Metadata & Discovery Group

Policies and preservation
how we catalogue Welsh Government publications

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ABSTRACT

The Welsh Government Publications Archive is a publicly available catalogue which allows anyone to search and access the historic publications of the Welsh Government and its predecessors. This article outlines the Publications Archive's purpose and background, and how the Knowledge and Library Services team within Welsh Government maintain this resource. It delves into their cataloguing practices and how these have developed over time, describing their approaches to cataloguing standards, classification and thesauri. The article also explores the challenges faced when cataloguing government publications and how these are informed by the evolution of government publishing practices, before concluding by reflecting on potential future developments.

KEYWORDS government publications; Welsh Government Publications Archive

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Introduction

Welsh Government is the devolved government of Wales, with responsibility for devolved policy areas such as health, agriculture, education, culture and the environment. It forms the executive branch of government, making policies and proposing laws for Wales. It is a different body to Senedd Cymru / the Welsh Parliament, which makes laws, agrees taxes and scrutinises the work of the Welsh Government.

Every year, Welsh Government publishes thousands of different publications in the process of carrying out government business; whether in policy making, engaging in government research or setting out proposals for new legislation. These publications are often the vehicle through which government information is disseminated and, as such, are important historical resources. These must be preserved as part of the public record to enable long-term access, enable scrutiny and help support the democratic process. This is why these publications are systematically captured and catalogued by the Knowledge and Library Services team and retained on the Welsh Government Publications Archive[1].

[1] https://publicationsarchive.service.gov.wales

What is the Welsh Government Publications Archive?

The Publications Archive is a free, public tool, accessible via www.gov.wales (GOV. WALES) which enables anyone to search and access the historic publications of the Welsh Government and its predecessors (e.g. Welsh Assembly Government / Welsh Office). It provides access to born-digital publications originally published on GOV. WALES, as well as the records of both physical and, in many cases, scanned copies of publications. Our library team of thirteen staff work diligently to make sure publications are consistently captured and catalogued for long-term preservation.

There is also a compliance component to preserving government publications. This is outlined in the *Freedom of Information Act 2000* (Freedom of Information Act 2000) and the *Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015* (The Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015). Government bodies must make as much information as possible available to the public proactively so that this information is accessible but, more critically, re-usable. While much is now published on GOV.WALES, publications can change rapidly. Many are regularly updated and some will eventually disappear from the site altogether, making it difficult to pinpoint what policies or guidance were in place at certain times. The Publications Archive supports this scrutiny, and these practices enable Knowledge and Library Services to answer requests for information resulting from public inquiries, freedom of information requests and general government business.

Cataloguing government publications

To capture Welsh Government publications effectively, we use a cataloguing rota that divides publications by policy area. At present, eight members of library staff are responsible for cataloguing. Each month they'll be assigned a different policy area and be expected to check the sources indicated on the rota for new publications for capture. We rotate areas every month to ensure that our workplan is flexible and can sustain workloads during periods of leave and sickness. Cataloguing is monitored by regular spot checks, and all cataloguers are encouraged to regularly review their records for accuracy.

We use our Library Management System (LMS) supplied by Soutron to catalogue our publications. All staff are trained to internal cataloguing standards, which are bespoke to the needs of Welsh Government as an organisation and updated regularly. While we do not subscribe to internationally recognised standards such as MARC21 or RDA, our cataloguing practices are not wholly dissimilar – a typical catalogue record looks like the below (Figure 1).

We use different cataloguing templates set up for distinct types of government publications, such as consultation documents, circulars, statutory and non-statutory legislation. Records are linked by several thesauri fields, including author, corporate

New Search   Back   Opened (1)   Current Record Actions

Formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales: survey of senior leaders and practitioners

EDOC Assembly

CID:	1079133
Welsh Title:	Gwerthusiad ffurfiannol o'r Cwricwlwm i Gymru: arolwg o uwch arweinwyr ac ymarferwyr
E-ISBN:	9781806337842 9781806337835
Language:	Welsh English
Reference Number:	EDOC
Authors:	PARKINSON, Gillian TYLDEN-SMITH, Ben THOMAS, Hefin DAVIS, Joanne SINNEMA, Claire
Corporate Author:	WELSH GOVERNMENT
Publisher:	Welsh Government
Publication Date:	18 December 2025
Physical Description:	Dogfen electronig / Electronic documents: PDF: 488p
Price:	Dim pris: Unpriced
Series:	Government Social Research (GSR)
Notes:	Rhif ymchwil cymdeithasol / Social research number 126/2025
Abstract:	Mae'r adroddiad hwn yn cyflwyno canfyddiadau o arolwg o uwch arweinwyr ac ymarferwyr mewn ysgolion a lleoliadau ynghylch eu harferion, eu barn a'u profiadau mewn perthynas â'r Cwricwlwm i Gymru. This report presents findings from a survey of senior leaders and practitioners in schools and settings about their practices, views and experiences in relation to Curriculum for Wales.
Subjects:	Evaluation Schools National curriculum
Websites:	Llywodraeth Cymru Welsh Government
Attached Documents:	gwerthusiad-ffurfiannol-or-cwricwlwm-i-gymru-arolwg-o-uwch-arweinwyr-ac-ymarferwyr-059371.pdf formative-evaluation-of-the-curriculum-for-wales-survey-of-senior-leaders-and-practitioners-668201.pdf

Figure 1: An example record from the Welsh Government Publications Archive

author, series, publisher and subject headings to aid browsing by these fields. These are maintained internally.

We diverge from standard cataloguing practices in how we retain both Welsh and English versions of documents in the same record. This relates to historic Welsh Government publishing practices where, when published in hard copy, many Welsh and English versions of the same document were printed back-to-back and therefore catalogued in the same record. Although the rise of digital publishing has negated the need for English and Welsh versions to share the same record, this practice has continued, even where both versions have different E-ISBNs. We have found that retaining this practice serves our user base, who may often need to carefully review both versions against one another and therefore easily access both at the same time. It has also had the added benefit of helping us save both server space and cataloguing time when dealing with an influx of new publications.

Being a public body, we also need to abide by the Welsh Language Standards in our cataloguing practices so that users can access our records and navigate our catalogue through the medium of Welsh. Our internal standards emphasise the importance of including Welsh within the description in our records and work is ongoing to provide our thesauri terms in Welsh where appropriate.

Since 2021 we've added, on average, around 3,700 items to the Publications Archive per year. For a cataloguing team of eight this is a significant task to keep up to date with. None of our cataloguers work full time on this task; other duties include literature searching, user training and enquiry support. This is also not the only collections task allocated to staff. As well as monitoring, capturing and cataloguing Welsh Government publications, we also maintain a collection of physical and e-resources for the use of Welsh Government staff, routinely transfer digital Welsh Government publications to the National Library of Wales for legal deposit and engage in necessary collection maintenance tasks such as collection audits and weeding.

Classification

Originally, our classification scheme was developed by library staff working in the Welsh Office, pre-devolution. It is based on Library of Congress Classification (LCC)[2] but uses elements of the Dewey Decimal Classification[3] to allocate geographic areas. You can see an example in the below record ([Figure 2](#)).

The original copy of this customised classification system was lost over the years, but we have continued to use a simplified version of LCC to classify our internal library collection, making use of the publicly available LCC listings to guide our classification ([Library of Congress, 2026](#)).

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[2] https://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/classification/
[3] https://www.oclc.org/en/dewey.html

Performance evaluation report 2013–14: city and county of Swansea social services

EDOC Assembly

CID:	915146
Welsh Title:	Adroddiad Gwerthuso Perfformiad 2013–14: gwasanaethau cymdeithasol dinas a sir Abertawe
E-ISBN:	9781473423664 9781473423657
Language:	English Welsh
Reference Number:	HV 245 (429.51)
Corporate Author:	CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE WALES (CSSIW)
Publisher:	Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales
Publication Date:	31 October 2014

Figure 2: A record containing an example of customised LCC

We rarely use LCC to classify digital items held in the Publications Archive. As fewer reports came to be published in hard copy, the requirement to formally classify them became less pressing. Born-digital publications didn't require the extra act of classification to be browsable in an online environment; effective use of subject headings and other linked thesauri metadata fulfil that need. We simply add the term 'EDOC' to the classification field. However, when a government publication comes with its own reference system, we include this in the class mark field. Government circulars and subordinate legislation usually have their own numbering systems; we capture these within their catalogue record in the class mark field, so they are searchable by their reference number.

Our team have also adapted other existing classification systems for cataloguing projects. In 2019 we were tasked with cataloguing the collection of books, journals and reports used by Cadw[4], the heritage arm of Welsh Government, to support their work in protecting Wales' historic environment. Colleagues working on the project had previously worked in Historic England and so adapted the Historic England library's classification system to meet the needs of their Welsh counterpart. The resulting classification system focuses on subjects such as archaeology, architecture, history, maps and planning. This cataloguing project is still ongoing, and to date the project team have catalogued over 8,000 items, enabling Cadw colleagues to more effectively browse and search their collection.

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[4] https://cadw.gov.wales/

Subject headings and taxonomies

We employ a combination of Integrated Public Sector Vocabulary (IPSV) terms and common subject descriptions used in the Welsh Government past and present to maintain our subject thesaurus headings. IPSV was a taxonomy designed specifically for public sector organisations, to help tag information across government resources such as websites, records management systems and library collections (Local Government Association, 2013). While once widely used across government organisations, it has not been mandated since 2012.

We've adapted and customised our subject thesaurus over the years, adding specific subject headings related to Welsh policy to index publications catalogued and aid their retrieval. Our subject thesaurus is hierarchical, and our catalogue provides the option for users to search related terms in addition to the search terms they've selected. This requires careful management of relationships between terms in our subject thesaurus, to keep them up to date and reflective of any policy / organisational changes.

To ensure consistency in subject allocation, our subject thesaurus is maintained by one person in the team. If a new term is required, this must be requested to avoid duplication. We only use one field to designate subject headings and do not differentiate between various categories of subjects, such as corporate entities or topical terms. For example, a health board inspection report may be indexed using the subject headings 'Local Health Boards (Wales)' and 'Health and Care Inspection', as well as the name of the health board in question and its locale (e.g. 'Swansea Bay University', 'Aneurin Bevan').

Common cataloguing challenges

With the speed and scale of government publishing, it can be challenging to keep up to date and capture everything on the Publications Archive as it is published. As digital publishing has become the default, publishing practices have in turn evolved and, in some cases, become increasingly decentralised.

Sourcing said publications can occasionally be challenging. While the majority are published on GOV.WALES, some departments may maintain a separate web presence and host their publications on there. Some notable examples of this are Hwb[5], which hosts Welsh educational resources for schools in Wales, Cadw[4], and the Welsh tribunals who, although they work independently from government, receive administrative support (including report publication) from Welsh Government. We use our rota to log all websites which require checking for publications; this is regularly updated.

Machinery of government changes can also impact our cataloguing practices; public bodies often move in and out of the remit of central government. Two recent examples

[5] https://hwb.gov.wales/

include Planning Inspectorate Wales, which transferred into Welsh Government in 2021 (becoming Planning and Environment Decisions Wales) (Planning Inspectorate, 2021) and Medr[6], Wales' Commission for Tertiary Education and Research which became an arm's length body in 2024 (Howells, 2024). In both cases, we needed to adjust our cataloguing practices to incorporate the material of Planning and Environment Decisions Wales and to exclude Medr. We focus our cataloguing solely on Welsh Government departments, as this is the extent of our remit under our Publication Scheme (Welsh Government, 2024).

As we host digital copies of publications on our Publications Archive, we take a vigilant approach to copyright to make sure we are only uploading items with the necessary permissions. Most Welsh Government publications are licensed under the Open Government Licence (OGL), a permissive licence which allows most forms of re-use (National Archives, 2014). However, some publications may not be covered by OGL. For example, Welsh Government commissioned reports sometimes retain the copyright of the originating body and jointly authored reports may have two or more copyright holders. In these cases, we need to carefully consider copyright and whether permissions are in place to add these items to the Publications Archive for long-term preservation.

Finally, version control of publications can be rife with complexity. While some publications follow best practice by using different ISBNs for each edition or including a clear version history, this isn't always standard practice. In many cases, previous versions of guidance will be overwritten with new versions with little to indicate the extent of changes made, necessitating careful review. Digital government publishing used to be predominantly carried out in PDF format, aiding version control and document preservation; this has since increasingly migrated to HTML as a more accessible format (Williams, 2018). It can be challenging to balance these important accessibility requirements with the act of preservation. We currently convert publications to PDF for preservation, but this is an area of our work which we hope to dedicate more thought to in the future.

Future developments

This article has outlined just some of the aspects of maintaining a government publications archive. Our cataloguing practices are constantly developing to adapt to the wider government and regulatory environment, as well as the ongoing evolution of digital publishing. In future we hope to continue to improve our practices to support discovery, accessibility and the Welsh language. We are also in conversation with our LMS providers to better understand how we can safely and responsibly integrate AI capabilities to enhance our cataloguing practices, while still maintaining a human in the loop. These combined efforts will help us maintain a comprehensive Publications Archive which effectively supports the work of government and ensures the public can easily access and benefit from vital public information.

[6] https://www.medr.cymru/en/

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