Developing a new data and information ecosystem that supports the reformed school system in Wales: findings from a research study: Welsh Government response

Our response to the research study report on developing a new data and information ecosystem that supports the school system.

First published: 18 January 2023

Last updated: 6 March 2023

Contents

Background

Through its enabling objective 4, **Education Wales: Our National Mission** committed to creating robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improved system, through the use of evidence-based approaches.

The **School improvement guidance** sets out how data and information should be used for the purposes of self-evaluation and improvement; accountability; and transparency. In all cases, the use of evidence should contribute to supporting all learners in making progress so that they achieve their full potential, and tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage on attainment and progression.

On 19 January 2023, the Welsh Government published the Government's Social Research report (GSR), produced by Social Finance, **Developing a new data and information ecosystem that supports the reformed school system in Wales – findings from a research study**. This report presents findings and recommendations relating to the data and information needs of the school system in Wales and the development of a new data and information ecosystem that underpins the curriculum and assessment reforms.

Below is the Welsh Government's initial response to the report and recommendations. The report provides us with an important body of evidence to inform design of a balanced and sustainable system, in which quality data and information is available and used effectively – in a way that works for schools and wider stakeholders' own unique settings and contexts and aligns with the aspirations across the programme of reform, placing learners at the centre of decision making.

Summary of Findings

The aim of this study is to propose a new school data and information ecosystem for Wales, that draws on a broader range of data and information to support the three functions of self-evaluation and improvement, accountability, and transparency.

Following engagement across the school system, the report details an understanding and mapping of stakeholders' use of, and need for, data and information, identifying gaps and challenges, and areas for changes and improvement. Alongside this, the research draws on relevant international policy and practice, and key learnings that could inform recommendations for Wales.

The report makes 13 recommendations across the following four categories:

1. general principles
2. specific changes
3. KS4 qualifications outcomes data
4. continuing to evolve the ecosystem

which are based on the criteria of

- balancing competing stakeholder needs
- good practice principles of using any indicators in context
- parity between curriculum and ecosystem – balancing the need for data with what is considered important for our learners
- minimising burdens
- promoting a culture of self-evaluation and improvement
- seeking a holistic understanding – reflecting the breadth of learner experience

It proposes fundamental principles that would underpin the whole information

ecosystem, cutting across the range of policies and provision, as well as indicating where there are specific gaps or changes needed in the available evidence base to enable holistic evaluation at all tiers of the school system.

Recommendations

The report makes 13 recommendations relating to the following areas:

1. Types of indicators
2. Approach to sharing school-level data
3. Using sampling to answer policy questions
4. Transparency and communication with the public
5. Understanding key learner skills
6. Supporting consistent approaches to learner progression
7. Learner well-being and voice
8. Staff wellbeing
9. Contextualising school indictors and ability to interrogate equity impacts
10. Greater transparency with school communities
11. Revise Key Stage 4 indicators and data sharing
12. Roadmap for building a culture of self-evaluation and improvement
13. Approach to ongoing review and development of the ecosystem

Additionally, the following 2 areas (which sat outside the scope of the study) are highlighted as needing further consideration:

1. Improving data quality for indicators of learner behaviour and attitude to learning
2. Learner voice in destinations data

Welsh Government Response

The Welsh Government accepts:

- the validity and aspirations of these findings and recommendations as a valuable contribution to Welsh Government's thinking and development of a data and information ecosystem that is embedded in the values of the Curriculum for Wales
- the relevance and quality of the study, demonstrated by its methods, appropriate focus of enquiry and governance arrangements

The Welsh Government will:

- fully consider the recommendations and how they can be applied to a data and information ecosystem that supports the ambitions of Curriculum for Wales and underpins the aims of all school education policy, whilst balancing the varying needs of different stakeholders
- draw on the report to design a data and information ecosystem based on firm principles, that can continuously develop as reform embeds in the school system and education policy continues to evolve
- draw on the recommendations to improve ways in which we can contextualise data to i) support its interpretation, and ii) better analyse the impact of poverty and other barriers faced by learners and the effectiveness of support arrangements for more disadvantaged young people
- continue to work in partnership with our stakeholders to work through these recommendations in detail and take forward the appropriate programme of work
- conduct further enquiry with specific groups where it would be beneficial to greater understanding of specific issues

Next steps

The Welsh Government will be establishing a practitioner group to begin reflecting on these findings, ensuring that solutions are co-constructed and that learners and their progression are at the very centre of our information eco-system.

We will ensure that proposals align with wider policy aspirations and Programme for Government aims. We will also give attention to links to other key research projects, such as the **Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales: final report**, the planned programme of monitoring and evaluation of the reforms and also the Evaluation of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) System, to ensure our approach is cohesive.

The findings of this study will also inform the evaluation plan to be published in summer term 2023 that will detail planned research, evaluation, and monitoring activity which will enable us to understand and describe improvement or change in educational standards across Wales under Curriculum for Wales. We will develop our programme of work in response to these recommendations alongside this.