

*Teaching literatures in secondary schools in Wales:  
diversity in Welsh, English and  
International Languages*

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ABSTRACT

This article shares findings on what literatures are taught in secondary schools in Wales, and why, from a survey of forty-seven teachers across Wales in 2022. Our participants taught literatures in Welsh, English, drama, French and Spanish. This represents a cross-disciplinary and plurilingual approach to literatures in schools in Wales that distinguishes this research from previous studies. The research is closely concerned with the gender and ethnic diversity of authors in terms of meeting Welsh Government objectives for education and society. The results show that women continue to be under-represented as authors of poems, plays, and – to a slightly lesser extent – novels. They are somewhat better represented in Welsh-language literary studies than English-language ones. Only a handful of Authors of Colour were taught: they are located exclusively among the English- and French-language texts. No Authors of Colour of Welsh-language texts were taught. Our discussion contextualises an overall lack of diversity in teaching literatures in Wales – which jeopardises Welsh Government ambitions for Anti-racist Wales 2030 and the teaching of BAME histories and experiences – through comparisons with international research. It concludes by outlining recommendations for government, publishing, schools and teachers in terms of training, resources, and curriculum design, as well as areas for future research.

**Keywords:** Literature, Diversity, Secondary school, Gender, Ethnicity, Welsh, English, Drama, Wales

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This article shares findings on what literatures are taught in secondary schools in Wales, and why, from a survey of teachers as part of a larger project on ‘Teaching literatures during the pandemic: impacts on secondary schools in Wales’. One of eighteen Collaborative Evidence Network projects funded by the Welsh Government to aid Covid-recovery in Wales, it investigated the impacts of the pandemic on the teaching of literatures in secondary schools in Wales and internationally, in terms of authors and texts, educators’ purposes and visions for teaching literatures. The full report and a webinar based on it can be found on the website Hwb (2023). This article answers the following sub-questions from that larger project:

1. What literary texts are taught in secondary schools in Wales?
2. How diverse are the literary texts taught, in terms of authors’ gender and ethnicity?<sup>1</sup>
3. Who chooses what texts are taught?
4. What factors influence the choice of texts?

In relation to the last question, although we asked teachers this without any caveating to elicit *their perception* of the factors involved, it should be noted, throughout this article, that exam boards make the first cut of texts that can be studied for qualifications (GCSE, A-level). Other choices – made subsequently by departments, teachers, and pupils – almost always operate within the constraints of these set texts. Furthermore, the selection of these set texts influences choice of texts at KS3, as teachers work to avoid repeating the same texts with the same cohort; provide appropriate progression towards GCSE and A-level texts; and also Hoover up texts that have fallen off GCSE lists to teach at KS3 (recycling existing physical texts, resources and expertise for efficiency’s sake).

### 1. Context

Education policy in Wales was devolved from Westminster to the Welsh Government in 1999. Strongly marking its difference from the National

Curriculum in England in terms of its title and content, the roll-out of a new Curriculum for Wales began in 2022. It sees individual schools designing and delivering a curriculum tailored to their students while meeting ‘four purposes’ of education across six Areas of Learning and Experience (a way of organising education emphasised in the curriculum documents over specific subjects, though schools may still retain these). The new curriculum is not organised by Key Stages, unlike its predecessors. Students will still take GCSEs, although their content will change to fit the new curriculum. This article on the teaching of literatures in secondary schools in Wales, across Welsh, English and international languages, is underpinned by research undertaken on the cusp of the old and new curricula. The participating teachers were preparing to implement it and some of their responses reflect their planning for it. However, the teaching they describe took place under the old system.

‘Literature’ in the context of school education usually describes written works of the imagination, including poetry, drama, and prose. In and beyond Wales, the importance of teaching of literature has been explained in terms of its strong association with literacy, language, communication and analytic skills, access to the whole curriculum, and consequently education and employment after formal education (HMSO 1985, HMSO 1989, Dyer, Arslan et al., Rosser 6). Beyond Welsh and English, literature also features in the teaching of drama and international languages, such as Spanish and French. Hence this article refers to literatures plural. In terms of Curriculum for Wales’ Areas of Learning and Experience, literature plays a role in ‘Languages, Literacy and Communication’ and ‘Expressive Arts’. A sense of the value placed on literature-rich subjects by the Welsh Government is evidenced by one of the aims in the Curriculum for Wales, to ‘build a lifelong love of literature’ for learners (Welsh Government, 2019). Rosser links Welsh children’s literature to other government policies including the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) and Cymraeg 2050 (6). More broadly, studying literatures benefits students’ health and wellbeing as well as the vitality of a country’s literary and cultural industries (Donaldson 48, Rosser 6). However, the uptake of English literature at advanced stages of secondary school and in higher education has been declining in various nations, so too the uptake of what Wales calls international languages across the UK’s four nations at age 14–16 (Elliott, Olive et al., Broady).

The introduction of the Curriculum for Wales during the global pandemic coincided with calls to ‘diversify the curriculum’. In terms of

literatures, this commonly refers to expanding the range of authors and texts taught, particularly the gender, ethnicity, and other protected characteristics (in a UK context) of authors and characters represented – though fuller definitions encompass diversifying intended learning outcomes, pedagogies and assessments. ‘Diversity’ is a contested term because it perpetuates notions of ‘otherness ... viewed from a dominant White lens’, although people of colour are in fact the global majority (Ramdarshan Bold 17). This article uses ‘diversity’ rather than alternatives such as multi-ethnic, multicultural, or inclusive because of the term’s familiarity with teachers and stakeholders, due to its widespread use in activism and policy.

On what evidence do calls to diversify the curriculum base their appeals? Some indicative statistics about gender and ethnic diversity in teaching and assessing literature from various parts of the UK from 2019 onwards follow:

- 65 per cent of schools teach no literary texts by female writers during the three years of KS3 (England, End Sexism in Schools campaign quoted in Fenn, 2022b);
- Between one and three female authors were taught in KS3 (Southwest England and Wales, Kneen 3);
- Of the set texts for examination at age 16, before the most recent update by Pearson in 2019, there were 69 text options by male authors (66 per cent) and 36 text options by female authors (34 per cent) (UK, Elliott 2017);
- White, middle-class men dominate literary texts taught and assessed in schools. ‘No more than 7 per cent of candidates for GCSE English Literature in 2019 answered on a full-length novel or play by a woman’ (England, Elliott et al. 4, 25);
- Malorie Blackman was the only Author of Colour to feature in prose; John Agard and Maya Angelou were the only poets of colour; and there were no plays by writers of colour taught at KS3 (Southwest England and Wales, Kneen 3);
- ‘82 per cent of youth survey respondents did not recall ever studying a text by a Black, Asian or minority ethnic author’ (England, Elliott et al. 6);
- Fewer than 1 per cent of candidates for GCSE English Literature in 2019 answered a question on a novel by an Author of Colour; 0.1 per cent on a novel by a woman of colour (England, Elliott et al. 4, 6).

Elliott et al. make the following arguments about the significance of the lack of diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity and class in the curriculum (the latter was not a focus of our study):

- The current lack of representation implies that only White, male, middle-class perspectives are worth reading about and studying. It is vital for the health of these subjects and for the young people studying them that the widest possible range of students see themselves represented in the literature that is taught;
- Lack of representation is not only harmful to learners from historically marginalised communities, it also impoverishes students from learning about other perspectives, cultures, religions, and ethnicities;<sup>2</sup>
- A monolithic curriculum denies students lessons in racial and gender justice and a lens through which to critique oppression, which a diverse curriculum can offer.

These studies exclusively attend to English-language literature. Our survey uniquely focuses solely on Wales and includes literatures in Welsh, English, Spanish and French. Research and figures on diversity in texts in Welsh educational settings, and Welsh-language texts for children, are hard to come by, at least in English. Even Literature Wales' website points to CLPE's UK-wide *Reflecting Realities*, a series of reports from 2017 onwards. This paucity means that our article uses a handful of studies from England, or England and Wales, to offer points of comparison. We were, however, able to identify and draw on some reports specifically by Welsh Government and charities in Wales: those by Siwan Rosser (2017), Charlotte Williams (2021), and Diversity and Anti-Racism Professional Learning (DARPL, 2023) were particularly useful. However, none focuses specifically on literatures in education. Existing work tends to offer state of the nation accounts about literature, language acquisition and use, or cultural policy, rather than demonstrate what is happening in schools – with the exception of DARPL's short case studies from individual schools, teachers and senior leaders.

## 2. Methods

Our project received ethical approval from the School of Educational Sciences, Bangor University. In March 2022, we presented our project

design to the Collaborative Research Network: Bilingual Education & Welsh Language. It provided a way of pre-piloting the survey questions, although these had previously been validated in the two recent studies from which they were adapted, chosen because they were the most recent and comprehensive existing audits of teaching literature in the UK (Elliott and Olive, 2019 and 2023, Kneen et al., Kneen). Using JISC, we distributed an anonymous online survey, in Welsh and English, to 164 headteachers in state comprehensive secondary schools across Wales via the regional school consortia.<sup>3</sup> We asked headteachers to disseminate the survey to relevant educators between March and June 2022. Participants could respond in either Welsh or English. The survey collected simple statistics and qualitative data about participants' demographics, the authors and texts taught at the three stages of secondary school (KS3, GCSE and A-level), how and why texts are chosen, teachers' views on the importance, purposes, and visions of teaching literatures, before and after the pandemic.

The qualitative data was thematically analysed in an iterative process drawing on a review of the existing research and Olive's previous research (Elliott and Olive, 2019 and 2023). Davies worked on the qualitative data in Welsh and Olive on the qualitative data in English. Davies' bilingualism meant that she was also able to code some data in English and then compare it with Olive's coding of the same data. Ensuing discussion maximised consistency in their coding across the two linguistically-different data sets. Maelor fed into the final draft of the Welsh Government report. In particular, she advised on issues relating to Welsh language and literature, her area of expertise.

Limitations in the representativeness of our sample, mainly geographically, represent the challenge of attracting participants from a profession still recovering from the demands of adapting to and experiencing the global pandemic, in its immediate aftermath. The teachers who completed our survey may be more than usually resilient and motivated. Even so, they may have experienced fatigue in later sections of the survey. This seemed to impact answers around GCSE poetry particularly adversely. In line with much mixed methods educational research, we had to pragmatically prioritise transferability over generalisability. The comparability of our findings with similar studies offers some reassurance. Our methods are detailed at greater length in our report, which also contains the survey instrument used (Olive et al.).

Future studies could consider buying out teacher time so they can dedicate work time to the survey and/or consider ways to capture what is

taught with greater ease e.g. allowing teachers to submit documents and images of the texts they teach, rather than them typing these details out. This could also improve accuracy since there were occasional errors in the names of authors and texts teachers submitted. Further avenues for exploration include looking at the diversity of characters' gender and ethnicity as well as disability, class and sexuality (CLPE focuses exclusively on characters' ethnicities). This study could be replicated now that the new Curriculum for Wales and mandatory teaching of BAME histories and experiences are more bedded into schools than when our data was collected. Such research could also seek to explore the impact of changes by exam boards to qualifications and set-texts.

### *3. Participant demographics*

The survey was completed by 47 educators from 30 secondary schools in Wales. The participants worked in 19 postcodes (out of 243). South Wales was most well represented in the responses, followed by North Wales. There were no responses from schools in Ceredigion, Powys, Pembrokeshire, Wrexham, Denbighshire and Flintshire. Clustering of two or more teachers working in the same school, likely on different literature-related subjects, occurred across 75 per cent of participating schools. In terms of school size, most participants worked in more populous schools, with very few based in medium or small ones. Our results, therefore, do not represent smaller schools as well as they do larger ones.

**Table 1: Schools represented in the study by size**

<i>School size</i>	<i>Number of participating teachers</i>
<b>1,101 pupils or more</b>	19
<b>601–1,100 pupil</b>	24
<b>600 pupils or fewer</b>	3
<b>301–600 pupils</b>	0
<b>101–300 pupils</b>	1
<b>100 or fewer pupils</b>	0

**Table 2: Subjects taught by year group**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Drama</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Other</i>
<b>Year 7</b>	18	10	7	4	3	2
<b>Year 8</b>	18	10	6	3	2	4
<b>Year 9</b>	18	9	7	4	2	1
<b>Year 10</b>	19	12	6	3	2	7
<b>Year 11</b>	18	13	6	3	2	6
<b>Year 12</b>	10	7	3	2	1	6
<b>Year 13</b>	10	7	3	1	1	4

Roughly half of the participants responded in Welsh (51 per cent, n.24) and half in English (49 per cent, n.23). A comparable number were from Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. There were fewer respondents from other language type schools: seven came from bilingual type B schools, six from bilingual type A schools, and two from Dual Stream. No participants identified themselves as working in Bilingual type C, English with significant Welsh, or transitional schools.<sup>4</sup> The participants tended to be Heads of Department (n.26). Perhaps, as subject leaders, they were seen within the school to be the most appropriate respondents. This was followed by ‘holders of subject responsibility below Head of Department’ (n.13), post NQT classroom teacher (n.7) and one NQT. No participants were currently in teacher training. The participants represent educators spanning all lengths of service in the teaching profession, from one to 33 years, although fewer responses came from those at the very start of, or exceeding four decades in, their profession. Three participants had taught for over 30 years; 11 for 21–30 years; 19 for 11–20 years; 14 for fewer than 10 years. Most participants taught Welsh, English and drama; some taught Spanish and French; a few additionally taught subjects such as media and film studies (see Table 2). We also asked about German, which no participants taught.

#### *4. Authors and texts taught*

In answer to a series of questions along the lines of ‘if you teach in KS3 (up to age 14)/GCSE/A-level, what literary texts do you teach?’, the



participants answered as follows for prose, poetry, and plays. The results for each stage and mode are presented, with Welsh- and English-language authors and texts separated. Within each table, authors and texts are listed by descending number of mentions. The date of first publication (sometimes approximate for older works) is given alongside titles to demonstrate the range of historical periods represented. Characteristic findings about each mode are summarised at the end of the relevant sections. A greater number of English-language texts were reported across stages and modes than Welsh-language texts. This may be skewed by the tendency, in relation to poetry, to name an anthology rather than individual texts or poets, the relative prominence and popularity of these subjects, and the availability of works in each language.

#### *4.1 Prose*

##### **4.1.1 Prose at KS3/up to age 14**

**Table 3: Welsh-language prose authors taught at KS3/up to age 14**

<i>Welsh-language author</i>	<i>Number of participant mentions</i>
Bethan Gwanas	9
Manon Steffan Ros	6
Tudur Dylan Jones	5
Eirug Wyn	3
T. Llew Jones	3
Gareth F. Williams	2
Gwyneth Glyn	2
Meinir Wyn Edwards	1
Pegi Talfryn	1
Rhiannon Ifans	1
Alan Gibbons	1
Nigel Hinton	1
Caryl Lewis	1
Bedwyr Rees	1

**Table 4: English-language prose authors taught at KS3/up to age 14**

<i>English-language author</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Louis Sachar	6
Michael Morpurgo	5
Darren Shan (aka Shaugnessy)	2
Charles Dickens	2
Robert Swindells	2
H. G. Wells	2
J. K. Rowling	1
Jewell Parker Knowles [sic Jewell Parker Rhodes?]	1
Elizabeth Laird	1
Charlotte Perkins Gilman	1
Suzanne Collins	1
S. E. Collins [sic S. A. Collins?]	1
Susan Hill	1
Andy Mulligan	1
Neil Gaiman	1
J. R. R. Tolkien	1
Alan Garner	1
Rudyard Kipling	1
Horace Walpole	1
Roald Dahl	1
David Almond	1
John Boyne	1
William Golding	1
Bram Stoker	1
Arthur Conan Doyle	1
Bill Bryson	1
John Steinbeck	1
George Orwell	1
'Adapted from stories'	1
'Various'	1
'None'	1

This question was answered by 28 out of 47 (60 per cent of) participants. The number of authors ranged from ‘none’ (perhaps the response of teachers of international languages) to nine, although most participants listed one to three authors. 12 women authors were named, out of 43 overall: less than a third. Out of the Welsh-language authors, seven are women: just under half. Out of the English-language authors, five are women: less than a fifth. One English-language author is Black – Jewell Parker Rhodes (partly mis-identified by the respondent). The other writers, and all Welsh ones, are White. Morpurgo’s and Sachar’s extreme popularity, and to a lesser extent that of Boyne, Dahl, Almond, Orwell, Dickens, Rowling, Steinbeck, Collins and Swindells, was noted in a similar survey by Kneen (2).

**Table 5: Welsh-language prose titles taught at KS3/up to age 14**

<i>Welsh-language titles</i>	<i>Date of publication</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
<i>Fi A Joe Allen</i>	2018	5
<i>Y Bancsi Bach</i>	2013	5
<i>Y Gelyn ar y Trên</i>	2014	3
<i>Llinyn Trons</i>	2000	3
<i>Al</i>	2014	2
<i>Anji</i>	2014	2
<i>Mewn Limbo</i>	2014	2
<i>Sgôr</i>	2002	2
<i>Pen Dafad</i>	2005	2
<i>Ceri Grafu</i>	2003	2
<i>United!</i> <sup>5</sup>	1996	2
<i>Y Mabinogion / Chwedlau'r Mabinogi</i>	n.d./adapted 1980; 1993	2
<i>Y Goeden sy'n Gwybod</i> <sup>6</sup>	n.d.	1
<i>Fi ac Aaron Ramsey</i>	2021	1
<i>Mis yr Yd</i>	2021	1
<i>Powdr Rhech</i>	2011	1
<i>Iawn Boi</i>	2003	1

<i>Welsh-language titles</i>	<i>Date of publication</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
<i>Isio Bet?</i>	2005	1
<i>Chwedl Cantre'r Gwaelod</i>	n.d.	1
<i>Llofrudd y Camera</i>	2012	1
<i>Stori Eli Brown</i>	n.d.	1
<i>Nes ei gael yn Euog</i>	2012	1
<i>Ar fy mhen fy hun</i>	n.d.	1
<i>Am Ddiwrnod</i>	2018	1
<i>Gangsters yn y Glaw</i>	2021	1
<i>Stryd y Bont</i>	2018	1

**Table 6: English-language prose titles taught at KS3/up to age 14**

<i>English-language titles</i>	<i>Date of publication</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
<i>Holes</i>	1998	6
<i>Private Peaceful</i>	2003	4
<i>Cirque du Freak</i>	2009	2
<i>Stone Cold</i>	1993	2
<i>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</i>	2006	2
<i>The Red Room</i>	1894	2
<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i>	1997	2
<i>Ghost Boys</i>	2011	1
<i>Trash</i>	2010	1
<i>Running Wild</i>	2009	1
<i>The Hunger Games</i>	2008	1
<i>The Garbage King</i>	2003	1
<i>Skellig</i>	1998	1
<i>Notes from a Small Island</i>	1995	1
<i>Boy</i>	1984	1
<i>The Woman in Black</i>	1983	1

<i>English-language titles</i>	<i>Date of publication</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
<i>War Horse</i>	1982	1
<i>The Outsiders</i>	1967	1
<i>The Weird Stone of Brisingamen</i>	1960	1
<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	1954	1
<i>The Hobbit</i>	1937	1
<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	1937	1
<i>The War of the Worlds</i>	1897	1
<i>Dracula</i>	1897	1
<i>The Jungle Book</i>	1894	1
<i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>	1892	1
<i>The Speckled Band</i>	1892	1
<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	1843	1
<i>Oliver Twist</i>	1838	1
<i>The Castle of Otranto</i>	1764	1
<i>Three Little Pigs</i>	n.d.	1
<i>Celtic Myths and Legends</i>	n.d.	1
<i>Animal Farm</i>	1945	1

This question was answered by 29 out of 47 (62 per cent of) participants. They named between one and ten titles each, although most participants named one to three. Most were short novels. The English-language texts combine a mixture of ‘classics’, modern popular novels, and those specifically for children or young adults. Among the Welsh-language titles, almost all texts are from the twenty-first century and known predominantly as children’s or young adult literature. The texts named are almost exclusively fiction, although travel writing also featured (Bill Bryson’s *Notes from a Small Island*). This question in the survey yielded the most titles returned across both languages. This could speak to the popularity of teaching prose relative to poetry and plays (Bleiman 154); the autonomy of teachers to choose wide-ranging texts at this level (Kneen et al., Kneen); the number of teachers who taught at this level (see Table 2); that teachers were unfatigued by the survey at this point; or a combination of these factors.

## 4.1.2 Prose at GCSE

**Table 7: Welsh-language prose titles taught at GCSE**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Bethan Gwanas	<i>Llinyn Trons</i>	2000	8
Manon Steffan Ros	<i>Llyfr Glas Nebo</i>	2018	4
Geraint Vaughan Jones	<i>Yn Y Gwaed</i>	1990	4
Mererid Hopwood	<i>O Ran</i>	2009	3
Eirug Wyn	<i>I Ble'r Aeth Haul y Bore?</i>	2009	2
Eleri Llywelyn	<i>Glanhau Ffenestri</i>	2009	1
Mihangel Morgan	<i>Pe Bai'r Wyddfa i Gyd yn Gaws</i>	2009	1
Emyr Llywelyn <sup>8</sup>	Short story collection	n.d.	1
Alun Jones	<i>Ac Yna Clywodd Swn y Môr</i>	1979	1

**Table 8: English-language prose titles taught at GCSE**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
John Steinbeck	<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	1937	12
Robert Cormier	<i>Heroes</i>	1998	7
Harper Lee	<i>To Kill A Mockingbird</i>	1960	4
Charles Dickens	<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	1843	4
William Golding	<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	1954	1

26 out of 47 (55 per cent of) participants responded to this question. The number of authors and titles named ranged from 'none' to three, although most participants listed two. There was a dramatic drop in the number of unique mentions of authors and titles at GCSE,

compared to KS3. Rather, responses clustered around a handful of titles and authors – largely an effect of the limited texts prescribed by exam boards noted throughout this article. The unrivalled popularity of *Of Mice and Men* tallies with Kneen, who noted that it was the most frequently read text in their survey responses, albeit at a lower level: KS3 (2).<sup>9</sup> Lee, Dickens and Golding were also popular with their respondents, while Cormier’s young adult fiction was not mentioned by them (2). Where there was a greater variety of English-language authors and texts at KS3, here there is a greater variety in Welsh-language authors and texts.

Five women writers were mentioned overall: just over one-third. Around four Welsh women writers and a single English-language female author were named.<sup>10</sup> All authors are White. All texts are fiction, reflecting the examination’s focus on it over other forms of prose. With one exception, the Welsh-language texts were published in the 1990s or twenty-first century. The English-language texts tended to be older, spread from the mid-nineteenth century to late twentieth-century: none were published this millennium. One Welsh-language text (*Llinyn Trons*, featured in the KS3 list) is targeted at readers aged 11–14. One (*Yn Y Gwaed*) is described as adult literature. This range could relate to the varying ability of learners in Welsh, across first language, second language and bilingual learners.

#### 4.1.3 Prose at A-level

**Table 9: Welsh-language prose titles taught at A-level**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Caryl Lewis	<i>Martha, Jac a Sianco</i>	2007	5
Dafydd and Rhianon Ifans or Gwyn Thomas	<i>Chwedl Branwen</i>	c.14c; updated 1980 or 1996	3
Manon Steffan Ros	<i>Blasu</i>	2012	2
Caradog Pritchard	<i>Un Nos Ola Leuad</i>	1961	1

**Table 10: English-language prose titles taught at A-level**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Charlotte Bronte	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	1847	5
Colm Toibin	<i>Brooklyn</i>	2009	1
Ian McEwan	<i>Atonement</i>	2001	1
Margaret Atwood	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	1985	1
Jamaica Kincaid	<i>Annie John</i>	1985	1
Alice Walker	<i>The Colour Purple</i>	1982	1
Truman Capote	<i>In Cold Blood</i>	1966	1
Jean Rhys	<i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>	1966	1
E. M. Forster	<i>A Room with a View</i>	1908	1
Jane Austen	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	1811	1

Of 47 participants, 17 (36 per cent) said that they taught prose at this level. The number of authors and texts named by individual teachers ranged from one to three. Compared to previous stages, there was an increase in the proportion of women authors, making up roughly half of authors overall and in each language, and the number of Black authors (n.2). The latter (Kincaid and Walker) only appear in English-language texts: all Welsh-language texts are by White authors. With texts from medieval, twentieth-century, and twenty-first-century Wales, the Welsh-language texts featured here are less recent, historically wider-ranging, than those listed at previous stages. Most of the English-language texts are from the twentieth-century, with a few from the nineteenth- and twentieth-century. These texts represented a slightly wider and more current time span than at GCSE. Again, most texts were fiction, except for *In Cold Blood* (a non-fiction work).

Other overall trends in prose texts chosen include some dominance of particular genres at lower stages: football-themed books in Welsh-language responses and speculative fiction in English-language ones. This is suggestive of an attempt by teachers to engage boys, who have in recent British history been deemed reluctant readers – through the use of genres typically associated with them (Sellers; Gorard, Rees and Salisbury; although Loh, Sun and Majid question the extent of gendered differences in genres or reading material preferences 29).



4.2 Poetry

4.2.1 Poetry at KS3/up to age 14

**Table 11: Welsh-language poems at KS3/up to age 14**

<i>Poet</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Bryan Martin Davies	'Glas'	6
Iwan Llwyd	'Tai Unnos'	5
J. J. Williams <sup>11</sup>	'Cantre'r Gwaelod'	2
Gerallt Lloyd Owen	'Etifeddiaeth'	2
Mererid Hopwood	'Sbectol Hud'	2
R. Williams Parry	'Englynion Coffa Hedd Wyn'	2
Menna Elfyn	'Er Cof am Kelly'	2
[no author identified]	'Ar fy mhen fy hun'	2
[no author identified]	'Cwestiynau'	1
T. H. Parry Williams	'Hon'	1
Gwyneth Glyn	'Y Gerdd Werdd'	1
[no author identified]	'Y Ffon Symudol'	1
[no author identified]	'Storm ar y môr'	1
Gerallt Lloyd Owen	'Cilmeri'	1
[no author identified]	'Y Caets'	1
[no author identified]	'Fy Mag Ysgol'	1
Grahame Davies	'Lerpwl'	1
Hedd Wyn	'Yr Arwr'	1

**Table 12: English-language poems at KS3/up to age 14**

<i>Poet</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Wilfred Owen	'Dulce Et Decorum Est'	3
William Blake	'The Tyger'	1
Paul Henry	'Daylight Robbery'	1
Walter de la Mare	'The Listeners'	1
Jessie Pope	'Who's for the Game?'	1

<i>Poet</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Roger McGough	'The Identification'	1
Dylan Thomas	'Hunchback in the Park'	1
Zulfikar Ghose	'Decomposition'	1
Rupert Loydell	'The Tramp'	1
Gary Turk	'Look up'	1
Alfred Tennyson	'The Kraken'	1
Edwin Morgan	'Hyena'	1

22 out of 47 (47 per cent of) participants shared details of poets and poems they teach at KS3. Most detailed individual poets and poems, but some described teaching 'WW1 poetry', 'Various', 'Selected poems', or 'a variety dependent on the class ability'. 17 male poets are mentioned compared to 4 women: just under a fifth. Three of these work in the Welsh language, one in English. With the exception of Zulfikar Ghose, a Pakistani-American writer, all poets mentioned are White. Our findings differ from those of Elliott et al., who found that 'poetry is the most common way for secondary students to encounter a Black, Asian or other minority ethnic author' in England (4). The Welsh-language poets all wrote in the twentieth century or twenty-first century. Similarly, two thirds of the English-language poets predominantly published in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the rest were active in the nineteenth-century, offering a somewhat wider historical range. The poems by Blake, Owen and Pope were similarly popular with Kneen's participants, although there were also many differences in the poets and poems named by our respective participants (4). Kneen's observation that there is greater teacher autonomy at this stage, than later, is attested to by the large number of titles mentioned across both languages.

#### **4.2.2 Poetry at GCSE**

Teachers at GCSE and A-level tended to invoke anthologies instead of listing individual poems taught, perhaps because they are easier to recall or teachers experienced fatigue at this stage of the survey. Only 13 out of 47 (28 per cent of) participants answered the question about poets taught at GCSE level. In terms of English-language poetry, one participant named Sheenagh Pugh's 'Toast' and Dannie Abse's 'Not Adlestrop'. In

terms of Welsh-language poetry, one participant named the war poet Hedd Wyn and his work 'Yr Arwr'. All were published in the last century and appear in *Poetry 1900–2000*, the Library of Wales anthology of poetry edited by Meic Stephens. Some teachers articulated the considerable role assessment plays in their choice of poetry at this level, saying they teach a 'Range from WJEC lists – Welsh authors/past papers as unseen practice'; 'A selection of poems based on the WJEC list from Welsh poets writing in English'; 'Varied annually according to selection set by WJEC'; and 'Relevant poems for controlled assessment'. Most participants said they taught 'Various, selected poems', 'Various – from WJEC poetry anthology', 'Varied, a selection of poems from the Welsh Anthology', 'Various, selection from Poetry 1900–2000 Library of Wales'; and 'Welsh Poetry Anthology (1900–2000)'. It is, therefore, impossible to meaningfully discuss diversity in the teaching of poetry at GCSE. The conclusion suggests ways to redress this in future research.

#### 4.2.3 Poetry at A-level

**Table 13: Welsh-language poems at A-level**

<i>Poet</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Grahame Davies	'Lerpwl', 5 poems	2
Tudur Dylan Jones	'Newyddion'	1
Myrddin ap Dafydd	'Twyll'	1
Iwan Rhys	'Caerdydd'	1
Gerallt Lloyd Owen	'Etifeddiaeth'	1
Iwan Llwyd	'Tai Unnos'	1

**Table 14: English-language poems at A-level**

<i>Poet</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Philip Larkin	'The Whitsun Weddings', Collected poems	2
Carol Ann Duffy	'Mean Time', Collected poems	2
Geoffrey Chaucer	'The Merchant's Prologue and Tale'	2

<i>Poet</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Owen Sheers	Skirrid Hill	1
Seamus Heaney	'Field Work'	1
John Donne	Selected poems	1
John Keats	Selected poems from anthology	1
William Blake	Selected poems from anthology	1

Only 15 out of 47 (32 per cent of) participants answered this question in detail. The majority referred to 'various poets' or poetry specifications generally e.g. 'A range of [sic] pre1900 poems' or the Higher Tier specification (units 3, 5, and 6). One stated that 'learners have selected a range of works independently as part of the synoptic element for the A-Level Welsh course', suggesting a degree of pupil choice. The poems span a broad historical period, from around 1400 onwards. The Welsh-language poems are all written by men. One English-language poet is a woman. All are White. However, it is difficult to be certain of the demographics of the poets taught given the number of responses that pointed to collections.

### *4.3 Playwrights and plays*

#### **4.3.1 Playwrights and plays - KS3/up to age 14**

**Table 15: Welsh-language plays at KS3/up to age 14**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Caryl Lewis	<i>Arkies</i>	2006	4
Caryl Lewis	<i>Yr Ysbryd</i>	2006	2
Saunders Lewis <sup>12</sup>	<i>Blodeuwedd</i> (extract of)	1947	2
Tom Lycos and Stefo Nantsou (trans. Arad Goch theatre company)	<i>Taftiad Carreg</i>	1996 (2001)	1
Sera Moore Williams	<i>Mwnci ar Dan</i>	2013	1
Samuel Beckett (trans. Saunders Lewis)	<i>Wrth Aros Godot</i>	1953 (1970)	1

**Table 16: English-language plays at KS3/up to age 14**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
William Shakespeare	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	1594–6	4
William Shakespeare	<i>Macbeth</i>	c.1604–7	4
Willy Russell	<i>Blood Brothers</i>	1985	4
Willy Russell	<i>Our Day Out</i>	1977	2
William Shakespeare	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	1594–6	1
William Shakespeare	<i>Julius Caesar</i>	1599	1
William Shakespeare	<i>King Lear</i>	1604–6	1
Mark Ravenhill	<i>Citizenship</i>	2007	1
Dennis Kelly	<i>DNA</i>	2007	1
John Godber	<i>Teachers</i>	1984	1
J. M. Barrie	<i>Peter Pan</i>	1904	1

The question was responded to by 9 out of 24 (38 per cent of) participants, fewer than those who answered on prose and poetry at KS3. This could mean that less drama is taught at this stage, that other colleagues were responsible for the teaching of plays, or that respondents became fatigued during the survey. Participants mentioned between one and four texts each. Out of the playwrights named, only two are women (less than a fifth), both of whom wrote Welsh-language plays. None of the English-language plays were written by women. All are White. The Welsh-language texts tended to be more recent and more targeted at a teenage audience than the English-language ones. *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Julius Caesar*, *Our Day Out* and *Blood Brothers* were all similarly popular plays with Kneen's respondents at this level (5). A notable difference between our results and previous studies is the absence of J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Kneen et al., Kneen, Elliott and Olive, 2019).

The former is explained by its popularity at GCSE (see table 17). The latter is interesting given the play's interpretation and popularity in recent decades as a critique of colonialism, something that might speak to Welsh history.

### 4.3.2 Plays at GCSE

**Table 17: Welsh-language plays at GCSE**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Willy Russell (trans. by Manon Eames)	<i>Shirley Valentine</i>	1988; trans. 1996	5
Gwyneth Lewis	<i>Y Streic a Fi</i>	2015	4
Saunders Lewis	<i>Blodeuwedd</i> (extract of)	1947	3
Jim Cartwright <sup>13</sup>	<i>Dau</i>	1989	1
Sera Moore Williams	<i>Mwnci ar Dan</i>	2013	1
Alan Llwyd	<i>Hedd Wyn</i>	1992 (film)	1
Stephen Sondheim (trans. Rhian Staples)	<i>Sweeney Todd</i>	1979; trans. 2013	1

**Table 18: English-language plays at GCSE**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
J. B. Priestley	<i>An Inspector Calls</i>	1945	9
William Shakespeare	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	1594–6	8
William Shakespeare	<i>Macbeth</i>	1604–7	4
Willy Russell	<i>Blood Brothers</i>	1985	3
Manon Steffan Ros	<i>Two Faces</i>	2016	2
Diene Petterle, Neil Monaghan, Christopher Heimann	<i>100</i>	2003	2
Arthur Miller	<i>A View from the Bridge</i>	1955	2

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Samuel Beckett	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	1953	1
William Shakespeare	'various'	n.d.	1
Owen Sheers [sic. Tim Price]	<i>The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning</i>	2012	1

This question was answered by 21 out of 47 (45 per cent of) participants. In addition to the tabulated answers, one respondent named the Welsh free-to-air broadcaster S4C, presumably having taught some of their programming. Six women featured here – two as translators of texts into Welsh – representing just under half of all playwrights and Welsh playwrights. Women playwrights represented only a fifth of the English-language ones. All are White. The Welsh-language texts were all written in the last hundred years, the English-language ones additionally included Shakespeare's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* peaked in popularity at GCSE, comparable with Elliott and Olive's and Kneen's surveys.

#### 4.3.3 Plays at A-level

**Table 19: Welsh-language plays at A-level**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Saunders Lewis	<i>Siwan</i>	1956	5
Gwenlyn Parry	<i>Y Tŵr</i>	1978	2
Alan Llwyd	<i>Hedd Wyn</i>	1992	2
Owen Sheers [sic. Tim Price]	<i>Radicleiddio Bradley Manley [sic. Manning]</i>	2012	1
Betsan Llwyd	<i>Un Nos Ola Leuad</i>	2011 (novel 1961)	1
Stephen Sondheim (trans. Rhian Staples)	<i>Sweeney Todd</i>	1979; trans. 2013	1
Samuel Beckett	<i>Wrth Aros Godot</i>	1953	1
Jim Cartwright	(No title given)	n.d.	1
Sera Moore Williams <sup>14</sup>	<i>Crash</i>	2009	2?

**Table 20: English-language plays at A-level**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Tim Price	<i>The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning</i>	2012	3
Tennessee Williams	<i>Streetcar Named Desire</i>	1947	3
William Shakespeare	<i>King Lear</i>	1604–6	2
William Shakespeare	<i>Hamlet</i>	1600–1	2
Caryl Churchill	<i>Top Girls</i>	1982	2
William Shakespeare	<i>Tempest</i>	1611	1
Ariel Dorfman	<i>Death and the Maiden</i>	1990	1
Marsha Norman	<i>Night, Mother</i>	1982	1
Peter Shaffer	<i>Amadeus</i>	1979	1
Peter Nichols	<i>A Day in the Death of Joe Egg</i>	1967	1
Arthur Miller	<i>A View from the Bridge</i>	1955	1
Sophocles	<i>Antigone</i>	441 B.C.	1
Sophocles [sic. Euripides]	<i>Medea</i>	431 B.C.	1
Shelagh Delaney [sic. Stephenson]	<i>The Memory of Water</i>	1996	1
Yasmina Reza (trans. from French by Christopher Hampton)	<i>Art</i>	1994 (1996)	1

This question was answered by 22 out of 47 (47 per cent of) participants. Most listed one writer, however one participant named seven plays by various English-language authors and is largely responsible for the length of the list. Another stated ‘[l]earners have chosen a range of works independently as part of the synoptic element for the A-level Welsh course’, again expressing some degree of pupil choice. The relative popularity of teaching *Hamlet* and *King Lear* at this



level aligns with UK-wide findings (Elliott and Olive, 2019). Seven women are named compared to 14 men, representing roughly one third of playwrights overall and in each language. Two are adaptors/translators of works written by men (Betsan Llwyd and Rhian Staples). All are White, possibly excepting Yasmina Reza who has Iranian heritage.<sup>15</sup> The Welsh-language plays date from the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, the English-language ones additionally include those from Ancient Greece and early modern England. While the English-language plays taught are comparable with other UK surveys, the stages at which they are tackled sometimes differ in Wales (variously earlier and later).

#### 4.4 International languages

Teachers of international languages were asked to complete the same survey as their colleagues in Welsh, English and drama. They had evidently begun to respond to changes requiring the inclusion of literature in these subjects, but there was only a smattering of evidence, exclusively in relation to French and Spanish. This reflects that using literature is an area still in development, especially with KS3 and GCSE students. The texts mentioned included Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* and René Goscinny's *Asterix*. At KS3, participants reported teaching these texts as extracts. There was no mention of texts in the study of international languages at GCSE level. At A-level, prose works included Faïza Guène's *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* (French, 2004) and Luis de Castresana's *El otro árbol de Guernica* (Spanish, 1969). Federico Garcia Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (Spanish, 1945) was the only play mentioned. These responses show one French-Algerian woman published in the twenty-first century being taught in addition to the older texts by White men, although the responses were too few to meaningfully comment on gender or ethnic diversity.

#### 4.5 How texts are chosen

In response to the question, 'who chooses which literary texts get taught?', the most popular answer was 'myself', followed by 'Head of Department', 'departmental vote' and 'other'. Of the participants who selected 'other', they mentioned the following processes:

- Everyone gets a chance to suggest ideas;
- The Head of Department along with the rest of the departmental staff;
- Pupils normally choose the two titles taught at A-Level out of the WJEC list;
- The GCSE and A-Level specifications and exam boards;
- Leader of Learning at KS3;
- ‘Historical choices by Head of Department and line manager/play to strengths at A-Level’.

Decisions were usually represented as individual: predominantly made by the classroom teacher, the Head of Department, or Leader of Learning. Collaborative decision-making was somewhat rarer, mostly identified as undertaken by departments or exam boards. The influence of assessment was highlighted by the teacher who mentioned ‘play[ing] to strengths at A-level’ as a factor in the selection of texts. That teaching to the test is a factor in why texts are chosen is explored in more detail below.

#### *4.6 Why texts are chosen*

This section considers what teachers said about the qualities sought in literary texts at each level. 40 (85 per cent of) participants answered the question ‘What qualities do you look for in literary texts to teach to students in KS3/up to age 14?’, 35 (74 per cent) in relation to GCSE, 27 (57 per cent) in relation to A-level. This could reflect the lower numbers of teachers who taught at this level (see Table 2) as well as participant fatigue. Several teachers pasted the same answer from their response at KS3 to answer the equivalent questions for GCSE and A-level. Perhaps the wording of this question was off-putting to participants since a subsequent related question – ‘Are there other factors that affect your choice of texts?’ – received a 100 per cent response rate. Because of the similarity in responses across the three levels of secondary school, these results are discussed together, with any differences between levels highlighted. Four qualities recurrently mentioned were: themes; interest of, or appeal for, learners; appropriateness; and language. Some of these qualities are interlinked: for example, multiple answers ran along the lines of seeking texts with ‘appropriate themes that will engage learners’.

It is difficult to unpack from these responses what an ‘appropriate theme’ constitutes. One response described ‘interesting, light texts that didn’t discuss difficult themes such as death and sickness’ as appropriate:

they may have been influenced by the immediate pandemic context in this answer. Some mentioned appropriateness in terms of texts' perceived fit with themes in the curriculum. One response mentioned looking for texts that can hit several notes in terms of curriculum requirements. Another emphasised that texts should reflect a variety of themes. Getting a good fit between the texts and pupils' interests was frequently in teachers' minds. A few responses mentioned the appropriateness or accessibility of language as important, although what that meant differed in interpretation: some said that they looked for language that was not too challenging, simple enough for learners to understand the texts independently. In contrast, several mentioned 'challenge' as a quality they sought in selecting texts, particularly in the higher levels of secondary school. Some noted that writing style, 'stylistic choices', and a variety of styles were important. Two participants mentioned making use of pupil votes and 'pupil voice' to choose texts, including 'pupil reflection on texts they have been taught to support [staff] future planning'. Previous research highlights teachers' positive views of students playing a role in the choice of texts (Goodwyn). Estyn, however, sounds a note of caution about the appropriateness of this, warning that 'pupils have limited knowledge of the wealth of reading material available', though it may be this relates more to independent reading choices than to teachers allowing pupils to choose from a selection of possible set texts (23). At higher levels only, participants' concern for the fit between pupils and text began to be matched by a concern with staff 'expertise', 'knowledge', 'personal interest' and 'preference'.

Qualities such as 'humour'; 'engaging narrative' or plot, characterisation; and contemporariness, as well as the potential for students to identify or empathise with the characters and topics were frequently invoked. Sometimes responses pertained to pupils' gender: one teacher revealed that they taught *Llinyn Trons* as a class novel to the middle set in Year 11 because they perceived it as a novel that appeals to boys – again invoking the idea of boys as reluctant readers. Responses relating to the desire to study local and seasonal authors and texts resonate with this aim. One answer praised the addition of *Llyfr Glas Nebo* to the Welsh GCSE specification because of its perceived relevance for pupils. Several responses related specifically to Welsh geographic and linguistic identities. Some were concerned to ensure the Welsh dialect of their pupils was reflected in the Welsh-language texts they studied: one specified that among Welsh-language texts plenty of south Walian texts

were available but opined that these were challenging for north Walian pupils, particularly those who did not speak Welsh at home. Another wrote of being mindful of ‘the difficulty in the level of Welsh language used’. One sought texts on modern Welsh subjects: texts that would expand pupils’ knowledge about Wales. Another wanted to engage learners’ interest in continuing to read Welsh novels (identified as a problem by Rosser).

Alternatively, some responses demonstrated that participants looked for a range of experiences and backgrounds to expand the horizons of students, suggesting that relatability alone was not seen as sufficiently fulfilling objectives for studying literature, especially at higher levels. One wrote that for A-level they sought ‘texts which are thought-provoking and which don’t necessarily reflect their [the students’] life experience so far, to introduce them to new ideas’. Another chose texts they felt would ‘push the understanding of pupils’ of the subject matter and the world in which the text is set. An international language teacher wrote of their ‘desire to provide a cultural feel for the world/country where the assessed language is spoken’ through their choice of texts. As we went into writing up our data, Estyn (23) and DARPL praised schools that strike a balance between nuanced representations of local and international, familiar and unfamiliar experience, in their choice of texts, reflecting the problematisation of *cynefin* and related concepts in Curriculum for Wales (also seen in the BERA 2023 conference session on ‘Cynefin, Curriculum and Wales through multiple lenses’, chaired by Gary Beauchamp).

At GCSE and A-level, more participants foregrounded ‘WJEC’, ‘exam boards’ and ‘exam specifications’ in answers, often to highlight the constraints on their choice of texts: ‘It would be nice to have more flexibility in choosing texts or vary texts from year to year rather than be confined to a certain choice by exam boards’ one wrote. There was also a marked concern about the length of texts here – specifically in relation to the feasibility of studying them within the limited classroom time available. Two teachers wrote about not having ‘time to read the texts fully’ ‘at an apt depth, even with the highest sets’ as an influence. Meanwhile, teachers’ stress on a strong and clear plot as an important quality subsided at this level, suggesting that it is associated with lower stages. Instead, the relationship between the choice of texts and students’ ‘critical’ engagement, ‘critical viewpoint’, ‘opportunities for individual research’ and to consider the ‘context’ and [‘social’] ‘background’ to a

text emerged as a factor. A few factors at A-Level demonstrated the influence of the high-stakes assessments involved. Two responses stated that staging possibilities were an important incentive: this may relate to the requirement in the A-level Drama written exam to discuss the staging of set texts. Two further responses stated that texts that could spark discussion for the oral assessment were desirable. Two more noted the ability to draw comparisons with the set texts as a deciding factor. One mentioned the ‘potential for students to achieve’ as a criterion – this echoes the teacher in Smith’s study in England who spoke about primarily basing choices on which authors students ‘are gonna get marks for’ (232). These responses raise the spectre of ‘teaching to the test’. Beyond this, one answer emphasised the ‘usefulness’ of the texts, explaining that equipping students for the workplace and helping students realise the value of literature was a priority in their school.

On a practical note, participants identified the availability of affordable supporting resources as a factor in selecting texts. However, it was striking that the availability of class sets of the texts themselves in the store cupboard was not foregrounded as a factor – something anecdotally and in previous research held to be a key factor (Elliott, Elliott et al., Smith 251). Perhaps this absence is explained by teachers completing the survey in the wake of increased funding for texts offered to schools by Welsh Government during the pandemic, something teachers reported utilising and much appreciating. To summarise teachers’ views on the qualities or factors that influenced their choice of texts across all three levels, consideration for pupils dominated: the potential for them to have positive experiences of the texts (e.g. be engaged, challenged, interested), be able to access the texts physically, intellectually and emotionally. A handful of perceived innate qualities, such as themes and language, informed teachers’ choices, but were more influential at lower levels of secondary education. Conversely and predictably, exam boards figured more heavily in teachers’ explanations of what they choose at GCSE and A-level.

### *5. Discussion*

In line with previous studies by Elliott et al. (England), Kneen et al. (Southwest England and Wales), and Hartman (United States), we found that women writers are less represented than their male counterparts, at

various stages and in various modes. Novels by women were more prevalently taught across the stages and languages than plays and poems, the mode in which women writers were least well represented. This perhaps represents the historical gendering of the medium as one in which women have popularly and critically succeeded. More women authors, and a higher proportion of them, were taught among the Welsh-language texts: often representing half the writers in each mode and stage, in comparison with their English-language counterparts representing a fifth. The three most mentioned Welsh-language authors are all women, all living: Bethan Gwanas (n.17), Caryl Lewis (n.12) and Manon Steffan Ros (n.12). The three most mentioned English-language authors are all men, dead for 40–400 years: William Shakespeare (n.29), John Steinbeck (n.13) and J. B. Priestley (n.9).

This captured the general tendency for Welsh-language texts to be more contemporary and, relatedly, for their authorship to reflect women's changing roles in society over the last century. In this way, they potentially avoid reproducing the inequalities produced through social conditions of previous centuries but, it seems, in relation to gender rather than ethnicity (Elliott 62). The Welsh-language texts contrasted starkly with Kneen's observation about the teaching of literature in English that 'you will note how few modern texts and writers are being taught'. They also included more explicitly Young Adult titles, although lack of choice in Welsh language texts for teenage readers has been opined (Rosser 20). This could relate to differences between Welsh- and English-language texts in terms of availability, in students' relative ability in each language, as well as differences in subject teachers' beliefs about the relationship between canonicity and quality. It was observed throughout that English-language texts tended to be drawn from across a wider historical period than their Welsh counterparts. This arguably relates to historical contexts of Welsh language suppression and, more recently, revitalisation as well as the hold that canonicity has on the teaching of English literature (Elliott, Smith).

Kneen's conclusion about the lack of Authors of Colour compared with the lack of women authors taught applies equally to our study – '[t]he situation is even more extreme in relation to race and ethnicity' (3). The observation that 'we have a race problem in England' rings true in Wales (Elliott 59, Williams 21). All Welsh-language texts were written by White authors. It seems highly probable that secondary students never study a Welsh-language text by an Author of Colour, observed to be true of students in England (Elliott 74). This gives a false impression of Welsh

as a language used exclusively by White people. This is despite a decrease in the percentage of people taking the census in Wales identifying as White (93.8 per cent of the population, compared to 95.6 per cent in 2011); 192,000 people identifying with an ethnic category other than White; 'Pupil Level Annual School Census data showing that in 2019, 12% of all pupils aged five and over came from Minority Ethnic backgrounds ... ranging from 34.4% in Cardiff schools to just 4.1% in Anglesey' (Williams 21); and the campaign *Cymraeg 2050* to reach one million Welsh speakers (Welsh Government, 2021). Only five or six Authors of Colour were reported in our survey overall, all writing in French (Guène) or English (Ghose, Kincaid, Parker Rhodes, Walker, and perhaps Reza), mostly in prose. These findings broadly align with Kneen's results, but with different individual authors identified.

Our teachers taught Authors of Colour most at A-level, closely followed by KS3. No Authors of Colour were identified at GCSE – though they may have been encapsulated in the anthologies often invoked at this level – adding to the existing sense of GCSE literature as representing a bottleneck of particularly conservative textual choices (Elliott et al., 4, 25, Elliott 68). Not only are more titles and authors listed at KS3 and A-level than at GCSE but these are drawn from a wider range of historical periods. At best, GCSE literature does not compare to students' breadth of experience at earlier stages and gives a poor indication of what they might expect at A-level (Elliott et al., 21). At worst, there is a risk that the prevalence of what have been popularly described as 'pale, male, stale' texts at GCSE puts students off studying literature-rich subjects at A-Level and in higher education, at a pivotal point in their education and careers decision-making (Elliott et al., 27).

Elliott includes WJEC in a comparison of inclusion of Authors of Colour across the various GCSE and A-level specifications, in which only Edexcel and OCR perform relatively well. They include a blistering critique of WJEC's 'Different Cultures' category, as it stood in 2020, for its predominance of White authors writing about Black characters' experiences, casting race as an American issue, and all texts focusing on negative topics like racism and AIDS (70–3). Elsewhere, this is described as a deficit model of representation (DARPL). Future research might extend Elliott's critique by querying why Edexcel and OCR had responded to calls for change, but WJEC had not – despite Welsh Government's arguably greater and more immediate commitment to anti-racist policies than Westminster's.

## 6. Conclusion

Lack of diversity means that children who do not identify as ethnically White do not see themselves represented in texts, negatively impacting on their sense of belonging, world-view, self-image, relationship with reading, and educational attainment (Williams 4–8, 22, Elliott 58, Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd 810). Meanwhile, children who are White are ‘left ignorant of true diversity and the lives of their peers’, less able to develop empathy for people beyond their own group and less likely to have negative views of them or unconscious biases challenged (Elliott et al. 31, Booth and Lim 71–2, Ramdarshan Bold 10–14, 188–9). Currently, literary studies in schools are not fulfilling their potential to contribute to achieving the Welsh Government’s policies outlined in the introduction, its Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (2022); *Curriculum for Wales*’ emphasis on developing ‘ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world’, and ‘tolerant and empathetic understanding of ... human society’ (quoted in Williams 1, 5, 17–18); and the mandatory teaching of BAME histories and experiences (introduced in response to Williams’ report).

Exam specifications and boards were unsurprisingly invoked repeatedly in relation to the choice of texts (4.6, also Smith). Expansion of diversity by them would compel significant change in the classroom at these levels of secondary schooling. The diversification under way from exam boards is not yet great enough to allow teachers to construct a diverse curriculum (Elliott 4). Elliott offers the additional caveat that real difference is made, not just from diversifying lists of texts but, through diversifying what texts are written on for assessment (25). For example, eradicating any sense that diverse authors and texts are difficult to write successfully about in assessment, that students who choose them will be disadvantaged, is crucial for their uptake (see also Elliott on the ‘implication that race adds an element of difficulty’, 73). Our study noted that prose seems to be narrowly defined by exam boards and KS3 teachers’ choices as fiction. This monolithic approach to prose is critiqued in a contemporaneous Estyn report that shares some examples of best practice for integrating non-fiction in literature-rich subjects (13, 23). There is scope for exam boards and stakeholders to explore whether including more varieties of prose, such as memoir, travel writing, journalism, and other creative non-fiction, for teaching and assessment of literatures (not just language, where the use of non-fiction texts has a more established foothold) would benefit diversity.



In terms of the relationship between diversity and who chooses the texts, our survey shows this is dominantly done by individual teachers and HoDs, followed to a lesser extent by various collaborative methods. The overwhelmingly White teaching profession, even more pronouncedly so in English Literature, has been remarked on in Welsh and English publications (Williams 4–8, 12, Elliott et al. 4). In 2019, over 88 per cent of the 35,545 teachers on the register in Wales identified as White British: only 3 per cent identified themselves as being from another ethnic group. The ethnic identity of the remaining 8 per cent was unknown (Lester and Price, 11). Diversifying the teaching profession in Wales might offer some positive potential for diversifying texts, although the significant higher proportion of female-to-male literature teachers has not uniformly led to women authors being well represented in classrooms, nor has a diverse workforce been shown to straightforwardly result in diverse content in other sectors (Ramdarshan Bold 84–5). Involving pupils in the choice of texts, on the basis that they are a more diverse group than teachers, would again offer a partial solution, for similar reasons. However, evidence from young people shows that they overwhelmingly support diverse representation in the school curriculum (Williams 8, Elliott et al. 7).

Elliott et al. found that, for teachers, ‘The greatest obstacles to teaching more diverse texts are: time [to prepare and to teach], money, subject knowledge, teacher confidence’ (6). Williams’ list is incredibly similar: ‘Time, Resources, Competence, Knowledge and Confidence’ (9). Funding new book buying (the ‘money’ and ‘resources’ aspect to diverse texts just referred to) is critical, though it is not the full solution (Elliott, Elliott et al., Smith 251). Several participants in our survey expressed appreciating Welsh Government funding for this during the pandemic (4.6). But then the issue arises of how to find diverse texts on which to spend such funding (speaking to the ‘knowledge’ aspect above). Existing research raises both discoverability of Welsh-language and diverse texts as an issue. Initiatives such as Books Council of Wales diversity booklists (covering BAME and disability representations) and Empathy Lab’s ‘Read for Empathy Wales Guide’ offer some resources. Social media and online campaigns offer another, although they tend to be Anglophone (Rosser 9, 13). Several of our participants mentioned the influence of bookshops (see also Rosser 33, Books Council of Wales 10, Elliott et al. 38) and campaigns such as Black Lives Matter in choosing new and diverse texts

to teach (Ramdarshan Bold lists other relevant campaigns, 90). In England, the Lit in Colour Pioneers programme recruited 134 schools and provided them with copies of a diverse set text newly chosen by their teachers, crucially accompanied by resources for and training to teach it (Elliott et al. 32). Edexcel has also garnered praise for supporting its diversified list with a set of resources, such as schemes of work, to accompany its new texts (Elliott 73). Lack, poor curation, and dubious quality of resources to support stakeholders in children's literature and education in Wales has been articulated by Rosser and Williams, who both follow their critiques with recommendations to inform change. Making high-quality, affordable resources related to diverse texts available could contribute to breaking the vicious cycle that sees popular texts attract more resources, perpetuating their teaching (Elliott and Olive, 2019).

Training for teachers (relating to the 'competence' and 'confidence' elements above), perhaps starting with HoDs – since they play a significant role in solo and group decision-making about texts taught – would contribute remedying the situation. Teachers of literatures at A-level in our study indicated that their own knowledge and expertise impacted on their choice of texts, so that they opted for texts and topics with which they felt secure (4.6). Indeed, research in the UK shows that teachers often choose books they read as children and/or studied in their own schooling (Cremin et al. 69, Elliott 2016). Lack of knowledge of diverse texts contributes to textual inertia and perpetuates a White default. We recognise, however, that there has been considerable change around diversity in Wales in terms of teachers' training, professional learning, and expectations of them – such as the mandating of teaching about BAME histories and experiences – since this data was collected. Much of this was in response to the concerns expressed in Williams's report about the teaching profession, teacher training and potential negative aspects of teacher autonomy in the new Curriculum for Wales (9, 18, 32, 34, 37). For example, the DARPL project was 'set up in response to the professional learning recommendations of [Williams's New Curriculum] working group ... DARPL emphasises the role of school leadership in effecting anti-racist and diverse education. It aims to provide a national model for professional learning for those working in education to develop an understanding and development of anti-racist practice' (Welsh

Government, 2022b). It involves live and virtual events with policy makers, ITE providers, regional school consortia (presumably reaching the schools, leadership teams and teachers within them); conference presentations; video and written resources (on Hwb, World Education Summit, and the DARPL website, such as its library and PL-bitesize pages); social media accounts; as well as a doctorate designed to track its initial impact. Indeed, further research will be vital to understanding the extent and nature of the impact these changes – plus the bedding in of Curriculum for Wales and the National MA Education Wales – have had on the teaching of literatures in Wales since our data collection ended in summer 2022.

Our teachers expressed an interest in the contemporariness of texts, texts written in a variety of styles, and expanding students' horizons. These objectives should find a productive synergy with what Bernardine Evaristo calls the increased 'multiracial diversity' of texts and publishers putting out 'voices that better reflect the nation' (Elliott et al. 4). However, if defined narrowly, some teachers' emphasis on students being able to identify with the characters and content, as well as on 'cynefin', 'local', and 'Welsh' texts will present an impediment until Welsh-language publishing is diversified (Williams 10). Recent steps to promote this include Literature Wales's and Books Council of Wales's strategic plans, including the former prioritising 'representation and equality in the literature sector' (4) and the latter supporting 'publishers who can demonstrate their commitment to investing in diverse content, authors and formats' (6). Books Council of Wales stated in their 2021 Strategic Plan that the sector 'does not adequately reflect our society'; recognised structural barriers; and committed to 'adapt proven models, such as ring-fenced paid internships or foundational startup support, to increase representation within our industry' (11). They also delivered the 'Schools Love Reading' book gifting campaign to boost pupils' access to high-quality and appealing diverse literature rooted in and beyond Wales. Other initiatives include Literature Wales's Platforming Under-represented Writers project and Representing Wales's new writers development programme; Mudiad Meithrin's similar scheme, AwdUra; and the AwdUron campaign to fund the translation of diverse texts into Welsh to meet demand for them from schools. This is described on their website as a stop-gap measure 'while we wait for more Black Welsh authors and other marginalised Welsh

voices to emerge'.<sup>16</sup> Melanie Ramdarshan Bold argues that 'a largely White publishing industry and gatekeeping process' (90 per cent in a 2017 survey) negatively affects books' diversity, but also opines the lack of evidence that diversity initiatives in the sector are successful and reminds us that a diverse workforce has not been shown to result in diverse content (16, 83, 84–5).

There may, however, be some opportunities for Wales that do not exist in the Anglo-American publishing sector, which is 'dominated by a small number of large, global media conglomerates' effectively gatekeeping the sector (Ramdarshan Bold 74). The implication is that more but smaller publishing houses, especially independents, are better placed to champion diversity. The influence on publishers of the Books Council of Wales, partly funded by the Welsh Government, is unusual compared to many nations' publishing sectors and could be better used to foster more diverse Welsh books and to promote them. Commissioned by Welsh Government with this situation in mind, Rosser's research showed respondents requesting more 'books for girls that are not pink, about horses or princesses and full of glitter!' and 'more stories/tales from around the world' (14–15, 21). Rosser argues that the Council has a duty to advance Welsh Government policies around education, young people, and social justice. She offers examples of intersections between the availability of literature and the likelihood of achieving policy aims. She writes: 'easy access to a variety of books that appeal to young readers from diverse backgrounds is vital in creating "a more equal Wales" (Wellbeing Act, 2015)' (6–7).

Writing from Australia about children's picturebooks, Emily Booth and Rebecca Lim suggest that low gender and ethnic diversity in texts be read 'not so much as a diversity deficit' as 'an excess of representations of a very narrow demographic' (73). Our research has shown the excess of representations of White male authors in secondary schools in Wales. Moreover, Booth and Lim's words are a useful reminder that diversity is not achieved by boosting 'very narrow' representations, even where they involve diverse authors and characters. As education policy with potential to redress this is put into practice in schools across Wales, it is vital that diversifying literatures is not done through telling a single story or relying on issue texts e.g. about oppressed women or enslaved Black people, but reflects pluralistic visions of everyday lives and ordinary people (Boehmer and Lombard, 117, Williams 8, 33).

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### Notes

- 1 The timescale for conducting the report ruled out looking at characters too. We intend to pursue this in future research.
- 2 Booth and Lim make the same argument in an Australian context.
- 3 In previous studies, the independent school sector was over-represented, this is not the case here (Elliott and Olive, 2019).
- 4 We are aware that the categories have changed: however, this was a commonly-used multiple-choice option for collecting school demographic data that was preferred due to the teachers' familiarity with this set of categories, at the time data was collected.
- 5 Likely refers to the book by Eirug Wyn, although he was not named by participants.
- 6 This appears to be incorrectly or partially titled, although the primary sector does use the Coeden Ddarllen Rhydychen series.
- 7 This likely refers to texts anthologised by Peter Berresford Ellis (2002).
- 8 This could be Emyr Llywelyn (also known for politics), although the collection of short stories mentioned for this answer does not contain any writing from him. He wrote a guidebook for teachers on themes within the work of four Welsh authors which includes Eleri Llewelyn Morris. Emyr Llywelyn also wrote an introduction to some masterpieces of Welsh literature for pupils studying Welsh in secondary schools. The teacher could be possibly referring to Morris' 'Y Dyn yn y Parc'.
- 9 Their finding presumably reflects the impact of the text being dropped by several exam boards for GCSEs in 2014 in response to then Education Secretary Michael Gove's sustained attacks on the teaching of literature from beyond the British Isles.
- 10 Giving a specific number is made difficult by some apparent errors in respondents' answers.
- 11 The poet could be J. J. Williams, but several poems, as well as prose retellings for children exist. The text often features in collected folktales.
- 12 The two participants who mentioned that they taught an extract of the myth *Blodeuwedd* did not provide the author's name. However, it can be assumed to be Saunders Lewis, whose adaptation of the story is frequently taught in schools.



- 13 The text is available in versions adapted by Gareth John Bale in 2016 and previously by John Owen. The answers we received don't make clear which, if any, of these versions are used.
- 14 One participant said they taught Sêra Moore William's play *Crash*, but another named it and attributed it to Mihangel Morgan, another Welsh writer. It may be the participant meant to list both authors and their respective works, or that they meant to list just Williams and *Crash*, so this answer is somewhat problematic.
- 15 People with Iranian heritage are variously offered the ethnic identity options of 'White' or 'some other race' in the US census/'other ethnic group' in its UK equivalent.
- 16 The contested role of translation and adaptation in children's publishing in Wales as well as issues in terms of the quality of such work are dealt with by Rosser (11, 23–4, 26).

