became teachers, eager 'to transmit cultural and patriotic values' to new generations of Welsh children [Morgan, 1981]. These sentiments survived, and were often reinforced by, the economic devastation of the interwar period. Even as the influence of the chapels and unions receded in the second half of the 20th century new cultural organisations, often built around a sense of Welsh national identity, emerged to take their place and articulate the importance of educational access and attainment.

By 1900 over 7000 Welsh pupils were receiving secondary education in nearly 100 schools, with a roughly equal split between boys and girls (3877 compared to 3513). These schools were administered by newly formed Joint Education Committees in each county, which were answerable to the Whitehall based Charity Commission. Each committee was charged with submitting a scheme for the provision of intermediate and technical education in its county and empowered to levy a local rate not exceeding ½d, which would then be matched by Treasury funding following a satisfactory inspection. The new schools were divided into First Grade (20% of the intermediate schools, educating children to 18 with the intention of preparing them for university entry or higher professions); and Second Grade (80% of the schools, educating children to 16 for white collar or engineering jobs in local area). Both charged fees (up to £12p/a in First grade and between £3-6 amongst the second grade). To ensure broadly common standards across the intermediate schools, a Central Welsh Board was established in 1895 to oversee inspections, examinations, and to report direct to the Charity Commission. Although several prominent voices argued that the new schools needed to do more than merely imitate the English grammar schools by providing a literary, technical and scientific education suited to Wales' particular economic and cultural needs, in practice the curriculum tended to remain closely aligned to the academic structure found across the border at this time [Paterson, 2015, 126-27].

Amongst the framers of the Act, the securing of better educational opportunities for the Welsh middle classes dominated priorities and in the decades before 1914 the imposition of fees meant that intermediate schools often stood beyond the means of the poorest families (the mandatory elementary school leaving age was raised from 11 to 12 in 1899). Even so, rates of working class participation in secondary level education was far higher in Wales than England, and the proportion of children progressing to higher education before 1939 surpassed only by Scotland across Europe. As Jones and Roderick observe, this 'ladder extending from the public elementary schools...to the university colleges' was facilitated by generous scholarship provision throughout the interwar period, which ensured that by 1939 Wales had a significantly higher proportion of children attending secondary school than England.

Despite efforts to create a coherent system across the counties, varying local approaches and priorities created internal divisions, as did the presence of other secondary level schools operating beyond the control of the JECs. Several of the older and most prestigious endowed grammar schools resisted calls by the Aberdare Committee to integrate into the new system (Christ's College, Brecon; Cowbridge, until 1919; Llandovery College; Monmouth; Ruthin), and instead formed the core of a small Welsh independent sector (several later became direct grant schools before reverting to independent status in the 1970s), although 17 did enter the new county system as First Grade schools. In addition, a separate stratum of 'quasi-secondary schools', Higher-Elementary and Higher-Grade schools (some all-age), existed beneath the level of the intermediate schools. These did not come within the frame of the 1889 Act and after 1902 became the preserve of newly established Local Education Authorities, which subsequently incorporated them into a new, parallel network of free-to-attend Municipal Secondary Schools. Despite ongoing calls for the creation of a unified Board of Control to administer all of Wales' schools, the dual system remained in operation until the 1944 Education Act and the source of frequent administrative and bureaucratic tensions in the intervening decades [Jones & Roderick, 87-90].

From this distinctive start, Jones & Roderick chart the subsequent steady convergence of the Welsh and English education systems over the twentieth century, albeit with the Welsh retaining distinctive cultural characteristics. The 1902 Education Act seemed to promise greater local freedom and decentralization across Britain; however, as newly formed Welsh LEAs sought to assert independence over funding priorities and to prevent the establishment of state funded denominational (Anglican and Catholic) schools, so Whitehall strove for greater control. The response, the 1904 Education (Local Authority Default) Act, gave the government powers to deal directly with non-maintained schools and quickly became known as the Coercion of Wales Act. In 1907 the Board of Education created a Welsh Department, which assumed responsibility for the administration and inspection of Welsh elementary schools. Energized by its Chief Inspector, O. M. Edwards, this body sought to promote education as the key means to disseminate Welsh culture, language, and a philosophy that emphasized Welsh distinctiveness from England. Edwards soon came into conflict with the more conservative Central Welsh Board and LEAs in Cardiff and Monmouthshire, which remained committed to ensuring that the intermediate schools provided a high-level grammar school education along traditional lines for Wales' then expanding middle class.

In 1910, 13,000 pupils were attending intermediate schools and working towards the School Certificate. Provision varied across Wales, with fewer secondary places available in the industrial south but surprisingly wide coverage in rural areas, such as Monmouthshire and Glamorgan, which enthusiastically supplemented the intermediate schools with a number of free municipal secondary schools after 1902. In 1912 around 2,000 pupils left Welsh secondary schools every year. As a percentage of all children over the age of 12 in Wales, 15.5% of boys and 14.9% of girls entered secondary education at this time. Of these 8.5% of boys and 22.8% of girls became teachers; 42.5% and 8.9% entered a professional, commercial or clerical job; 14.1% & 3.9% entered manual work; 7.5% & 0.3% went into agriculture. Even so, most pupils continued to depart prematurely before completing the standard 4-year course (average attendance of 3 years 1 month for girls; 2 years 6 months for boys). This changed little even after school attendance was made compulsory to the age of 14 in 1918, with over 50% of children still leaving before this point; however, by 1920 there were 336,836 children in secondary education. Elementary schools were expected to give a minimum level of education in literacy and numeracy but, like in England, educational outcomes were heavily mediated by class background. Most schools and teachers appear to have accepted the 1904 dictum that elementary schooling should provide 'training in followership rather than leadership training, suited to the working classes', and that most pupils would enter manual or industrial jobs. While this situation was comparable to England, important differences in attitude remained. From the 1880s onwards, there was broad enthusiasm across Wales that all children of requisite ability should have the opportunity to attend secondary school. Subsequently, all elementary pupils were given the opportunity to sit the scholarship examination for the intermediate schools (a decade before this was the case in England) and scholarship provision (particularly from LEAs) was far higher than over the border (which rarely exceeded the centrally stipulated 25% of scholarship places), thus helping to explain the high numbers entering the intermediate schools.

Education in Wales after the Butler Act

In many ways, the Butler Act served to bring the English system more in line with the Welsh rather than the other way around. The run-up to 1944 saw increased efforts to assert claims to regional control over education from the Central Welsh Board and Federation of Education Committees, which proposed a National Council for Education overseen by a Secretary of State for Wales. The latter also advocated a free, compulsory and universal secondary system, with the leaving age set at 16 and part-time compulsory education until 18. While it endorsed a tripartite system in urban areas, it was eager to introduce multilateral or bilateral schooling in rural areas, which were felt to be poorly equipped to

support separate grammars, secondary moderns, and technical schools. Ultimately, however, Welsh voices achieved little influence over the 1944 act even though its conditions applied to both England and Wales [Jones, 135-40]. Administrative rationalization followed the passing of the Butler Act with the total number of LEAs dropping from 315 to 146 nationally, 17 of which were Welsh. Many of the intermediate schools transitioned to become the grammars, with the Municipal Secondary and Higher Grade Schools becoming Secondary Moderns. In 1948 the Central Welsh Board was abolished, with control over examinations and inspections passing into the purview of the new Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) but day-to-day responsibility split between the LEAs and Welsh Department at the Board of Education. Although falling short of a devolved control of education, this body's control over examinations in Wales did give it a unique place in national education administration and led David Eccles erroneously to proclaim it 'a representative education parliament in Wales [Jones & Roderick, 147].

Like their English counterparts, Welsh LEAs submitted proposals to the Board of Education detailing how they intended to introduce compulsory, free senior education, but these varied significantly between areas and depending upon local conditions. The legacy of the intermediate schools ensured that before 1960 Wales had a higher proportion of pupils in grammar school (around 45% compared to 18% in England in 1951); however, the terms of the 1944 Act limited Welsh LEAs' ability to expand multilateral schooling. In some areas, such as Montgomeryshire, the desire to entrench grammar schools amongst administrators, teachers, and parents alike was so strong that Newtown and Welshpool's four intermediate schools were converted into secondary moderns and a new grammar founded midway between the towns rather than introduce bilateral schooling on the same site. Only Anglesey had its proposals to introduce 11-18 multilateral schools for all its pupils by the mid-1950s approved (partly because it submitted its plans very soon after the act), whilst others, such as Merionethshire, saw their plans denied by the Welsh Office, which, according to Jones and Roderick, remained intent on prioritising the needs of middle class grammar school pupils. Even so, local constraints on teacher numbers and space meant that all rural counties had no option but to introduce some bilateral provision, although this often meant grammar and secondary modern streams segregated on the same site. In urban areas, the tripartite system (even though little enthusiasm for technical schools meant this was often bipartite) found more supporters but still ran-up against staunch opposition from Labour controlled LEAs in Swansea and Glamorgan which favoured multilateral schooling. Only a messy compromise with the Welsh Department resolved this impasse, with multilateral schools being permitted in areas of new council housing but not in the towns, meaning that the intermediates-turned-grammars retained their place at the top of a local educational hierarchy.

By 1951 47.5% of secondary pupils were in secondary moderns, 45% in grammars, 4.5% in bilateral or multilateral schools, and 3% in technical schools. Over the next decade, technical schools declined rapidly, so that there were only 6 left in 1965 (from a total of 20), whilst multilateral comprehensives started to expand. The corresponding figures for 1961 are 52% in secondary moderns, 34% in grammars, 11% in comps, 3% in all age schools. Despite the higher proportion of grammar school pupils, Welsh schools gradually lost their advantage over English counterparts in terms of staying on rates after the age of 15 during this decade. In 1961, 58.1% left before 15. For Jones and Roderick, this is further evidence of 'the increased synchronicity of the school systems in Wales and England from the 1950s', which eroded Wales' advantages and entrenched a conservative bureaucratic model intended to serve a middle class elite and the priorities of a central bureaucracy' [Jones, 153-4].

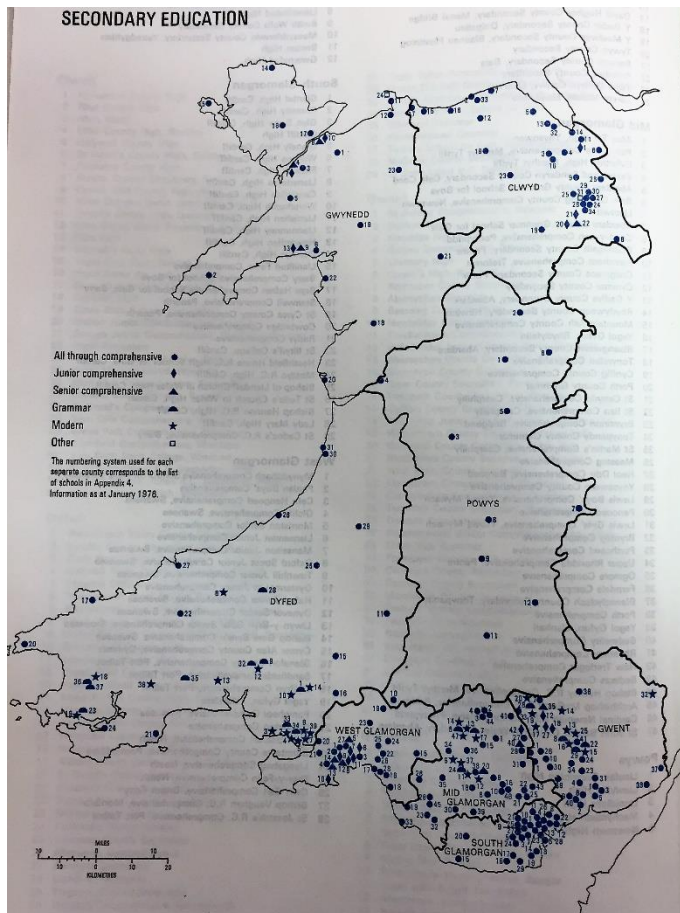
The curriculum in Welsh schools differed little from that found in England; Welsh students studied towards the same qualifications as their English counterparts (albeit with the option of Welsh from 1951). Grammar schools aimed for the same academic atmosphere fostered in the intermediate schools (which often had had English or public school educated headmasters) and found in equivalent schools across the border. Before 1951 students worked towards the School Certificate and after this point for the General Certificate of Education (GCE). Following the introduction of the GCE, candidates for state

scholarships took a new scholarship paper (selected as those judged capable of gaining a high-level university degree), while LEAs continued to award local scholarships to promising students. The secondary moderns also taught to a curriculum largely aligned with that found in England, which focussed on the core subjects combined with more ‘practical subjects’, often incorporating elements originally intended for the technical schools. A few pupils were entered for the GCE but most students left at the earliest opportunity and joined the workforce. Welsh schools also introduced the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) in 1961, as a more appropriate qualification for Secondary Modern pupils to work towards. At the time of the Robbins Report around 10% of Welsh students continued to university, roughly similar to England, although this included a higher ratio of female students (1:3 compared to 1:4). Wales’ University Colleges expanded steadily from the mid-1950s, and more rapidly after Robbins (14,678 students at the University of Wales in 1971); however, this did not reflect an upward spike in admissions from Welsh schools alone, with much of the increase relying on English students. In 1939, almost all students at Welsh university colleges were Welsh; in 1955 80%; by 1961 63%; and 47% in 1965; 44% in 1975; 28.4% 1986. It is important to note, however, that more Welsh students left for English universities during the same period and that a higher proportion of Welsh working class students entered Welsh universities than the national average. University growth in Wales slowed over the 1970s and then began to fall at the end of the decade following UGC cutbacks, levelling out at 18,832 students in 1978.

With the creation of the Welsh Office and appointment of the first Secretary of State for Wales in 1964, new possibilities emerged for greater devolution of powers over education policy. By the mid-1980s, over 2000 civil servants were permanently based in the Welsh Office’s Cardiff headquarters, but while educational administration increasingly took place at a regional level, there was no attendant shift in policy making powers. Nonetheless, a growing number of voices were prepared to argue that the education system in Wales needed to take into account Welsh distinctiveness, particularly in terms of language teaching. The Gittins Committee (under the chairmanship of Charles Gittins, Professor of Education at Swansea University) ran a parallel investigation to the Plowden Committee into Welsh primary education, although it delivered very similar findings in 1967 (recommendations that Welsh language teaching provision should be expanded, excepting). Like Plowden, Gittins stressed that testing as a fundamental element in the primary/secondary should be abolished and that the period between 11 and 13 should be seen as transitional, with all pupils following the same curriculum. Throughout the period there was little opposition in Whitehall to incorporating Welsh language teaching into the curriculum and ensuring that Welsh speakers could studied in their native tongue. The introduction of the GCE in 1951 allowed for the Welsh to be examined at O-level and in 1961 Welsh was added as an A-level subject, while pupils were permitted to take a growing number of other subject papers in Welsh during this period. Although numbers of Welsh speakers declined throughout the late twentieth century, there remained an active and vocal nationalist lobby, such as Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (Welsh Language Society) founded 1962, that filled the void left by declining influence of chapels and church, and unionism in old industries in maintaining the Welsh language as a core component of Welsh national identity and insisting on its teaching in schools [Jones, 144-45].

Wales transitioned to comprehensive education quicker and more enthusiastically than much of England. This was due to a combination of the financial pressure of maintaining a tripartite system within thinly populated areas or against government opposition (e.g. Cardiff) and also because of longstanding opposition to the 11-plus in many LEAs (e.g. Swansea). At the time of Circular 10/65, of the 400-odd state secondary schools in Wales, 231 were Secondary Moderns, 116 grammars, 14 technical, and 31 comprehensive or bilateral. In 1969, Wales had 118 comprehensive schools and 202 in 1976 (educating 89% of pupils). Despite pockets of resistance to comprehensivization (mainly amongst Conservative or Liberal dominated authorities, but also from some Labour voices who valued the historic contribution of the intermediate/grammar schools), by 1979 almost all schools were fully integrated comprehensives, with only a handful of local authorities persisting with the 11-plus. The

always small proportion educated in direct grants and independent schools also steadily contracted, standing at 3.8% in 1976 (7% nationally).



Distribution of Welsh secondary schools, 1976.

Economic stagnation and industrial decline in the 1970s took a heavy toll on the Welsh economy and labour market. Unemployment amongst school leavers rocketed (rising nationally from 10,000 in 1974 to 240,000 in 1977), which was exacerbated by the high pre-16 leaving rates in Wales. In that year, 76.6% of leavers went straight into the workforce (81% of boys; 71.8% of girls – broadly comparable with England), but about 30% did so with no qualifications, the highest across the England and Wales by almost 10%. Few local solutions to this problem emerged, with Wales incorporated into various national youth training schemes devised by the Manpower Services Commission. Many colleges of further education in Wales responded to the funding opportunities created by these schemes by offering school leavers the chance to stay-on in full or part time education and 1979 had 80,000 students enrolled, with a further 127,411 attending various adult education centres.

The 1980s began with a moment of introspection and reflection in Wales following the publication of the 1981 Loosmore Report, which highlighted that Wales now lagged behind the rest of the UK in terms of educational attainment with 25% of pupils leaving without any exam qualifications (this had dropped to 20% by 1986 but was still the highest in the country). Critics blamed this failure on the persistence of traditional teaching methods and a grammar school mentality that served the ablest pupils well but left weaker ones without necessary support [Reynolds, 1990]. Various follow-up studies emphasised institutional failures and stressed the need to make schools more efficient, but largely ignored the socio-economic challenges faced in many Welsh communities as traditional industries disintegrated. Wales remained poor in comparison to other parts of the UK, with limited opportunities for professional graduates (who increasingly moved elsewhere) and limited opportunities in skilled industry. Wales remained peripheral in national education debates during the 1980s, although rural Welsh schools were particularly badly hit by Thatcherite efficiency drives. Little distinction was made for Welsh schools in the new governing structures put in place through 1986 Education Act or 1988 Education Reform Act. Unlike in England, grant maintained status held little appeal (only 12 of 228 secondary schools taking it up) but Wales fitted into the broad scope of the new National Curriculum

Educational devolution predated political, with the introduction of the Welsh curriculum in 1993 following persistent lobbying from the mid-1980s from the Curriculum Council for Wales. While the core structure remained the same as in England, 'Welsh elements' were incorporated across a number of subjects. Following devolution, the National Assembly launched a major investment programme in school buildings and facilities, as well as to raise standards in schools. While some progress has been

made Wales continues to lag behind the rest of the UK in science and maths measures and in terms of numbers of pupils progressing to university. Just as they did in the late 19th century, these inequalities continue to reflect the entrenched fissures of class and locality in Wales, and remain a clarion call for those demanding greater autonomy from Westminster as the only means to reshape Wales' 'unique educational landscape'.

Secondary Education in Wales: Number of establishments

	1950/1	1960/1	1970/1	1980/1	1985
Maintained Secondary	377	402	311	241	237
Direct grant	4	4	4	3	0
Independent (efficient)		58	53	68	69
Total					

Number of Pupils

	1950/1	1960/1	1970/1	1980/1	1985
Maintained Secondary	115,784	176,293	190,627	240,771	218,378
Direct grant	1,587	1832	1735	1696	0
Independent (efficient)		9,998	8,991	10,932	11,263
Total					

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