Migration and Education in Wales

Key points

- Although policy on migration is not devolved, the Welsh Government has responsibility to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees living in Wales under its housing, health, education, social service functions and through its community cohesion agenda.

- The overall impact of migration on education in schools is unclear. The existing literature identifies both positive and negative impacts of migration on education.

- Many schools are under-subscribed. Immigration has contributed to the maintenance of some local village schools as the children of immigrants increase enrolment levels.

- The education system has benefitted substantially from the contribution of teachers who have moved to the UK.

- Contrary to popular perception, there is a positive relationship between the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (who will include migrants and children of migrants) and levels of achievement.

- 26% of primary schools in Wales have significant surplus places (more than 25%) and 33% of secondary schools have significant surplus places. Some schools would benefit from an increase in applications, including from migrant families.

- There are pressures on some schools in some areas associated with inward migration, including Carmarthenshire (specifically Llanelli), Newport and Wrexham. Local authorities are working hard to mitigate the potential for negative impacts by providing additional resources and support.

- Some schools may lack the knowledge and experience to deal with bullying and racism.

- The importance of English language skills for migrant integration is universally acknowledged.

- Research by the Welsh Government has identified significant issues in ESOL provision in Wales including a gap between supply and demand, insufficient funding, variations in the quality of delivery, gaps between the courses on offer and the needs of learners and difficulties in recruiting and training ESOL tutors and teachers.

- There is some evidence of disparities emerging between individual authorities and between North and South Wales in the provision of ESOL training.

- International students have become increasingly important to the Welsh economy. 8% of undergraduate students and 39% of postgraduate students at Welsh Universities are from outside the EU. International students in Wales add £237m to the nation’s gross domestic product and more than 9,000 jobs.
The policy context

Although powers relating to asylum and migration are not devolved, the Welsh Government has responsibility for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees living in Wales under its housing, health, education and social service functions and through its community cohesion agenda. As a result the Welsh Government is a key player in relation to the inclusion of migrants in Welsh society.

Policies towards migrants in Wales are developed in the context of the Welsh Government’s strategic agenda, specifically the Programme for Government (2011), and within the framework of UK, European and international legislation.

The Programme for Government sets out specific actions the Welsh Government is taking to ‘create a fair society free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation with cohesive and inclusive communities’ (Welsh Government 2011). The Government aims to do this by reducing inequality in education and skills, health, housing and employment outcomes for people with protected characteristics (including race), increasing public services satisfaction rates and reducing the incidence of hate crime.

The public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010), also referred to as the ‘general duty’, came into force in April 2011 and aims to ensure that public authorities and those carrying out a public function consider how they can positively contribute to a fairer society in their day to day activities through paying due regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations.

In order for public bodies to better perform their public sector equality duty (PSED), the Welsh Government was the first government to bring in specific equality duties as set out in Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011. The regulations were approved by the National Assembly for Wales and came into force on 6 April 2011. The specific duties are more far reaching in Wales than in England and place duties on the public sector covering engagement, equality impact assessments, pay differences, procurement, reporting arrangements, review and equality and employment information.

Public authorities in Wales published their equality objectives and their Strategic Equality Plans in April 2012 which clearly laid out the actions the public sector is taking to fulfil the PSED.

Education policy in Wales

Education in Wales is compulsory from the ages of 5 to 16 and there are 1,635 state schools offering free education to about 465,000 pupils. There are around 250,000 students at higher and further education institutes (colleges and universities).

Wales has long had administrative control over its education system, which commentators describe as allowing for the development of a distinctive Welsh education (EHRC 2009). Education in Wales differs in certain respects from education elsewhere in the UK. Around 37,000 (10%) of children in primary and secondary schools in Wales are educated either wholly or largely through the medium of Welsh (Statistics for Wales 2013). Welsh medium education is available to all age groups from nursery through to schools, colleges, universities and adult education. Lessons in the language are compulsory for all until the age of 16.

The Welsh Government’s Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant (MEAG) aims to improve the educational opportunity of all minority ethnic groups including, in particular, measures to assist pupils for whom English is an additional language. Refugees, asylum seekers and the children of migrant workers are amongst the groups who receive English language acquisition support funded by MEAG which stood at £10.5 million in 2013-14 and is shared between all 22 Local Authorities.

Migrant children in schools

There is some concern in Wales, as in other parts of the UK, that increased migration can place pressures on the education system in some instances, for example when children enter schools from diverse cultural backgrounds and have language support needs. There are concerns that the presence of immigrant children in the classroom lowers the quality of education for native students. The existing literature identifies both positive and negative impacts of migration on education. Research has focused on three key issues:

- The increase in pupil numbers resulting from migration;
- The additional demands on schools arising from the needs of some migrant pupils;
- The effects of pupil mobility and ‘churn’ on schools.

The overall impact of migration on education is unclear. An assessment of the overall impact of migration on the education system is complex and must take into account not just the pressures placed on resources but also the measures put in place to address these and the positive benefits that result from migration.
The impact of migration on schools varies significantly in different areas. There are some reports of over-subscribed pupil rolls resulting from migration. However, data on school capacity indicates that many schools are under-subscribed. Data provided by the Welsh Government indicates that as of May 2014, 16.9% of primary places are surplus and 17.9% of secondary places are surplus. 26% of primary schools have significant surplus places (more than 25%) and 33% of secondary schools have significant surplus places. Some schools would benefit from an increase in applications, including from migrant families (Reynolds 2008; George et al 2011).

In some areas of the UK, where school populations are dwindling, the arrival of migrant children has provided a much-needed boost (Reynolds 2005). The National Farmers Union has recognised that immigration has contributed to the maintenance of some local village schools in some areas of the UK because the children of immigrants increase enrolment levels, renewing demand for established schools which were at risk of closure (iCoCo 2007). It is not clear whether this has been important in Wales. The Welsh Government is not aware of migration bolstering numbers at rural schools and most rural authorities do not anticipate substantial pupil growth.

The education system has also benefited substantially from the contribution of teachers who have moved to the UK, particularly the high number of teachers who have come to the UK from the Commonwealth. These individuals have often trained in their home country and bring considerable experience and expertise, in some cases in subjects where there is a teacher shortage (iCoCo 2007).

In terms of pupil performance, data suggests that contrary to popular perception, there is a positive relationship between the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (including migrants and children of migrants) and levels of achievement (George et al. 2011). Research undertaken in US by Hutt (2012) similarly concludes that the net effect of immigration on native students is small but positive. The increase in immigration in the 1990s caused the 2010 native high school completion rate, which stood at 87.8%, to be 1.3% higher than it would otherwise have been.

Although migration can have a positive impact on migration in some area, there are also pressures on schools in some areas associated with inward migration. Local Authorities in these areas have to work hard to mitigate the potential for negative impacts by providing extra resources and support.

A study commissioned by WAG (2010) has looked at how local authorities are dealing with increased migration. There were over 70 children from migrant worker families (not just those from A8 countries) in Llanelli primary and secondary schools at the time of the study. Minority Ethnic Achievement Services (MEAS) which exist in each Local Authority and are funded by the Welsh Government, provide specialist support for pupils whose first language is neither English nor Welsh and who need support for English. MEAS actively seek data on all minority ethnic pupils in schools to ensure that English language needs are clearly identified.

In Newport the greatest impact as a result of migrant workers and their families moving into the area has also been experienced by primary schools. The Catholic schools have been particularly affected because of the high numbers of Polish people in the area. Schools within the Pill area have also experienced substantial impact due to migrant workers settling in the area. More resources and support have been allocated to these schools to cope with the extra demand and requirements, however, resources are stretched (WAG 2010).

Interviews with local authority staff in Wrexham showed that the education sector has experienced a significant impact from migration. It was reported by the local authority that the numbers of children from migrant worker families peaked in 2005/06 but growth has subsequently slowed down and become more manageable. Schools are now more confident in dealing with pupils from Poland and Portugal, the majority of whom attend Roman Catholic schools (WAG 2010).

The educational experiences of migrants in Wales

Much of the evidence on the educational experience of migrants in Wales is anecdotal or relates specifically to the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees. This literature acknowledges the importance of education as a strategy for securing the integration of migrants, particularly refugees.

The Refugee Inclusion Strategy (WAG 2008) states that refugee and asylum seeking children and young people are generally succeeding in school, although their participation in extracurricular activities is low, mainly owing to poverty. The strategy made mention of specific funding set aside for refugees and asylum seekers, inclusion through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Strategy and guidance for teachers to complement this strategy.

Hewett et al (2005) found that both young people and professionals spoke highly of education provision for refugees and asylum seekers. However racism and bullying were common. Some head teachers showed reluctance to accept students when they heard the word ‘asylum seeker’ and a small number of students had been moved to
more ethnically diverse schools. Hewett et al (2005) found that separated (unaccompanied) refugee and asylum-seeking children over the age of 16 were sometimes inappropriately placed in classes with adults, depriving them of important friendship networks.

Crawley (2013) found that the educational experiences of those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds living in Wales are mixed. Many have positive experiences of their children’s schools, commenting on an increased awareness of multiculturalism that has developed, and in some cases been promoted, over recent years.

Despite this less than half (43%) consider that there is race equality in education with nearly 20% reporting racism and discrimination in their dealings with schools and colleges. Many reported that their children had been bullied in school and called names. Some of the research participants consider that head teachers and teaching staff are often aware of the issues that children from BAME backgrounds face and can be approached and relied upon to address issues as they arise. But this is not always the case. Some parents reported that teachers do not always deal with racist incidents and bullying in an appropriate or effective way.

In addition, some schools, particularly those in rural areas or in areas where there has not previously been significant ethnic diversity or inward migration, may lack the knowledge and experience to deal with issues (Crawley 2013). Lack of awareness may lead schools and teachers to behave inappropriately and themselves discriminate against or stereotype children from BAME backgrounds. For example, it was reported that some schools were unaware of the implications of European accession on the rights of Polish (and other) migrants to access education after May 2004. Schools asked parents for visas, resulting in children being kept out of school for months whilst the situation was clarified.

Several children who participated in the research said that they were sometimes discriminated against by teachers who they felt did not give them as much attention or support as other children who were not from BAME backgrounds. Although the majority of examples provided in relation to racial inequality and discrimination in education relate to primary and secondary schools, there is also some evidence of perceived inequalities in higher and further education.

**English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

The importance of English language skills for migrant integration is universally acknowledged. Conversely poor English language skills serve as a primary barrier for migrant workers in learning about and asserting their rights and responsibilities, and are a principle factor in making them vulnerable to exploitation. English language provision is widely viewed as the key issue for migrant workers (National Assembly of Wales 2008). Poor English language skills can leave migrant workers:

- Unable to understand terms and conditions of employment contracts and tenancy agreements;
- Susceptible to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and landlords;
- Unable to secure alternative employment;
- Exposed to workplace health and safety risk;
- With difficulty in accessing public services.

Migrant workers who were interviewed for a study by the Welsh Assembly Government (2010) felt that they must learn English because they were in the UK. Difficulties in communicating at the bank or post office were mentioned. For example, many rely on the volunteers at the Polish Welsh Mutual Association in Llanelli to translate documents. Most migrant workers have attended English classes at some point.

Self-reported English language skills among refugees in Wales are generally poor on arrival but English language skills improve considerably over time (Crawley and Crimes 2009).

The importance of learning English is reflected in the emphasis placed on the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training by both the Home Office and WAG. Research by the Welsh Assembly Government and NIACE (2009) shows that ESOL has an extremely wide impact: on individual aspirations; improved health; increased access to services and on opportunities for civic, democratic and community participation. This study also illustrates the diversity of ESOL learners: in settled communities; refugees and asylum seekers; migrant workers and their partners and spouses. Demand for ESOL fluctuates over time for these groups.

Although the importance of learning English is recognised, a review of the provision of English for speakers of other languages in Wales commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government (2010) has identified significant gaps in ESOL provision in Wales, specifically:

- **Demand for ESOL is outstripping supply;**
- **There is insufficient funding;**
- **The context of learning** does not always align with learner demand;
- **The quality of delivery** is variable;
- **In many areas there are significant difficulties in recruiting and training** ESOL tutors and teachers.
The estimates of ESOL supply and demand suggest that in Wales in 2010 there were:

- 40,000 people who did not have English or Welsh as a first language;
- 26,000 of these had ESOL needs at Level 1 and below;
- 11,400 learners participated in ESOL provision. This means that across Wales less than half (44%) of ESOL needs were being met.

It seems likely that the gap between demand and supply will have increased since the research was conducted due to the arrival of further migrants and public sector funding cuts.

The study also identified disparities emerging between individual authorities and between North and South Wales, with:

- Shortages in provision being most severe in South Wales - exacerbated by the large number of people in the area with ESOL needs.
- In North Wales, and in rural areas of mid Wales, shortages were identified, but as the overall number of people with ESOL needs is smaller these shortages do not appear to be as chronic.

A survey of refugees living in Wales also identifies difficulties in accessing appropriate and affordable English language training (Crawley and Crimes 2009). Although two thirds of refugees said they had received some formal English language training since arriving in the UK, many described difficulties in receiving appropriate support to improve their language skills. These difficulties included the appropriateness of the level of training provided (usually too easy), courses and lessons/classes being too short, a lack of childcare and/or the timing of classes which makes it difficult for parents (especially mothers) with school-age children to attend. Several respondents commented on the associated costs of attendance, particularly bus fares (Crawley and Crimes 2009).

The internationalisation of higher and further education

Data from the Wales Migration Portal indicates that international students have become an increasingly significant proportion of the migrant population in Wales. In 2011 8% of undergraduate students at Welsh Universities were from outside the European Union. This figure rises to 39% for postgraduate students at Welsh Universities.

In 2009-10, there were 19,050 international students from more than 70 countries studying in Wales, during which they paid £110m in tuition fees, spent £130m on living costs and triggered a £23m injection from family and friends. In total Oxford Economics (2011) estimates that international students in Wales add £237m to the nation’s gross domestic product and more than 9,000 jobs in Wales.

The total is equivalent to 0.5% of the Welsh economy, which is a larger share than agriculture and on a par with Cardiff’s hotel and restaurant sector. The rest of the UK also benefits from the Wales’s international and EU students, with UK-based supply chains generating a further £57 million contribution to UK GDP, and supporting an additional 1,910 jobs.

References and further information


www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/policy_areas/business_and_communities/The%20Impact%20of%20International%20and%20EU%20students%20in%20Wales.pdf


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About the briefing paper series
This briefing paper is one of a series produced by Professor Heaven Crawley, Director of the Centre for Migration Policy Research (CMPR) at Swansea University to improve knowledge and understanding of migration issues in Wales. The papers set out the evidence on migration to Wales in relation to key issues and themes that are of public and policy concern and provide up-to-date information about the composition and experiences of migrant, asylum seeking and refugee populations living in Wales.

The briefing papers can be downloaded at www.wmp.org.uk

Additional data and resources can be downloaded from the Wales Migration Portal http://wmp.infobasecymru.net/IAS

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