School development plans

Audience
This document is aimed at governing bodies of maintained schools (including pupil referral units and nurseries) in Wales. Headteachers and school staff, HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training, local authorities and regional consortia will also have an interest.

Overview
This document provides guidance on the Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014 that came into force on 27 October 2014. It is intended to support schools in embedding a robust strategic planning approach to delivering improvements in learner outcomes.

Action required
All schools are required to comply with the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014 by 1 September 2015.

Further information
Enquiries about this document should be directed to:
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Additional copies
This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government’s website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Related documents
Introduction

The Minister for Education and Skills has set out a challenging and ambitious programme for educational reform in Wales. Raising standards of education and improving learner outcomes is at the heart of the programme.

Sustainable school improvement is supported by effective short- and long-term planning, which is linked to challenging targets. Planning for improvement is a disciplined process involving honest self-evaluation using qualitative and quantitative data. This is reflected in a continuous cycle in which a school will reflect upon its performance, identify priorities for improvement, develop strategies to address them, take action, and review progress and impact.

Estyn’s annual report for 2012–13 concludes that self-evaluation and planning for improvement could be improved in just over a quarter of those schools in Wales inspected. Therefore, we know that many schools already have robust self-evaluation and effective school development planning processes in place and we do not wish to constrain those schools. This guidance is intended to support all schools in embedding a robust, evidence-based approach to planning which leads to positive changes in learner outcomes and which reflects existing best practice in schools in Wales.

The Welsh Ministers have made the Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014 (‘the Regulations’). The Regulations relate to the preparation of school development plans (SDPs), including the matters to be addressed in a SDP, the period covered by the SDP, the requirements for reviewing and updating the SDP, and the arrangements for publishing the SDP.

We recognise schools may already use alternative titles for their SDP such as ‘school improvement plan’. ‘School development plan’ is used here as a generic title to apply to the document a school has in place to meet the requirements of the SDP Regulations. Schools are free to use whatever title they feel appropriate so long as the document meets the requirements of the Regulations.

Throughout this document references are made to individual Regulations of the Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014. These references appear in brackets, for example (Regulation 3), and have been included for ease of reference. The Regulations can be found on the Welsh Government’s website at www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/school-development-plans/?lang=en.
Purpose of a school development plan

The school development plan (SDP) is the school’s strategic plan for improvement. It sets out the actions a school will take to improve learner outcomes. A SDP will be informed by the regular self-evaluation a school undertakes of its own performance and contextual data, and will contain the school’s improvement priorities together with short- and longer-term targets. The school’s priorities will include how the school is addressing the national priorities of:

- raising the standards of education in relation to literacy
- raising the standards of education in relation to numeracy
- reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

The SDP will set out how the school will achieve its targets, in relation to its priorities, and how it will use the resources it has available, including funding. It must also set out how the school intends to develop its staff (including those temporarily placed at the school) in order to meet the school’s priorities and targets.

In setting out the overall plan for improvement for the three years ahead, the SDP will contain sufficient detail to enable actions to address the priorities for the current school year to be identified and implemented, along with high level priorities and targets for years two and three. It is a live document that should be regularly refreshed to reflect the school’s progress in meeting its priorities, taking account of the latest performance data.

The SDP should be easily accessible and used as a common reference point by all staff and governors in reflecting upon and improving their work and need not contain more detail than is necessary to fulfil its primary purpose. The quality of planning should be judged in terms of its impact on improvement rather than the volume of detail it contains.

As part of the national model for regional working the SDP will also serve a key role in informing the engagement of Challenge Advisers in their ‘challenge and support’ role with schools, and be a means whereby local authorities and regional consortia have a clear single reference point for schools’ planned improvement activities.
Roles and responsibilities

Governing bodies are responsible for promoting high standards of educational achievement in maintained schools\(^1\). The headteacher is responsible for the management and control of the school\(^2\) and, alongside the governing body, is key to leading the work of the school and its capacity for improvement.

The Regulations place a duty upon the governing body to prepare (Regulation 3), monitor, review and revise (Regulation 6) a SDP. By being responsible for its preparation and revision, the governing body will be responsible for agreeing and ‘signing off’ the SDP. The matters that must be dealt with in a SDP are set out in the Schedule to the Regulations (Regulation 4).

Although the governing body holds overall responsibility for the SDP, in practice the headteacher will work with the staff and governing body in producing the SDP and will be responsible for implementing the necessary actions and strategies to bring about improvement.

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\(^1\) School governors’ guide to the law, chapter 2 ‘Governing Bodies: Their Powers, Duties and Relationships’ (Welsh Government, 2012).

Characteristics of effective school development planning

This guidance sets out an approach to school development planning, but is not intended to be unduly prescriptive. Each school will be at a different point on its improvement journey and what works well in one school may not be appropriate for another.

Key to school improvement is effective school development planning, which will be set in the context of the school’s long-term vision and have the following key characteristics.

• The impact on learner outcomes will be seen as the measure of its effectiveness rather than the production of the plan itself.

• All school partners and stakeholders will be involved in identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

• Self-evaluation of school provision and performance and contextual data will inform the plan.

• It will focus on both short- and long-term priorities and actions that will raise standards and improve outcomes for all learners, regardless of their background.

• It will provide a context for the performance management process for all staff.

• It will be an ongoing process that is reflected in the status of the SDP as a ‘live document’.

In their self-evaluation manuals³, Estyn identifies key characteristics of effective SDPs. Further information on this can be found on Estyn’s website at www.estyn.gov.uk/english/inspection/inspection-guidance.

School development planning cycle

This section provides an overview of a school development planning cycle and reflects the approach already taken by many schools that set priorities and targets based on honest and robust self-evaluation. In these schools this leads to a SDP that, when effectively implemented, brings about tangible improvement. Integral to this approach is the ongoing review and evaluation that forms a key element of the planning cycle.

Schools are bound by existing legislation which will affect the content and timetable for school development planning. The School Performance and Absence Targets (Wales) Regulations 2011 place a duty on governing bodies to set and submit specified performance targets to the local authority by 31 December each year. The School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations 2011 require schools to have a performance management policy in operation. Through the performance management process, individual development needs are identified that align with the school’s priorities for improvement. The Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014 specify that the SDP period will be three years and the first must begin no later than 1 September 2015 (Regulation 5(2)).

In practical terms this means that by 1 September 2015 a school must have in place a SDP that, as a minimum, is fully compliant with the requirements of the Regulations.

However, it is for individual schools to determine the cycle of self-evaluation and development planning that works best for them (Regulation 5(1)) within the confines of the timescales outlined above.

The SDP is required to function as a rolling three-year plan (Regulation 5(3)). A SDP will therefore always cover a three-year period from the date of preparation or last update. Year one of the plan will contain detailed priorities, targets and strategies; years two and three will capture high level priorities and targets.

Figure 1 sets out a typical improvement cycle of self-evaluation, planning, implementation and review set against the school’s long-term vision.
Vision

The school development planning cycle is set against a clear vision of what the school is aspiring to achieve. A clear vision will set the context for the SDP. In order for the school to make sustained improvements and move forward it needs to have a clear purpose that is shared and understood by all. In setting its vision, a school should consider the context in which it operates and agree a vision that is both motivational and achievable, and is underpinned by solid practical strategies.
Stage 1: Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is the means by which schools reflect upon their performance and use it as a basis for sustainable improvement planning. The process of self-evaluation and improvement planning is central to supporting advances in school improvement, professional learning and learner outcomes. As an annual process, self-evaluation is a key tool in assisting a school to assess its performance. It helps schools to identify:

- how well they are performing
- areas of strength
- what needs to be improved
- what actions to take to make those improvements.

During the year, schools will assess their progress against set targets/milestones as part of their regular monitoring arrangements.

It is important to note that school development planning is not only a process for identifying and addressing a school’s development needs. Identifying strengths, building on these and celebrating and sharing best practice, both within school and more widely, is a crucial part of system-wide improvement.

Estyn has highlighted the importance of schools carrying out self-evaluation to identify their strengths and areas for development and has identified a strong correlation between school self-evaluation that focuses on impact and outcomes, and improvements in educational experiences and outcomes for learners.

Schools have access to a range of data to support the school development planning process, including data in relation to specific groups of learners, e.g. those eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs (ALN). Schools also have access to benchmarking data so that they can compare themselves against both the best performing schools and those within their family of schools. Schools should make use of existing data systems to avoid duplication and additional bureaucracy. Robust self-evaluation will be informed by the effective use of qualitative and quantitative data. Further information on using data effectively can be found on the Welsh Government’s website at www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/schooldata/ims/usingdataeffectively/?lang=en

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Qualitative data will include:

- inspection reports relating to the school
- information relating to learners’ well-being.

It could also include information obtained from consultation with learners, parents/carers, staff, and outside organisations and agencies that the school may be working with as part of the wider community engagement.

Quantitative data will include:

- any school comparative information and the attainment results of learners at the school (Regulation 8) – the all-Wales core data set will prove a useful source of information, as will the end of Foundation Phase assessment information
- school banding information
- tracking information on learners’ progress
- National School Categorisation System
- PISA
- wider contextual factors, e.g. socio-economic, linguistic, enrolment trends, facilities at school
- school workforce absence information
- young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS) data.

Other diagnostic approaches, such as those used in the National Support Programme (NSP), Schools Challenge Cymru and other improvement programmes, may also contribute to self-evaluation.

In their self-evaluation manuals, Estyn provides three key questions for schools to work through during the process of self-evaluation.

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know?
- How can we improve things further?
Further information is available on Esty’s website at www.estyn.gov.uk/english/inspection/inspection-guidance.

Schools may also find it helpful to refer to the learning pack on professional enquiry, Introduction to teachers' professional enquiry, which is available on the Learning Wales website at www.learning.wales.gov.uk/learningpacks. The learning pack provides useful advice and guidance on self-evaluation using data.

Having undertaken a robust and honest process of self-evaluation, areas of strength and areas for development will have been identified. While the areas for development will ultimately become the focus for inclusion in the SDP, as previously mentioned it is also important that areas of strength are identified and shared to help stimulate system-wide change.

**Stage 2: Strategic planning**

For school development planning to be most effective, it should involve all school partners and stakeholders; this is essential in ensuring that everyone has a commitment to the school’s improvement agenda. In preparing a SDP, the governing body must consult with the headteacher (who in the majority of cases is a member of the governing body), school staff, learners, parents/carers and others involved in the life and work of the school, e.g. local authority, regional consortia challenge adviser, other schools, community, etc. (Regulation 9). Some schools serve a much wider area than the locality in which the school is situated, for example Welsh-medium schools, faith schools and special schools, and the governing body must ensure that they work with the wider community that the school serves. Each school will determine how this will be done, but this is a crucial part of the school development planning process and will help promote a sense of ownership and collaborative working towards improvement.

Schools may currently produce a number of plans as part of the planning process which may include, for example, a SDP, a staff development plan, spending plans for grant funding, a post-inspection action plan (PIAP) and/or a plan for ensuring that the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) is embedded in the curriculum.

Schools only need one strategic improvement plan. The SDP should be the single means of capturing the school’s improvement priorities.
and strategies and functions as a starting point for any external challenge, support and interventions. The SDP provides a means for streamlining schools’ strategic planning processes and avoiding unnecessary duplication and additional bureaucracy. It should therefore not be necessary to have separate plans in place such as spending plans for grants – these should form an integral part of the SDP which will reflect the circumstances the school is in at any point in time.

However, following an Estyn inspection, there is an existing legal requirement to produce a written statement or post-inspection action plan (PIAP), as it is commonly known, setting out how the school proposes to address the recommendations highlighted in the inspection report\(^5\). The PIAP needs to be prepared within 20 working days\(^6\) and distributed to relevant parties as specified in law. The SDP Regulations specify that the SDP must be revised following an inspection to take account of inspection findings, recommendations and proposed actions.

It is up to schools to determine how best to meet these legal requirements, but information relevant to inspection could be drawn from the SDP (which has been revised following the inspection) into an annex which could be published as the PIAP. In this way the PIAP becomes part of the SDP.

**Contents of a SDP (the Schedule to the SDP Regulations)**

It is important to note that the Regulations specify the minimum requirements for SDPs. Schools that already have effective SDPs which exceed the minimum requirements will not necessarily need to amend their approach but should satisfy themselves that their planning process is not unduly burdensome. Schools may use their own format and style of SDP which suits their particular needs but are encouraged to share effective approaches.

**School improvement priorities (paragraph 1 of the Schedule)**

The governing body, headteacher and school staff should work together to determine how the areas for development identified through self-evaluation should be prioritised. Schools may wish to consult with their challenge adviser during this process and, in some

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\(^6\) In relation to schools in ‘significant improvement’ or ‘special measures’, Welsh Ministers may direct preparation of the PIAP in a shorter timescale.
circumstances, regional consortia may require challenge advisers to work closely with schools during this process. Schools should set challenging but realistic priorities for the next three years; in detail for the current school year and high level for the following two years. The school priorities must include how the national priorities are being addressed.

**School improvement targets, expected outcomes and strategy (paragraph 2 of the Schedule)**

Once the priorities have been identified, the governing body must approve the school’s agreed targets, the expected outcomes as a result of achieving those targets and strategies to meet them. Targets for improvement must be quantifiable (where appropriate) and suitably challenging.

In identifying their strategies schools should both consider how they can build on their existing strengths and learn from those of other schools. Schools should be alert to opportunities to work collaboratively and share best practice.

Clear success criteria should be developed, against which intended improvements can be evaluated. Schools may wish to develop suitable milestones to measure and evaluate progress during the year. Outcomes should focus on the core purpose of school development planning, raising standards and improving outcomes for all learners.

**Professional development strategy (paragraph 3 of the Schedule)**

It is widely recognised that the quality of teaching is the single most important factor in helping learners achieve. Schools therefore need to ensure that those who either teach, support teaching or lead teaching have the necessary skills and experience to provide high-quality teaching.

The SDP must contain details of the school’s provision for addressing the professional development needs of all staff, including leadership development, in relation to achieving the school improvement priorities. These provisions also include staff temporarily placed at the school which will include short- and long-term supply teachers. Schools’ provision for supporting the professional development of these practitioners will naturally reflect the nature of their tenure and deployment.
Estyn has found a common feature of excellent leadership resulting in excellent teaching is professional development that is focused on the national priorities for improvement, and on developing individual skills and expertise in the context of school priorities.

The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring that all practitioners have access to career-long professional learning that is effective, sustainable and linked to national priorities. This approach is underpinned by the practice, review and development model (PRD) that integrates professional standards, performance management and professional development to ensure that professional learning is focussed on school improvement priorities and is tailored to address individual needs. Existing Regulations (the School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations 2011) require that schools have a performance management policy in operation.

The Welsh Government’s national professional learning model (PLM) sets out the key characteristics of effective approaches to professional development that have been informed by the latest academic research, and which have been proven to positively impact on classroom practice. These include:

- coaching and mentoring
- use of data and evidence of what works well
- effective collaboration
- reflective practice.

The PLM will be used in conjunction with the performance management process and the professional standards to ensure practitioners’ professional development needs are firmly linked to priorities, as contained in the SDP, and are met in the most appropriate and effective way.

International research also demonstrates that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. Headteachers are required to meet the Leadership Standards in full.

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8 Seven strong claims about successful school leadership (National College for School Leadership, 2006).
For other practitioners, teachers and support staff the Leadership Standards can be used as a tool to support ongoing leadership development. Leadership at all levels should be nurtured and developed to increase the leadership capacity of the school and build effective leaders for the future. The Leadership Standards should underpin all forms of leadership development and the interactive Individual Leadership Review (ILR) tool enables practitioners to review their own practice against the standards and identify areas and opportunities for development. Schools should support and encourage this engagement with the standards and ILR and look to provide leadership development opportunities which meet both the needs of individual practitioners and the improvement priorities of the school.

In determining a school’s approach to the professional development of its staff, consideration should be given to adopting strategies that minimise the negative impact of teachers’ absence from the classroom on learner progress. This should be balanced with the need to provide high-quality professional learning experiences and schools will need to carefully assess the impact of their provision so they are confident they achieve the optimum balance.

As part of wider professional learning, schools may also wish to consider how they can work in partnership with initial teacher training providers to develop practice in high-quality mentoring during practical teaching placements.

As part of the delivery arrangements for school improvement under the national model for regional working, professional development is a key priority for regional consortia. From September 2014, it has been expected that regional consortia will work together to establish consistent provision across Wales to support improved teaching, including recognising outstanding practice, and effective leadership development.

In supporting the effective use of grant funding, regional consortia are expected to ensure that practitioners’ professional development, including developing effective leadership at all levels in schools, forms a key element of meeting school improvement priorities and in supporting the delivery of national priorities. Regional consortia

9 The ILR can be found at www.learning.wales.gov.uk/yourcareer/leadershipdevelopment/individual-leadership-review/?lang=en
are expected to promote a cultural change away from investment in limited, low impact ‘one-off’ courses for individuals and towards more effective and collaborative forms of professional learning. Engagement with regional consortia challenge advisers will be critical in ensuring successful integration of grant spending plans in the SDP. Where required, the challenge adviser will provide advice and support on how best to utilise the grant to support the school’s improvement priorities.

Moving forward, the Welsh Government will continue to work with regional consortia to consider how to rationalise the administration of grant funding to reduce administrative burdens and free up more resource to support high-quality professional learning. Schools will also need to ensure they are getting best value for money by directing funding at activities that are known to have the greatest impact.

**Working with the community (paragraph 4 of the Schedule)**

As previously mentioned, for school development planning to be most effective, it should involve all school partners and stakeholders. The SDP must contain details of how the governing body will work with the wider school community, e.g. parents/carers of learners at the school, local residents, other schools, agencies and businesses, in seeking to achieve the school improvement priorities.

**School staff and school resources (paragraph 5 of the Schedule)**

This section deals with how the school deploys its staff and other resources. Resources will include, but are not limited to, funding, equipment, school buildings and grounds, etc.

A key factor in delivering school improvement is ensuring that the right people with the right skills are in the right place at the right time to achieve short- and long-term organisational objectives.

Workforce planning is a continuous process that is integral to school development planning. It enables schools to maximise their resources and build current and future capacity in a structured and planned way, and ensures succession planning is effective. Schools should consider the skills and capacity of their workforce and other resources available to them in order to deliver their school improvement priorities and targets. This will link closely with the school’s plans to develop its staff so it has available a workforce with the necessary skills and experience to meet learners’ needs.
When planning for the current school year, the headteacher and governors will already be aware of the staff and funding resources they have available. The SDP must set out how the governing body will utilise available resources to best meet their school improvement targets.

The SDP must always cover a period of three years. For years two and three of the plan, governing bodies will need to capture how they intend to utilise existing and anticipated resources to meet their school improvement targets. Consideration of longer term provision supports a more proactive approach to ensuring the best use is made of resources and allows a longer period of time in which to re-configure resources where this is felt necessary to meet targets.

**Previous targets (paragraph 6 of the Schedule)**

The governing body is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the progress in meeting targets and is required to include a statement within the SDP setting out the extent to which the school improvement targets for the previous school year were met. If targets were not met, a brief statement must be included as to the reason for that and any corrective action to be taken should be outlined. This statement should not include any reference (direct or indirect) to individual staff.

Schools should evaluate the effectiveness of targets that have been achieved, in terms of raising standards and improving outcomes for all learners.

**Stage 3: Making improvement/action**

The next stage of the school development planning cycle is to put into practice the actions and strategies outlined in the SDP.

The school staff will have been consulted during the preparation and revision of the SDP and will be aware of their responsibilities in implementing the actions necessary to bring about improvement. High-quality leadership at all levels is crucial in sustaining the involvement and commitment of staff throughout the development process in order for the SDP to be implemented efficiently and effectively.

It is important that the SDP contains clear details of responsibilities, accountability, actions and timescales in order to avoid confusion, duplication and to ensure the most effective use of resources.
Stage 4: Reviewing impact

SDPs should be considered as live documents that are regularly monitored during the development cycle and formally reviewed and revised at least annually.

The governing body must monitor, review and update the school development plan annually (as a minimum) or following an Estyn inspection, whichever is sooner (Regulation 6). This will ensure that the school’s improvement planning and strategies reflect the up-to-date context of the school. If the SDP is to be revised following an inspection, it must be done so within the required timescale as set out in The Education (School Inspection) (Wales) Regulations 2006.
Publication and accessibility of the SDP

It is important that the whole school and wider community are aware of the school’s plans to bring about improvement.

Once formally prepared or revised, the governing body is required to provide copies of the SDP to each member of the governing body and school staff (Regulation 7).

Parents/carers and the community are an important asset in raising standards and improving learner outcomes, and schools will have already engaged with them in preparing the SDP. Governing bodies must make a summary copy of the SDP available via the School Governors Annual Report (Regulation 11 of the Regulations amends the School Governors’ Annual Reports (Wales) Regulations 2001 to include provision to that effect). A summary will include high level priorities, targets and actions for the current academic year.
Support and challenge

The Welsh Government is working with local authorities and regional consortia to support governing bodies, school leaders and practitioners in raising standards and improving learner outcomes.

The establishment of challenge advisers in regional consortia as part of the national model for regional working is a key element in meeting local authority and regional consortia responsibilities to raise standards of school performance and share effective practice. The SDP will therefore provide a focus for engagement with schools; challenge advisers will challenge and support schools in identifying and implementing the actions necessary to bring about improvements. Challenge advisers will play a critical role in linking schools to the support available from, and through, regional consortia. The SDP will serve the same purpose for those schools and challenge advisers participating in Schools Challenge Cymru Programme.
Inspection

Aspects of Estyn’s Common Inspection Framework (CIF) focus on self-evaluation, strategic planning, and management of staff and resources; aspects which are a requirement of the SDP.

The starting point for inspections is the schools’ self evaluation and, among other things, Estyn will be looking for a clear link between self-evaluation, the school development plan and how self-evaluation and planning for improvement has had a positive impact on learner outcomes.

In terms of the information that is required by law following an inspection, please refer to page 11 of this guidance.
Further information

‘Self-evaluation; easy as 1, 2, 3’ film, Estyn  

**NFER self-evaluation toolkit: guidance for schools** (Welsh Government, 2014)  

**School Governors’ guide to the law** (Welsh Government, 2012)  
www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/schoolfundingandplanning/schoolgov/schoolgovguide/?lang=en

**Introduction to teachers’ professional enquiry. Masters in Education Practice (MEP) learning pack** (Welsh Government, 2014)  
www.learning.wales.gov.uk/learningpacks/mep/module1/?lang=en

Performance management guidance documents (Welsh Government, 2012)  
www.learning.wales.gov.uk/yourcareer/performancemanagement/pmguidance/?lang=en

**Common Inspection Framework** (Estyn, 2010)  
www.estyn.gov.uk/download/publication/11438.7/common-inspection-framework-from-september-2010/&rct=j&frm=1&q=&esrc=s&sa=U&ei=fkkhVO60CI2d7gbx44D4Cw&ved=0CBQQFjAA&usg=AFQjCNE62RzDAAuun88S6yKUt6519La7CQ

**Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools** (Welsh Government, 2014)  
Rewriting the future: Timeline governance and monitoring  
(Welsh Government, 2014)  
www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/rewriting-the-future-schools/?lang=en

**School teachers’ pay and conditions document 2014 and guidance on school teachers’ pay and conditions** (Department for Education, 2014)  

**National model for regional working** (Welsh Government, 2014)  