

WELSH GOVERNMENT INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Title of proposal:	Research into the data and information needs and uses in the school system in Wales
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Cabinet Secretary/Minister responsible:	Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams
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SECTION 1. WHAT ACTION IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSIDERING AND WHY?

In narrative form, please describe the issue and the action proposed by the Welsh Government. How have you applied / will you apply the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to the proposed action, throughout the policy and delivery cycle?

The school system in Wales is undergoing significant reform in response to the 2015 Successful Futures report on the independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements and the development of other Welsh Government policy priorities, such as Additional Learning Needs reform and Cymraeg 2050.

As the cornerstone of our collective effort to raise standards, the new curriculum will be reliant upon the alignment of four enabling objectives which must all be delivered effectively to have the transformational impact to which we aspire, as set out in *Our National Mission*.

In October 2020, we published an update to *Our National Mission*, which looked back on how we've moved forward together in our national mission and outlined the actions we will take to support the effective implementation of *Curriculum for Wales* in September 2022.

In terms of Enabling Objective 4 (*robust evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements, supporting a self-improving system*), the Welsh Government has recently launched a [consultation on non-statutory school improvement guidance, which sets out how the new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements will work in practice](#).

It is critical that these new arrangements are supported by a sound evidence base and an intelligent use of data, information and evidence to inform each function: in self-evaluation for improvement; accountability through effective governance; and transparency for the wider citizen, across all educational settings and spanning all agencies and tiers of the system.

At this time of significant change in the school system, the use of data and information needs therefore needs to be reviewed in terms of fitness for purpose for future arrangements in Wales.

Current challenges

Schools, local authorities, regional consortia and Welsh Government are data rich, but do not always currently use this information to drive improvement.

The data that is used under existing arrangements is often intended to serve multiple purposes e.g. assessing individual learner progress, self-evaluation processes, accountability processes and publication in a public arena as part of the approach to accountability and transparency. The same measures have also been used at different levels of the system, aggregated up where necessary at an authority, regional and national level. This has been a particular issue with performance measures based on independent external qualification outcomes at Key Stage 4.

A disproportionate focus on data out of context, alongside the pressure to maximise each school's performance measure outcomes, has resulted in some unintended consequences where the benefit of individual learners has not always been placed at the heart of decision making – issues such as a narrowing of schools' curriculum offers and impacts on the distribution of support and improvement planning. Additionally, most of the data used is based on an annual cycle, which can result in short term approaches.

Proposed action

The Welsh Government will commission research to establish an evidence base on the data and information that is used and needed to support effective evaluation, improvement and accountability throughout the school system, as set out in the October 2020 update to *Our National Mission*. The research will consider how all parts of the system have access to the most appropriate and useful data for the purposes they need it, looking at what is already available, what else is required or would be beneficial for each function, and how to access or source it.

This is towards the Welsh Government's vision for an 'ecosystem' of data and information at the heart of the above arrangements, where the data and information used is rich, broad and balanced to reflect the different aspects of the development of each learner, ensuring every learner gets equity. This is defined by the four purposes of the new curriculum in enabling our children and young people to be ambitious, capable learners; enterprising, creative contributors; ethical, informed citizens; and healthy, confident individuals.

In this way, and through the research project's evidence-based approach to supporting the new arrangements, it will contribute broadly across all seven well-being goals, with a particular focus on a prosperous, more equal and healthier Wales.

The project specification has been designed in accordance with the sustainable development principle and the 5 ways of working - it is designed to ensure prevention by identifying unintended consequences seen in elements of the current system, ensuring they are not repeated within the new arrangements. It will also look at the timing of data in order to capture existing weaknesses whereby most of the data used is based on an annual cycle, leading to shorter-term approaches in an effort to improve indicator scores each year.

It also designed with meaningful collaboration in mind, requiring expertise and involvement to be sought from throughout the school system, including the views of teachers, children, young people, parents and communities, and looking for international best practice. This will help foster that crucial sense of ownership and belief in the arrangements needed to achieve a consistent and enduring approach and appropriate application across the nation and all tiers.

This document assesses the impact of taking forward the research, looking at its objectives and the design of the project specification to achieve these. The most significant impacts are dependent on subsequent decisions and actions taken on the research findings - the Welsh Government has committed to develop a better system of collating and then providing data and information to support system improvement and this will be based on the findings of this research. The research is therefore an enabling factor to much wider positive impacts, which are broadly outlined throughout this document, but will be considered in detail once the research findings are available. Decisions and actions related to the implementation of outcomes from this research will be subject to a separate impact assessment, at the appropriate time.

SECTION 7. CONCLUSION

7.1 How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

The research project and specification have been designed in accordance with the 5 ways of working, with a strong focus on inclusive collaboration and involvement. We have sought input from key stakeholder groups in the development of the specification, including regional education consortia, Qualifications Wales, Estyn, Local Authorities and various Welsh Government departments.

The research itself will require further extensive engagement with a broad and representative sample of stakeholders from throughout the school system in Wales. The exact methods will be determined by the successful contractor, but may include, for example: interviews, group discussions, case studies etc., subject to relevant Covid-19 restrictions. A non-exhaustive list of stakeholders/representative groups that must be consulted is included within the specification.

There is a requirement for the schools involved to be representative of Wales in terms of their type (primary, secondary, through schools, special schools), the spectrum of school support needs (i.e. from high to low), medium of language used for teaching (Welsh, English, bilingual), geographical type (rural/urban/coastal), learner characteristics (e.g. levels of disadvantage) and governance types (e.g. faith / non-faith schools).

The successful contractor will also be required to engage with representatives of children, young people and parents / guardians in the research, using appropriate engagement techniques. Again, those involved must represent the diversity of people in Wales and areas within it including, for example, equalities protected characteristics, additional learning needs, area-based deprivation / socio-economic background and by the geographical type e.g. rural/ urban/coastal location.

This will help foster that crucial sense of ownership and belief in the arrangements needed to achieve a consistent approach and appropriate application across the nation and across all tiers.

7.2 What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

As this impact assessment is limited to the impacts of undertaking the research and the design of its specification, without further action it is likely to have a neutral impact across the board, with some minor positive impacts due to the inclusive, collaborative approach based on extensive engagement from throughout the school system in Wales. The more demonstrable positive impacts are anticipated from future actions on the subsequent

findings of the research, once available, but these will need to be considered in detail once they are available.

It is important to acknowledge that not undertaking it would mean we lack the necessary evidence base to make available the rich data and information that is needed to effectively undertake each function as part of the new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements. This is at odds with the evidence-based approach promoted by our national mission and could act as a barrier to the reform programme, particularly the evaluation of approaches to, and successful delivery of, the new curriculum and its wider anticipated benefits for people and communities.

The research is therefore an enabling factor to wider positive impacts. Its contribution will be through establishing the required evidence base on the data and information needs of all parts of the school system for their specific purposes: self-evaluation for improvement, accountability through effective governance; and transparency for citizens with an interest in the school system.

According to the McKinsey report, [*'How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better'*](#), what makes a good system into a great system is self-evaluation based on a breadth of performance information. Our future actions on the research findings will help develop an 'ecosystem' of data and information at the root of the evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements, made up of rich, broad and balanced data and information which reflects the equity of the different aspects of the development of each learner and contributes to the goals of a prosperous, more equal and healthier Wales.

This is vital to the successful delivery of the new curriculum arrangements and supports wider policy priorities. For example, the research will consider what evidence is needed to support the delivery of the new Welsh language continuum, removing the current distinction between first and second language. This will help to ensure all learners make meaningful progress in Welsh, so that future school leavers have a good grasp of the language and maintain linguistic skills that can be used in the workplace, everyday life and beyond, supporting Cymraeg 2050.

Initial consultation with stakeholders on the development of the research specification has been positive in terms of its direction, tone and content, with comments incorporated into the specification or to be captured within future phases of the research project.

This impact assessment has only identified one potential negative impact, which is actually a product of the positive impact of the collaborative approach being used. This relates to the time demands on stakeholders, which are predominantly within the public sector, such as schools, Local Authorities, regional education consortia etc. A strong willingness among stakeholders to engage in this research, despite the time investment, is anticipated.

7.3 In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:

- **maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or,**
- **avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?**

The research and specification have been designed in accordance with the sustainable development principle and five ways of working, to maximise its contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals.

The specification requires significant collaboration and involvement with a broad and representative group of stakeholders from across the school system in Wales, to establish their data and information needs to support the new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements, and to identify what is missing and where it could be made available.

By also looking at the current system and the way data and information is currently used, we can identify, and subsequently seek to prevent, any unintended consequences seen as part of the current system from reoccurring. This includes those issues mentioned in 7.2 above, but also any wider issues established through the planned engagement with stakeholders, as outlined in 7.1.

Children's rights will be promoted through the requirement for inclusive engagement with children and young people that represent the diversity of people in Wales and areas within it, such as: equalities protected characteristics; additional learning needs; area-based deprivation / socio-economic background; and geographical type e.g. rural/urban/coastal location.

Similarly, the schools, local authorities and regional education consortia involved must be representative of Wales in terms of factors such as their type; the spectrum of school support needs; medium of language used for teaching, geographical type; learner characteristics; governance type etc.

A strong willingness among stakeholders to engage in this research, despite the time investment, is anticipated. Any negative impact resulting from this investment is expected to be offset by the benefits of taking part and getting their views and expertise captured and, through subsequent action once the research findings are available, ensuring the widest and richest possible range of information is available for providers to inform self-evaluation within their own context. This will allow evaluation to become more contextual, raise standards, and assist providers to evaluate their approaches to implementation and realisation of the new curriculum.

However, looking specifically at school involvement, we recognise the pressures on the time of school practitioners and have programmed the research so that the majority of fieldwork

takes place during the autumn and spring terms of the 2020/21 school year, in order to minimise demands as far as possible during busier term times.

7.4 How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

What plans are in place for post implementation review and evaluation?

There will be a series of workshops programmed at key points throughout the research with presentations to an advisory group made up of key partners from throughout the school system, along with a final presentation of findings. Representation on this group will include partners well-placed to champion issues such as equality, children's rights and Welsh language. It is the arrangements implemented based on the conclusions of the research project which will be the subject of future evaluation, closely linked with the delivery of the wider curriculum and associated reforms.

FULL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

A. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1. Describe and explain the impact of the proposal on children and young people.

The research and its findings, without further action, are unlikely to have an impact on children and young people, beyond establishing an important evidence base and ensuring that children and young people have their voices heard and considered as part of the strong engagement element of the research.

All other impacts are reliant on subsequent decisions and actions on the research findings. The Welsh Government has, however, given a clear commitment in the update to *Our National Mission* to develop a better system of collating and then providing data and information to support system improvement and this will be based on the findings of this research. Whilst these wider impacts will be considered in detail as part of a further impact assessment, once the research findings and recommendations are available and decisions are taken on their implementation, they are also broadly discussed here as undertaking this research is an enabling factor to achieving them.

For example, implementing the findings of the research is expected to ensure availability of high quality, relevant and timely information across the school system, much wider than learner attainment and progress, to inform effective evaluation and improvement, rigorous accountability and public transparency. This includes data and information needed:

- by schools to drive improvement in their performance;
- by governing bodies, local authorities and Estyn to facilitate accountability and democratic scrutiny; and
- by parents, children and communities to help them understand their schools, instilling public confidence.

According to the McKinsey report, *'How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better'*, what makes a good system into a great system is self-evaluation based on a breadth of performance information.

Our aim is to make the widest and richest possible range of information available for providers to inform self-evaluation within their own context, and to increase the range of information available publicly. This will allow evaluation to become more contextual, raise standards, and assist providers to evaluate their approaches to implementation and realisation of the new curriculum.

In terms of children and young people, this will make sure that all learners get a fair life chance with this information driving and informing self–evaluation at all tiers of the system.

We have designed the specification to ensure it takes a holistic, collaborative approach, requiring engagement, expertise and involvement from throughout the system, including the views of young people and parents, and looking at international best practice.

It will consider prevention – looking to identify and avoid any unintended consequences created by elements of the current system. For example, behaviours created as a result of the pressure to maximise scores in performance measures and these inadvertently influencing choices around the curriculum offer of some schools (not necessarily in the best interest of the learner), and a disproportionate focus on specific groups of learners, to the potential detriment of others.

It also aims to ensure long-term sustainable improvement, addressing existing weaknesses whereby most of the data used is based on an annual cycle, leading to shorter-term approaches in an effort to improve indicator scores each year. In doing so, we will seek to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future learners and young people.

2. Explain how the proposal is likely to impact on children’s rights.

The research alone, without further action on its subsequent findings, is unlikely to have an impact on children’s rights, beyond the promotion of **Article 12** - *Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.*

This will be achieved through inclusive engagement with representatives of children, young people and parents / guardians (which may require the involvement of a third party specialist organisation). The specification ensures that those involved must represent the diversity of people in Wales and areas within it - including, for example, equalities protected characteristics, additional learning needs, area-based deprivation / socio-economic background and by the geographical type e.g. rural/ urban/coastal location. This will ensure that their data and information needs to help them understand their schools are captured (and met through future actions on the findings).

Similarly, there is a requirement for the schools involved to be representative of Wales in terms of their type (primary, secondary, through schools, special schools), the spectrum of school support needs (i.e. from high to low), medium of language used for teaching (Welsh, English, bilingual), geographical type (rural/urban/coastal), learner characteristics (e.g. levels of disadvantage) and governance types (e.g. faith / non-faith schools).

The findings of the research are expected to be available in Autumn 2022 and will be published on the Welsh Government website. Wider promotion of children's rights and related articles are expected as a result of subsequent actions on these findings, but these will be subject to further assessment, consultation and consideration by the Welsh Government.

No negative impacts have been identified.