

## *Research News*

Each year in the autumn edition of the journal we will include a section on current research activity in Wales. In this edition we have entries from The Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD); The Wales Centre for Equity in Education (WCEE); the Welsh Government; Estyn and The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers in Wales (UCET Cymru). We hope that future editions will include further updates from these and other organisations.

### *WISERD Education*

WISERD Education is a major strand of WISERD's research programme, which includes a range of projects, as well as the large HEFCW-funded research capacity building programme. Over the twelve months, we have been engaged in a number of projects. These have included:

- **Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilots**, funded by the Welsh Government;
- **Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant** (in conjunction with Ipsos MORI), funded by the Welsh Government;
- **A Crisis of Welsh Education? A Review of the Current Evidence**, funded by the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion;
- **The Impact and Effectiveness of Widening Access to HE in Wales**, funded by the ESRC and the Welsh Government.

The **WISERD Education research capacity building programme** is now entering its fourth year – and has a started a number of new initiatives – which we hope to report in the pages of this journal in coming months. These have included:

- a **'State of the Nation' survey** to identify the research background, experience and needs of academic staff working in the field of education

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in universities in Wales. We know that recent years have seen a serious decline in the volume of research that has been submitted to successive UK-wide research assessment exercises. We see the survey as providing information about the nature of research, which falls ‘under the radar’ of these exercises, as well as an important step in building a sustainable and research active community of education scholars in Wales. We received eighty-eight responses to the survey – more than we were expecting – and we are currently analysing the data;

- the construction of the **Directory of Expertise**. We know we need to build stronger collaborations if we are to attract funding for research in the changed HE landscape. In parallel with the ‘State of the Nation’ survey we asked colleagues across Wales to provide us with details of their research expertise so that we could compile a directory. We were delighted to receive ninety-five responses and the directory will be circulated soon – as well as placed on the WISERD website;
- a residential **Writing Workshop** to be held at Gregynog over one week in April. The workshop will involve a range of activities – including a session on writing for REF, as well as intensive one-to-one support. We have participants from all HEIs in Wales and will be interested to see how well it is received.

We have also continued to publish findings from the cohort studies – and we are always open to researchers wanting to use the data for their own purposes. Please do get in touch if you are interested. Recent publications include:

- Power, S., and Smith. K. (2016). “‘Heroes’ and ‘villains’ in the lives of children and young people’. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. This paper explores the responses of nearly 1,200 children and young people in Wales who were asked to identify which three famous people they most admired and which three they most disliked. Analysis of these young people’s responses reveals a number of sociological and educational issues. The paper concludes by discussing the chasm between our young people’s ‘heroes’ and ‘villains’ and those ‘officially sanctioned’ within the school curriculum, while considering what schools and teachers might do about it.
- Power, S., and Smith. K. (2015). ‘Giving, saving, spending: what would children do with £1 million?’. *Children and Society*. This paper explores Welsh children’s responses to a single question: ‘If someone gave you

£1 Million today, what would you do with it?’ Although such an exploration might seem trivial, we argue that their responses provide important insights into children’s values and priorities. One-third intend to spend it all, one-quarter to save it. But the largest group claim they would give all or some of the money away. Their responses highlight the divergent ways in which children use money to foster particular forms of social relations and social standing. Against the prevalent discourse of consumer society, the dominant theme of giving may indicate that the individualism of neoliberalism is less pervasive than is often feared, but also suggest that further research is needed into the social contexts and processes which encourage children to be ‘givers’, ‘savers’ or ‘spenders’.

Professor Sally Power  
*Director, WISERD Education*

### *The Wales Centre for Equity In Education*

WCEE is a national policy and research centre focused on issues to do with inequity in the Welsh education system. It was set up in September 2003 by The University of Wales and The University of Wales Trinity Saint David. It now has seven academic staff, three support staff, three full-time PhD scholars and a number of visiting academics. Further information on the centre can be found on its website, at: [www.uwtsd.ac.uk/wcee](http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/wcee).

Its current research activity is focused on the following areas:

- **Poverty and Education.** Current work here includes a major ethnographic study of schools in Wales which can be seen to be making sustained progress in overcoming the impact of poverty on educational achievement and the impact of the Teach First programme in Wales;
- **Ethnic Minority Achievement in Wales.** Work has begun here on aspects of ethnic minority achievement in Cardiff and also on the experience of Roma communities in Wales;
- **Early Years Education.** Research is underway on the impact of the Pupil Deprivation Grant in the early years’ community in Wales and on developing professional learning and pedagogy within the early years’ sector;
- **Family and Community Education.** Work in this area includes research on existing family and community-based strategies in a range of

communities in Wales and the development of an action research programme working with schools and their communities;

- **Digital Inclusion.** Early work in this area is exploring the role of digital inclusion in overcoming educational inequity and the potential for schools using digital platforms as a way of strengthening their work with their families and communities.

The centre develops its work through Special Interest Groups in each of these areas. The groups are open to internal staff within the university and to external partners and individuals. We are committed to developing collaborative work across the Wales education system and building international links. More information on the SIGs can be found on our website.

Professor David Egan  
*Director, WCEE*

### *UCET Cymru*

The aim of UCET Cymru is to be the definitive academic and professional voice of the higher education sector in Wales on matters relating to initial teacher education (ITE), continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and educational research. In pursuing this aim, UCET Cymru meets regularly with the Welsh Government, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Estyn and the Education Workforce Council (EWC). It responds to consultation documents issued by these bodies and maintains links with press and media in Wales, to ensure that the voice of university teacher educators is heard.

UCET Cymru meets three times per year, rotating between the different regions of Wales. It includes two representatives from each of the five university providers of ITE: Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, the University of South Wales and University of Wales Trinity Saint David. UCET Cymru has been involved in discussions with Welsh Government about educational change in Wales and is represented in the post-Donaldson curriculum development process on the Independent Stakeholder Group. It has also met with EWC to discuss the Professional Learning Passport and collaborated with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to run a seminar entitled ITE: breaking the attainment gap/poverty link. The Arts in Education Working Group

held a best-practice sharing event on 24 February 2016 at which representatives from all five universities presented examples of innovative ITE practice to support the development of creative pedagogies in ITE students.

In September 2015, UCET Cymru established five sub-groups to respond to different aspects of educational change across Wales:

- national priorities;
- Continuing Professional Learning and Development (CPLD) and widening workforce;
- Quality Assurance (QA), including Graduate Teaching Programme and Teach First representation;
- admissions, marketing and recruitment; and
- research, evidence and impact.

The research sub-group aims to address the criticism in *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers* that university providers of ITE lack research capacity to inform teaching and learning. The first activity we undertook was an audit of research publications in the field of education produced since 2012 by staff in the five universities, together with the nature and focus of research groupings and funded projects. This audit revealed that, despite no submissions having been made to the education unit of assessment of the Research Excellence Framework (REF, 2014) by ITE providers in Wales, there is a considerable volume of activity being undertaken.

Our next initiative was to undertake a thematic analysis of these audits to identify the main educational research areas of interest being pursued across Wales, with their principle findings and associated projects and publications. This work will inform the Welsh Government response to Recommendation 8 in *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers*: the establishment of regional centres of excellence in pedagogical research. We have put forward a proposal to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for a 'deep audit' of pedagogical research ongoing in schools and consortia across Wales, much of it contained in Master's dissertations (including the government-funded Master's in educational practice) or doctoral theses. Synthesising the findings and best practice from hundreds of small-scale teacher research projects will help disseminate key recommendations for practice across Wales. We are also developing a joint research project examining the attitudes of young people in Wales towards the teaching profession. We welcome the opportunity to report regularly on

developments from UCET Cymru and especially the research subcommittee in the journal.

Professor Dan Davies  
*Chair of UCET Cymru Research Sub-Group*

*Estyn*

The minister's annual remit letter to the chief inspector commissions Estyn to provide advice and reports on educational matters in Wales. This article includes key findings from six of the thematic surveys that Estyn published in 2015. All other thematic surveys can be viewed at: [www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports](http://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports).

1. *The impact of advisory teachers on funded non-maintained settings* (Estyn, 2015a) survey focused on the role of qualified early years teachers, referred to as the advisory teacher. The survey found that the role of the advisory teacher in the non-maintained sector has changed over time. At first, advisory teachers mainly modelled good practice. Now, advisory teachers provide more support for management and administration, but less for teaching and learning. One of the recommendations of the report is that advisory teachers should do more to model effective teaching in the classroom and share ideas with practitioners;
2. *The best practice in teaching and learning in the creative arts at key stage 2* (Estyn, 2015b) survey found that in many of the schools visited pupils' standards in oracy were at least good. This is partly because worthwhile engagement in the creative arts gives pupils exciting experiences to talk about. However, the survey found that the quality of the curriculum for the creative arts relies too much on an enthusiastic teacher on the staff with specialist skills and knowledge rather than on secure curriculum planning;
3. *The School-to-school support and collaboration* (Estyn, 2015c) survey considered the impact, success factors and obstacles schools face when engaged in these initiatives. The survey identified four main types of support and collaboration: self-generated collaboration; brokered support; formal collaboration; and federation. For each type, there is a good practice case study. The survey found that that nearly all schools in Wales are involved in some form of partnership working with other schools. Successful school-to-school working arrangements require the genuine commitment of school leaders and attitudes of openness, trust and transparency;

4. *The best practice in leadership development* (Estyn, 2015d) report focused on how effective school leaders try to create a leadership culture and build leadership capacity. Schools with strong leadership demonstrate clear communication between leaders and all members of staff, strong succession planning at all levels, a focus on teaching and learning, and a commitment to professional learning. They also employ effective strategies for identifying and nurturing the leadership potential of all their staff and have a detailed understanding of the knowledge, skills and attributes required for each leadership role;
5. Estyn also undertook a good practice survey of provision for those students who attend education other than at school (EOTAS) settings (Estyn, 2015e). Provision for pupils at risk of exclusion or disengagement is most effective where local authorities, schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) work together to meet the needs of these pupils. In the most effective PRUs, teachers-in-charge and head teachers are skilled leaders and managers, and staff have appropriate expertise and experience in teaching and learning, as well as behaviour management. Pupils are most successfully reintegrated back into schools when everyone involved understands that the placement is a short-term intervention.

In the further education sector, Estyn explored how colleges use teaching and learning observation effectively to improve learners' standards of achievement (Estyn, 2015f). Teaching and learning observation works best in colleges that have a clear strategic vision of how to achieve high-quality teaching and learning, a strong culture of improvement and work as a team. In these colleges, lesson observation is principally a method for helping teachers to improve their own practice, rather than being used as a tool for internal inspection.

Kerry Jones  
*Research Officer, Estyn*

### References

- Estyn (2015a). *The impact of advisory teachers on funded non-maintained settings*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2015b). *The best practice in teaching and learning in the creative arts at key stage 2*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2015c). *School-to-school support and collaboration*. Cardiff: Estyn.

- Estyn (2015d). *The best practice in leadership development*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2015e). *Education other than at school: a good practice survey*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2015f). *Effective teaching and learning observation in further education colleges*. Cardiff: Estyn.

### *The Welsh Government*

Evidence plays an increasingly important role in the development and evaluation of Welsh Government education and skills policy. This is not to say that getting evidence into policy in the Welsh Government is any easier than elsewhere of course. But, a great deal of effort is put into achieving that goal. There are about twenty-five analysts – statisticians and social researchers, librarian, data specialists and economic analysts – who support this work. We work closely with policy makers and ministers to develop and carry out a rolling programme of statistical and research work linked to policy priorities. All the outputs from that work are published on the statistics and research webpages on the Welsh Government website (<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/>), which has been refreshed during the last term. During the last term we published over 200 reports relating to education and skills in keeping with Official Statistical Code and Welsh Government Research Principles.

So, what has that body of work included? What contribution has it made? I'll provide some selected highlights but would encourage a critical dialogue in this journal and beyond, to challenge the research and evidence, improve upon it and make sure that it is used and applied where it is robust and relevant.

The bedrock or evidence comes from our routine collection and reporting of education statistics. During the last term, the development and use of statistics to inform school banding and then categorisation have been significant with a highlight being the production of the My Local School website (<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk>); runner-up in the Royal Statistical Society's Official Statistics Awards in 2013.

It is important that key policy developments are independently evaluated and that the findings are fed into decisions about funding and revisions of policies. We've seen that with the research undertaken by Cardiff University/WISERD to evaluate the foundation phase for instance. Other studies have provided evaluations of the Pupil Deprivation Grant, Educational Maintenance Allowance, Welsh Medium Education Strategy

and a number of European social fund programmes. A great deal of effort by research organisations – private and third- sector organisations and HEIs – as well as the stakeholders, practitioners, employers and learners who engage and participate in the research has gone into producing a large body of evidence.

It is important to look across the breadth of the research produced to extrapolate more general lessons to inform reform where the evidence warrants it. To start, a range of positive outcomes have been captured in statistics and programme evaluations, such as:

- high levels of learner and employer satisfaction;
- improved pupil and learner well-being;
- improved attendance;
- improved attainment;
- increased skills levels, confidence; and better employment and promotion opportunities for adult learners;
- company cost savings, business productivity and increased sales.

And, of course, our evidence has also identified areas for improvement or further investigation such as:

- making progress in international comparisons (PISA);
- implementation of cross-cutting themes (such as equalities, tackling disadvantage and Welsh language);
- improving connections between interventions;
- setting targets, and building suitable systems for data collection;
- targeting interventions to avoid high levels of deadweight;
- the quality and consistency of programme or curriculum implementation is key to making an impact (e.g. foundation phase);
- engagement of the workforce in developing and improving practice using evidence (e.g. Graham Donaldson's *Successful Futures* report;<sup>1</sup> the Pupil Deprivation Guidance evaluation;<sup>2</sup> the Sutton Trust/Education Endowment Foundation's *Teaching and Learning Toolkit* (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>);
- integrating evidence-based principles within everyday mainstream educational practice needs well-trained, capable and motivated practitioners and leaders (see John Furlong's review of ITET; and how programmes are developed and piloted to allow for impact evaluation in keeping with HM Treasury Magenta Book guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book>)).

Whatever the political complexion of the new Welsh Government following the elections in May 2016, keeping up momentum where improvements have been made and applying lessons from research will be important, especially if we are to aim for the data – and research-rich education system envisaged in Qualified for Life (see link). Some broader challenges relate to that objective, including:

- building capacity for educational research (within HEIs, but also consortia, providers, schools);
- using research as a tool to support curriculum and pedagogical developments;
- the application of evidence to inform teaching and learning as part of *Successful Futures*. For instance, what research is necessary to test the new curriculum and assessment arrangements – both in terms of design and implementation. And what measures (assessments, data, surveys) might be needed at different levels in the system to help understand progress against Donaldson’s Four Purposes?
- the new political term will also be highly focused on the implementation of the recently enacted Well-being of Future Generations Act, and the Rights of Children and Young People Act, and those may lead to a re-thinking of the type of data collected to monitor and evaluate Welsh Government policies more widely.

As a footnote, correspondence over any of the education-related research and statistics reports Welsh Government publish would be welcomed as well as ideas or discussion relating to proposals for research and analytical work from practitioners, leaders and researchers.

Richard Thurston  
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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://hwbplus.wales.gov.uk/schools/6714052/Documents/Donaldson%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Welsh Government (2015). *Guidance for using the pupil deprivation grant*. Available at: <http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/140512-what-really-works-en.pdf>.