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# A comparative analysis of discourses shaping physical education provision within and across the UK

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# Initial study

The purpose of this research was to carry out an analysis of the key curriculum documentation for PE across all four UK nations to identify those discourses that shape how PE is conceptualized in each context.

To explore and understand the points of convergence and divergence in how PE is presented within each UK curricula.

# Key Stages/Levels

England	Northern Ireland	Scotland
<b>Key Stage 1 – ages 5-7</b>	<b>Key Stage 1 – ages 6-8</b>	<b>Early (pre-school to P1) – ages 3-4</b>
<b>Key Stage 2 – ages 7-11</b>	<b>Key Stage 2 – ages 8-11</b>	<b>First (lower primary) – ages 5-8</b>
<b>Key Stage 3 – ages 11-14</b>	<b>Key Stage 3 – ages 11-14</b>	<b>Second (upper-primary) – ages 9-11</b>
<b>Key Stage 4 – ages 14-16</b>	<b>Key Stage 4 – ages 14-16</b>	<b>Third/Fourth (lower secondary) – ages 12-14.</b>

# Northern Ireland

- Contributor to society, the economy and the environment.
- All pupils should experience a sense of fun, enjoyment and achievement through a variety of progressively challenging and innovative activities.
- Through a broad and balanced programme that pupils should develop knowledge, understanding and skills (CCEA, 2007) for PE, for learning, for life and work and appreciate the benefits of physical activity.

# England

- Purpose: to inspire all pupils to ‘succeed and excel in competitive sport and other physically demanding activities’; to ‘provide opportunities for pupils to become physically confident in a way which supports their health and fitness’; and to provide students with the opportunity to ‘compete in sport and other activities build character and help to embed values such as fairness and respect’ (DfE, 2013, p. 220).
- Four key stages: to ensure that all pupils: ‘develop competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities, are physically active for sustained periods of time, engage in competitive sports and activities and, lead healthy, active lives (DfE, 2013, p.1).

# Scotland

- The Curriculum for Excellence (2010).
- In PE, teachers are guided by ‘**experiences and outcomes**’ from two areas of the curriculum, the HWB curriculum and the PE curriculum.
  - **HWB focus** – Social, emotional, mental and physical WB.
  - **PE focus** – physical competencies, fitness and personal/social skills.
- **Significant Aspects of Learning (SALs)**: physical competencies, cognitive skills, physical fitness and personal qualities.
- **Benchmarks for PE**: increasing complexity across five developmental levels: early (pre-school to P1), first (lower primary), second (upper-primary) and third/fourth (lower secondary).

# Wales

- The Curriculum for Wales (published 2020 for 2022)
- Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE).
- Statements of 'What Matters' (SWM):
  1. Developing physical health and well-being has lifelong benefits
  2. How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental and emotional well-being
  3. Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others
  4. How we engage with social influences shapes who we are and affects our health and well-being
  5. Healthy relationships are fundamental to our well-being

# Methods: Key documents

England:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Physical education programmes of study: Key Stages 1-4, National curriculum in England (Department for Education (DfE), 2014).</li></ul>
Northern Ireland:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Key Stage 1 and 2 Statutory Requirements for PE (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2007).</li><li>• The Statutory Curriculum at Key Stage 3 and the Key Stage 3 Statutory Requirements in Physical Education (CCEA, 2007).</li><li>• The KS4 Physical Education Non-Statutory Guidance (CCEA, 2008).</li></ul>
Scotland:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Curriculum for Excellence: Health and Wellbeing - Principles and Practice (Scottish Government, 2009).</li><li>• Curriculum for Excellence: Health and Wellbeing –experiences and outcomes (Scottish Government, 2009).</li><li>• The Benchmarks for PE (Scottish Government, 2017).</li></ul>
Wales:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The New Curriculum for Wales Guidance (Welsh Government, 2020).</li></ul>



# Framework of Analysis

Discourse	Description	Example
<b>Performance</b>	PE conceptualised as motor competency and ability; fitness and sport skills for performance; or sport psychology for performance improvement.	Pupils should be taught to develop their technique and improve their performance in other competitive sports [for example, athletics and gymnastics]. (DfE, 2013, p. 222)
<b>Public health</b>	PE conceptualised as physical health promotion with physical behaviours, activity, and exercise as medicine.	Investigates heart rate zones and how these zones relate to fitness and health and wellbeing. (Scottish Government, 2017, p. 37)
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	PE conceptualised as physical activity for enjoyment and holistic wellbeing (involving the physical, mental, social, and emotional).	I can make meaningful connections with others, valuing safe, healthy and equitable relationships in a range of contexts. (Welsh Government, 2020, p. 84)
<b>Pedagogy</b>	PE conceptualised as assessment and teaching approaches for reflection, criticality, inclusion, and personalisation to different learning styles.	Show deeper understanding by thinking critically and flexibly, solving problems and making informed decisions, demonstrating Using Mathematics and Using ICT where appropriate. (CCEA, 2007, p. 48)
<b>Citizenship</b>	PE conceptualised as a process for imparting values and ethics, teaching skills for life, and encouraging inclusivity and responsibility for self and others	I can interact pro-socially in different groups and situations, and actively advocate for other individuals and groups. (Welsh Government, 2020, p 83)

# Comparative analysis

- **Conceptions of health in PE**
- **Performance**
- Pedagogy and teacher agency

# Conceptions of health in PE

- In **Wales and Scotland** the term health and wellbeing is used and understood in a holistic sense, encompassing social, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing with discursive connections to notions of citizenship.
- In **Northern Ireland**, discourses of health vary from KS1 to KS4.

KS4 example: *'plan, undertake, monitor and evaluate safe and effective personal exercise/training programmes that contribute to a healthy and active lifestyle.'* (CCEA, 2008, p. 7)

- In **England**, there is reference to public health discourse in the curriculum intentions.

# Performance

- In **Scotland, Northern Ireland and England** – performance discourse is significant.
- Example from **England**:

*‘Pupils should be taught to develop their technique and improve their performance in other competitive sports [for example, athletics and gymnastics].’ (DfE, 2013, p. 222)*

In **Wales**, discourses of performance less significant (pedagogy discourses dominate).

# Conclusions

- Cross-curricular learning – useful for the future?
- Encourage teachers to look at and think differently about their own context.
- Learn from what is not in the curricula, notably those references to social and critical issues around, for example, gender equality, conceptions of ability, social class and culture.
- Future research should explore these discourses from a more critical perspective and expose further the underlying ideologies that (re)produce those discourses that persist in PE.
- Build PE teachers' capacity to contribute to future curricula.

# Questions (and ideas for future research)

- How do these findings compare to your curriculum?
- What might a more critical analysis uncover?
- A useful exercise for (pre-service) PE teachers to engage in?