

Research News

Estyn

Estyn has a unique role in informing national education policy because our advice is based on first-hand, observed evidence of the impact of policy on the learner through our inspections and thematic surveys. We draw upon existing research in the course of our work, although the advice we provide differs from that of academic researchers because it reflects the professional judgement of experienced inspectors.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education's annual remit letter to Estyn sets out the specific advice required by the Welsh Government which we provide in our thematic reports. During 2018 we published 16 thematic survey reports. Many have contributed to the development of the new curriculum for Wales by presenting evidence either of the current state of play in a given area, or the extent to which providers are preparing for reform.

Curriculum innovation in primary schools (Estyn, 2018a) considers how schools are adapting to the curriculum and education reforms and provides case studies to show how they evaluate, plan, deliver, monitor and refine their curriculum and teaching. The report explores what is working well, for example most schools have a clear focus on delivering teaching of high quality allied to an improved curriculum, and what the barriers are to change, such as insufficient curriculum planning. A four stage curriculum development model is presented, which provides questions for schools to consider at each stage in the change process.

Preparing for the digital competence framework (DCF) (Estyn, 2018b) focuses on how schools are beginning to ensure that pupils develop their digital competence. It provides examples of innovative and interesting practices in the schools surveyed. The survey finds evidence of good change leadership in schools, with inclusive approaches taken to develop a vision for implementing the DCF, although leaders are unsure of the implementation timeframe. Digital leads in most schools have a thorough knowledge of the DCF. However, most secondary schools are not preparing well enough to

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realise the DCF in its entirety. The report recommends that Welsh Government should clarify its expectations for embedding the DCF and that schools should map the framework across the curriculum to eliminate gaps in provision and secure sufficient progression and continuity.

New qualifications (Estyn, 2018c) considers how schools and colleges have implemented new GCSEs in English and Welsh language, mathematics and mathematics- numeracy and the Welsh Baccalaureate, and reports on the standard of pupils' work in these subjects. In schools, many subject leaders lead their departments well and are supported effectively by senior leaders to prepare for the new courses. However a narrowing of the curriculum has occurred in many schools, and the review finds that there is too wide a variation in the quality of support to schools from the regional consortia, local authorities and Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC). In colleges, most learners consolidate their learning from school well and many make suitable progress in preparing for GCSE resits in English and maths. The report recommends that schools and colleges should provide stimulating tasks that develop learners' resilience and ensure that learners improve their writing in English and Welsh.

The 'new qualifications' and 'preparing for the DCF' thematic reports were complemented by national conferences, where HMI and case study schools shared the main messages and discussed teaching and learning practices.

Our subject-focused thematic reports look at *Religious Education* (Estyn, 2018d) and *Welsh at key stage 2 and key stage 3* (Estyn, 2018e). In addition to the curriculum topics, reviews have been undertaken in a range of sectors. Reports on *Youth support services in Wales* (Estyn, 2018f), *The quality of education and training for young people engaged with youth offending teams* (Estyn, 2018g), and *Higher apprenticeships in work-based learning* (Estyn, 2018h) reflect the breadth of Estyn's thematic work. The role of teachers and parents are featured in thematic reports looking at: *Involving parents – communication between schools and parents of school-aged children* (Estyn, 2018i) and *Improving teaching* (Estyn, 2018j).

Further reports cover the topics of *A Levels in schools and colleges* (Estyn, 2018k); *Mentoring in initial teacher education* (Estyn, 2018l); *Schools readiness to meet the demands of the new Additional Learning Needs Bill* (Estyn, 2018m); *The impact of the learning and skills measure on vulnerable learners* (Estyn, 2018n); *How best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils* (Estyn, 2018o); and *Effective use of managed moves by local authorities and schools* (Estyn, 2018p).

References

- Estyn (2018a). *Curriculum innovation in primary schools*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2018b). *Preparing for the digital competence framework*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2018c). *New qualifications*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2018d). *Religious education at key stage 2 and key stage 3*. Cardiff: Estyn.
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- Estyn (2018f). *Youth support services in Wales*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2018g). *The quality of education and training for young people engaged with youth offending teams*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2018h). *Higher apprenticeships in work-based learning*. Cardiff: Estyn.
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- Estyn (2018l). *Mentoring in initial teacher education*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2018m). *Schools readiness to meet the demands of the new Additional Learning Needs Bill*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2018n). *The impact of the learning and skills measure on vulnerable learners*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2018o). *How best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils*. Cardiff: Estyn.
- Estyn (2018p). *Effective use of managed moves by local authorities and schools*. Cardiff: Estyn.

Qualifications Wales

Qualifications Wales was established through the Qualifications Wales Act 2015 as the regulator of non-degree qualifications and the qualifications system in Wales. The Qualifications Wales Act sets out two principal aims for the organisation:

1. ensuring that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales;
2. promoting public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system.

Qualifications Wales is organised into four main areas of activity; Recognition and Approval, Monitoring and Compliance, Development

and Commissioning, and Policy and Research. The primary function of the research team is to provide an objective evidence base for regulatory and policy decision-making about qualifications in Wales through designing, commissioning and conducting research projects.

This brief report outlines some of the key research-related activities we have undertaken since our inception, alongside a summary of some of the activities planned for the forthcoming year.

1. In line with the second of our principal aims, we are undertaking a multi-stage project to explore **public confidence in qualifications and the qualification system in Wales**. The research involves both interviews with key stakeholders and a survey of the public in Wales. The first report from the qualitative study, *Confidence in Qualifications and the Qualifications System in Wales*, was published in Spring 2017 (York Consulting, 2017). We are due to report on the second wave of qualitative research with key stakeholders and the results from the public confidence survey in Autumn 2018.
2. **Review of vocational qualifications** – in 2015 we began a series of sector reviews that form the backbone of our Vocational Qualifications Strategy, (Qualifications Wales, 2017a). Each review includes large-scale engagement with key stakeholders including employers, sector bodies, teachers, learners and higher education representatives, as well as a technical examination of the current qualifications by sector experts and an international comparison study. To date we have completed three such reviews:
 - a. *Health and Social Care (including childcare and playwork)* (Qualifications Wales, 2016)
 - b. *Construction and the Built Environment* (Qualifications Wales, 2018)
 - c. *Information and Communication Technology (ICT)* – this report will be published in Autumn 2018We have recently begun a review of the Engineering, Advanced Manufacturing and Energy sector, which we anticipate reporting on in 2020.
3. In 2017 we commissioned a **review of the design and assessment model of the Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) and how it fits in the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) framework** (Engeli, Daly and Davidson, 2018). The review drew on a detailed analysis of the design of the SCC and evidence gathered from learners and teachers about their experience of the qualification. The review concluded that the SCC is an

innovative and valuable qualification but also identified some areas for development, including raising awareness and understanding of the qualification and considering ways in which the design can be simplified. A design group is being established to take forward the recommendations of the report and we have commissioned an online questionnaire to further our understanding of how the SCC is being delivered by centres in Wales.

4. **Approaches to early and multiple entry for GCSE examinations in Wales** – in 2017 we undertook research to gather information about the views and experiences of school and regional consortia staff with regards to early and multiple entry practices for GCSE examinations in Wales. The final report identified a wide range of interconnecting factors that can influence decisions about when, and how many times, learners are entered for examinations before the end of Year 11. The research also found that beliefs about the effectiveness and appropriateness of the practice varied across participants, (Qualifications Wales, 2017b).
5. **The reliability and rigour of non-examination assessment (NEA) in reformed GCSEs in Wales** – Non-examination assessment (NEA) refers to all forms of summative assessment within qualifications that do not consist of an externally set and marked written examination. We are currently speaking to teachers and learners in Wales to understand their experience and perceptions of NEA in light of the changing qualifications landscape and curriculum reform. This work is due to report in 2019.
6. **Exploring GCSE mathematics qualifications in Wales** – in 2019 we will be speaking to teachers to understand their approaches to examination entries in Mathematics qualifications as part of our wider organisational preparations for curriculum reform.
7. We will be soon conducting research into **teacher perceptions of reformed qualifications**. At the initial stage we will be exploring the views of teachers who teach the following GCSE subjects: Geography, Science (including separate sciences), Performing Arts (Music, Drama and Dance), English (language and literature), Welsh (language and literature), Maths (Maths and Maths Numeracy) and Modern Foreign Languages (MFL).
8. Qualifications Wales is also developing a suite of **regular statistical publications** describing the qualifications system in Wales. These publications are tagged as ‘statistics’ on the publications section of our website.

Project updates and published outputs will be available on the Research and Statistics page of the Qualifications Wales website: (www.qualificationswales.org).

References:

- Engeli, A., Daly, C. and Davidson, C. (2018). *A review of the design and assessment model of the Skills Challenge Certificate, and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate*. Newport: Qualifications Wales. [Online]. Available from: <https://qualificationswales.org/media/3311/review-of-scc-final-report-e.pdf> (Accessed 01/10/18).
- Qualifications Wales (2016). *Sector Review of Qualifications and the Qualification System in Health and Social Care, including child care and play work*. Newport: Qualifications Wales. [Online]. Available from: <https://qualificationswales.org/media/1904/hsc-report-2016-e.pdf> (Accessed 01/10/18).
- Qualifications Wales (2017a). *Vocational Qualifications Strategy*. Newport: Qualifications Wales. [Online]. Available from: <https://qualificationswales.org/media/2270/vocational-qualifications-strategy-eng.pdf> (Accessed 01/10/18).
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Welsh Government

During this Assembly Term, research is continuing to play an important role for the Welsh Government. This includes informing education policy developments, evaluating reforms and increasing evidence-informed practice in our education settings in Wales.

Schools

Previous updates in this journal set out the OECD's 2017 recommendation to strengthen the link between evidence, research and policy to support improvement in schools. In response the strategic plan for school education *Education in Wales: Our National Mission*¹ has research embedded within its four enabling objectives:

- Developing a high-quality education profession;
- Inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards;
- Strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being; and
- Robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system.

The plan clearly states that ensuing policies will be developed in partnership, on the basis of sound evidence and evaluated effectively at all stages.

Our commitment to education research is underpinned by the following goals:

- build the knowledge, expertise and research base of a self-improving system by supporting collaborations within and between schools, regional consortia and higher education institutions (HEIs) and committing to sharing research evidence and effective practice across the system
- increase HEI-school engagement beyond Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and build on the role of HEIs in supporting a research-engaged profession, and
- a commitment to ensure that policy is evidence-driven and its implementation is open to regular evaluation.

To assess progress there is a commitment to 'measure the growth of educational research in Wales to better support collaborations'.

Work on this area was advanced following the joint conference with the British Educational Research Association in November 2018. The conference provided a platform for the education community in Wales to discuss and share ideas about the opportunities for research and evidence-informed practice in this evolving context.

In the coming year, it is envisaged that our programme for schools research and statistics will also include the following:

- Continuation of collaborative work to co-construct an Education Research Strategy for Wales. This research strategy will cover the following dimensions:
 - research and its role in evidence-based policy-making and implementation in the Welsh Government;
 - evidence-informed school improvement (including the middle tier²);
 - engagement with HEIs and ITE providers to build research capacity; and
 - evidence-informed practice in school leadership, teaching and learning.
- Core analytical work to support the Education Directorate within the Welsh Government:
 - research and evaluation to support the development and implementation of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements;
 - research to inform the National Approach to Professional Learning;
 - a range of studies to support the reforms to Initial Teacher Education maximising the use of data from the Millennium Cohort Study in Wales;
 - evaluation of key priorities within 'Our National Mission';
 - a focus on well-being in partnership with the Schools Health Research Network;
 - annual data collections and a wide range of publications relating to school census, national tests, national curriculum assessments, school performance, attendance and exclusions, national categorisation of schools; and
 - consideration of data requirements related to accountability.

Post-compulsory Education and Skills

Research and statistical work in post-compulsory education and skills is focusing on two areas of major reform in the sector and supporting the key strategies driving forward the work of the Welsh Government.

We continue to support the implementation of reforms agreed following the Diamond Review of Higher Education funding and student finance arrangements³. Most recently this has involved:

- A scoping exercise to provide evidence to support the development of an overseas study pilot and explore the practicalities of extending the new student support package being introduced in 2018/19 to students wishing to study beyond the UK and EU. The report⁴, published in July

2018, reviewed the available evidence on the characteristics and patterns of study of Welsh-domiciled students who study part of their degree abroad. It also reviewed a variety of models for overseas study and put forward a range of options for Welsh Government to appraise for extending the student support package to be considered, from full degree portability to short-term study options.

- Drafting plans to evaluate the impact of the key student support reforms, and commissioning a peer review to critically appraise and review the proposed approach. The outcomes of the peer review will be published early in 2019.
- Early discussions with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales on the evaluation of the new Degree Apprenticeships pilot. The first of which is being introduced from September 2018. This was a key element of the Apprenticeship Skills Policy Plan published in February 2017 which focuses on aligning the apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy.⁵

The proposed establishment of a single, strategic authority responsible for regulation, oversight, funding and governance in post-compulsory education and training and research has to date received widespread support⁶. This would require extensive changes to the law and researchers and statisticians are preparing the impact assessments which must accompany a bill upon introduction to the National Assembly. This work involves:

- development of cost models to assess potential administrative costs;
- commissioning a study exploring wider and longer term benefits and impacts; and
- consultation with stakeholders about potential effects and outcomes.

Core analytical work is also being driven by the Welsh Government's National Strategy *Prosperity for All*⁷ and the plans that flow from it, particularly the *Employability Plan*⁸ and *Economic Action Plan*.⁹

We will be evaluating new services such as the Employment Advice Gateway to be delivered by Careers Wales and the Working Wales programme. This service will provide holistic support to adults on their journey into employment and young people on their journey into further education or employment.

Responding to the evidence needs of the Fair Work Commission and those working on policy to support employability for those aged over 50

will involve data collection, analysis and research. A key vehicle for some of this data collection will be the National Survey for Wales¹⁰, a Welsh Government survey which involves over 11,000 people each year.

Our support for the Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate of the Welsh Government also encompasses improvements in labour market data and analysis and evaluation of individual programmes and initiatives. Examples are:

- ongoing evaluation of the flagship Apprenticeships programme;
- evaluation of the Seren Network, which supports sixth formers to achieve their potential and go to leading universities, and will also be rolled out to key stages 3 and 4 from September 2018; and
- Further development of consistent attainment and destination measures, including widening the analysis and impact of the destinations data.

WISERD

The past year has seen a number of developments for WISERD Education. Of particular importance has been the publication of two key reports. The first is the very thorough evaluation of the first five years of WISERD Education funded by HEFCW and undertaken by a team from the University of Oxford. That report, *Evaluation of WISERD Education*, can be downloaded from the HEFCW website (www.hefcw.ac.uk). It contains a really balanced account of the successes and challenges of the WISERD Education initiative and we believe it contains a number of important recommendations for taking education research capacity-building forward.

We have also published an account of what we see as the major achievements of WISERD Education – *WISERD Education: Changing the landscape of educational research in Wales* – which has been widely distributed to key stakeholders and which has received positive feedback. It can be downloaded from the WISERD website (www.wiserd.ac.uk).

Despite these successes, we still need to work hard to ensure the sustainability of our capacity-building activities and the continuation of the WISERD Education Multi-cohort study – which is growing into a really valuable resource for researchers.

In this brief report, we outline some of the key activities from the past year:

Funded projects

Since the last update, we have received funding for the following projects:

- Evaluation of the Seren Network (with OB3, funded by the Welsh Government);
- Overseas Study Pilot (with OB3, funded by the Welsh Government);
- Successful Futures for All? (with partners in Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff Metropolitan, South Wales and UWTSD, funded by HEFCW and the Welsh Government);
- Evaluation of the Super Ambassadors Initiative (funded by the Children's Commissioner for Wales); and
- Disparities in rates of permanent exclusion from schools across the UK (funded by the John Fell Foundation in collaboration with the University of Oxford).

Events

WISERD Education has delivered research papers at the following conferences, including:

- BSA Annual Conference (April 2018 University of Newcastle);
- AERA Annual Meeting (April 2018, New York);
- WISERD Annual Conference, (July 2018, University of South Wales);
- A Child's World (July 2018, Aberystwyth University);
- BERA Annual Conference (September 2018 University of Newcastle); and
- ECER (September 2018, University of Bolzano, Italy).

In November 2018, we organised an event to celebrate the WISERD Education Multi-Cohort Study. *Growing up in Wales* showcased some of the most significant and interesting issues facing children and young people in Wales to an audience of practitioners, policy-makers and researchers.

Publications

We continue to publish from the WISERD Education Multi-Cohort Study (WMCS) data. Recent publications using these data include:

Power, S. and Taylor, C. 2018. Not in the classroom, but still on the register: Hidden forms of school exclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* (10.1080/13603116.2018.1492644)

- Power, S. 2018. The mainstreaming of charities into schools. *Oxford Review of Education* (10.1080/03054985.2018.1438255)
- Connolly, M., Milton, E.-J., Davies, A. J. & Barrance, R. 2018. Turning Heads: the impact of political reform on the professional role, identity and recruitment of head teachers in Wales. *British Educational Research Journal* (10.1002/berj.3450)
- Barrance, R. and Elwood, J. 2018. National assessment policy reform 14–16 and its consequences for young people: student views and experiences of GCSE reform in Northern Ireland and Wales. *Assessment in Education* (10.1080/0969594X.2017.1410465)

As always, we think it's really important that the WMCS data are used and would love to hear from anyone who thinks they might be interested in exploring its potential for their own use. At the time of writing, the survey questions and data are being made available through the WISERD Data Portal. Do have a look. The Dashboard can be reached at <http://data.wiserd.ac.uk/> where you will find a link to WISERD Education.

Notes

- 1 <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/education-in-wales-our-national-mission.pdf>.
- 2 Local authorities, regional consortia, regulatory and inspection bodies.
- 3 <https://beta.gov.wales/review-higher-education-funding-and-student-finance-arrangements-final-report>.
- 4 <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/overseas-study-pilot/?lang=en>.
- 5 <https://beta.gov.wales/apprenticeships-skills-policy-plan>.
- 6 <https://beta.gov.wales/tertiary-education-and-research-commission-wales>.
- 7 <https://gov.wales/newsroom/firstminister/2017/170919-new-national-strategy-for-a-more-prosperous-wales/?lang=en>.
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- 10 <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-survey/?lang=en>.