Chapter 1. Wales and its school system

This chapter starts with an introduction and background to the report. It then provides a description of Wales' school system and the context in which it operates. Wales is a small, bilingual country in English and Welsh that is part of the United Kingdom. It in 2011 embarked on a large-scale reform to improve the quality and equity of its school system. This has become increasingly focused on the reform of the school curriculum in recent years, aiming for all children and young people to develop into "ambitious capable and lifelong learners, enterprising and creative, informed citizens and healthy and confident individuals".

To support schools in this effort, Wales aims to develop them into learning organisations. This study supports Wales in this effort by gauging the extent to which schools have put into practice the characteristics of learning organisations and identifying areas for further development.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Introduction and background to the report

An education system in which all learners have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential can strengthen individuals' and societies' capacity to contribute to economic growth and social cohesion. In 2011 Wales embarked on a large-scale school improvement reform. It introduced a range of policies to improve the quality and equity of its school system. Education reform has since been a national priority in Wales and actors at all levels are committed to achieving system-wide improvement.

In support of these reform efforts, the Welsh Government invited the OECD to conduct a review of its school system. The resulting report, *Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective* (OECD, 2014[1]) analysed the strengths and challenges of the Welsh school system, and provided a number of policy recommendations to further strengthen it. The OECD recommended that Wales develop a long-term and sustainable school improvement strategy by investing in the teaching and school leadership profession, ensuring that schools and their staff can respond to the learning needs of all students, and establishing a coherent evaluation and assessment framework to underpin the school system.

Building on the OECD review and other research reports (Hill, 2013[2]; Estyn, 2013[3]), in 2014 the Welsh Government released *Qualified for Life: An Education Improvement Plan for 3 to 19 Year Olds in Wales*. The plan outlined the actions it would take over the next five years to improve educational attainment for all learners (Welsh Government, 2014[4]).

In September 2016, the Welsh Government invited the OECD back to Wales to undertake an "education rapid policy assessment" to take stock of the reforms initiated in recent years. The resulting report, *The Welsh Education Reform Journey: A Rapid Policy Assessment* (OECD, 2017) provided an analysis of the most prominent reforms, provided feedback on progress made since the policy advice provided by the OECD in 2014 and offered recommendations to inform the next steps.

After taking stock of the progress made with *Qualified for Life* (Welsh Government, 2014[4]) and responding to the findings and recommendation of a review of the curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales (Donaldson, 2015[5]), and those provided by the OECD's rapid policy assessment, in September 2017 the Welsh Government released *Education in Wales: Our National Mission* (Welsh Government, 2017[6]). This action plan for 2017-21 presented the national vision for education and calls for all children and young people to access a curriculum that supports them in becoming:

- ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives

- enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work

- ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world

- healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

To be able to deliver on these "four purposes" of the curriculum, the action plan proposes the following four key enabling objectives: 1) developing a high-quality education profession; 2) inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards; 3) strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being; and 4) robust

assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system.

In support of these four objectives, and ultimately the realisation of the new curriculum, the plan calls for all schools and other parts of the system to develop into learning organisations. This is because schools that are learning organisations have the capacity to adapt more quickly to changes as well as explore and try out new approaches so that they can improve learning and outcomes for all their students (Welsh Government, 2017[7]).

The Welsh Government, regional consortia and other stakeholders have started supporting schools in developing into learning organisations with support from OECD, and developed a schools as learning organisations (SLO) model for Wales that was released in November 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017[7]).

This study aims to support Wales in this effort, gauging the extent to which schools have put into practice the characteristics of learning organisations and identifying areas for further development. It also examines the system-level conditions that can enable or hinder schools in Wales in developing as learning organisations.

The study is part of the OECD's efforts to support countries in the design and effective implementation of education policy, grounding these efforts on evidence, and multidisciplinary tools and approaches (Gurría, 2015[8]). It uses various quantitative and qualitative data sources:

- A desk study: a review of policy documents, studies and reports together with international and national data.

- An online Schools as Learning Organisations Survey: this was shared with school leaders, teachers and learning support workers (i.e. higher level teaching assistants, teaching assistants, foreign language assistants, special needs support staff) from a random sample of 571 schools, resulting in over 1 700 responses from 178 schools. Annex 2.A2 provides further details on the use of the SLO survey.

- School visits: the OECD team visited eight schools throughout Wales in June and July 2017. Over 80 school leaders, teachers and learning support workers were interviewed. The team complemented and triangulated the findings from the interviews with: 1) the schools' results in the SLO survey; 2) a desk study of the available data and information about the schools (e.g. school evaluation reports by Estyn, the Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales); and 3) a short self-assessment questionnaire completed by the school leaders to showcase "good practices".

In addition, the OECD team (Annex A) conducted various policy missions during 2017 and early 2018 during which they interviewed and consulted a wide range of experts and stakeholders from various levels of the education system. These missions were part of the broader OECD Education Policy Implementation Support provided to the Welsh Government since September 2016. It consists of: 1) a rapid policy assessment; 2) strategic policy advice during policy meetings, conferences and other events; and 3) tailored implementation support for developing schools as learning organisations. This broader collaboration between the OECD and Wales has resulted in a rich exchange of views, experience and knowledge which have enriched the analysis of this report.

The preliminary findings of this assessment were furthermore discussed with a large number of stakeholders during several meetings, allowing their validation and further refinement where it was found necessary.

Outline of the report

This report is structured into three parts. Following the introduction (Part I), Part II, *The Schools as Learning Organisations Assessment*, describes and analyses the school as a learning organisation in Wales in context and Part III, *System Assessment for Developing Schools as Learning Organisations*, analyses the system-level conditions that can enable or hinder schools developing into learning organisations.

The report starts with Chapter 1 that provides a short overview of Wales and its school system. It describes some of the key features of its population, governance system and economy before turning to a description of the school system and performance of its students.

In Part II, Chapter 2 draws from multiple data sources to explore the question of to what extent schools in Wales have put in practice the country's SLO model (Welsh Government, 2017[7]).

Chapter 3 continues the assessment by exploring in greater depth to what extent schools in Wales have put in practice the seven action-oriented dimensions and underlying elements of Wales' SLO model. The chapter presents examples of good practice to exemplify the findings and provide practical guidance to those wanting to develop their schools into learning organisations in Wales and beyond. The chapter concludes by presenting the key findings of the assessment, offering points of reflection and action for schools.
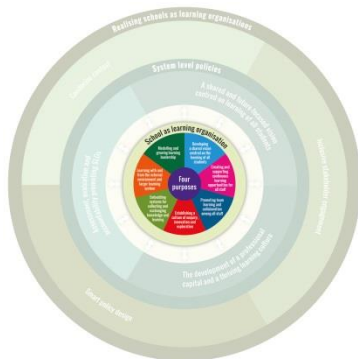
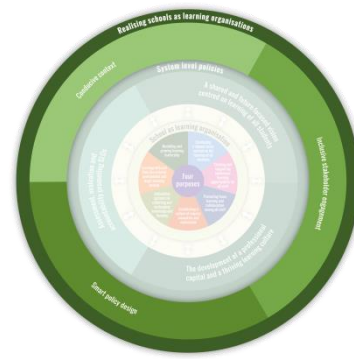| Schools as learning organisations assessment	System-level policies	Realising schools as learning organisations
Chapters 2 and 3	**Chapter 4**	**Chapter 5**

Part III of this report consists of two chapters. Chapter 4 sets out to answer the question of what system-level policies are enabling or hindering schools to develop as learning organisations, and offers a number of concrete recommendations for strengthening policies, enhancing policy coherence and further policy action.

Chapter 5 explores the question of how Wales can ensure the effective implementation, or "realisation" as it is often referred to in Wales, of its SLO policy (Viennet and Pont, 2017[9]). It concludes with a number of recommendations for consideration by the Welsh Government and other stakeholders at various levels of the system.

The Welsh context

Wales is a small country that is part of the United Kingdom (UK) and the island of Great Britain. It is bordered by England to its east and the Atlantic Ocean and Irish Sea to its west. The country has about 3.1 million inhabitants, about 5% of the United Kingdom population (Office for National Statistics, 2016[10]). The country is officially bilingual in English and Welsh. In 2017 around 19% of the population spoke Welsh – which represents half a million people – and 11% reported they use Welsh every day (Welsh Government, 2017[11]).

Wales has a form of self-government similar to Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Government of Wales Act (1998) created the National Assembly, following a referendum the year before. The Welsh political body is made up of the 60 elected Assembly Members and the Welsh Government, which consists of the First Minister and his or her cabinet. Although in the beginning the Assembly had no powers to initiate primary legislation, in 2006 it gained law-making powers over 20 areas such as economic development, local government, health, social welfare, and education and training. These law-making powers were expanded in 2011 but some policy areas are not included in the devolution process, including policing and criminal justice; foreign affairs, defence and security issues; and welfare, benefits and social security. These are matters on which the UK Parliament legislates.

Further devolution of powers is being considered, for example in the area of teachers' salaries. In June 2016, the Welsh Government established the Ministerial Supply Model Taskforce to consider issues around supply teachers, which reported to the Cabinet Secretary for Education (Jones, 2017[12]). Following this report, a cross-party amendment was introduced in the committee stages of the Wales Bill which sees teachers' pay and conditions devolved to Wales at some stage in the coming years (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2017[13]).

Local governments have significant responsibility for public service delivery in Wales. The 22 local authorities are politically accountable through elections held every 4 years. Local authorities have locally elected councils that are responsible for a range of services such as trading standards, education, housing, leisure and social services. The structure of the local authorities is currently being reviewed, with a proposal to reduce their number to nine by 2021 (WLGA, 2015[14]).

The main urban areas are located in the local authorities of Cardiff, Swansea and Newport; almost 24% of the population is concentrated in these areas (StatsWales, 2017[15]). In 2016, the Welsh population had increased by almost 1.5% since 2011. Similar to many OECD countries, population growth is limited, partly due to the ageing population. Wales' fertility rate also remains below the replacement level, at 1.77 in 2015 (OECD, 2018[16]).[1]

The population of Wales is projected to increase from 3.1 million in 2016 to 3.21 million by 2026 and 3.26 million by 2041. The number of children aged under 16 is projected to increase to 568 000 by 2026. Overall, the number of children is projected to decrease by 1.5% between 2016 and 2041. The number of people aged 16-64 is projected to decrease by 81 000 (4.2%) between 2016 and 2041 while the number of people aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 232 000 (36.6%) between 2016 and 2041 (Office for National Statistics, 2017[17]).

Since the 1970s the Welsh economy has undergone major restructuring and has managed to transform itself from a predominantly industrial to a post-industrial economy. The country's traditional extractive and heavy industries are either gone or are in decline and have been replaced by new ones in light and service industries, the public sector, manufacturing, and tourism. While there was a need for low-skilled workers in Wales in the past, the changes in the Welsh economic profile are likely to demand highly skilled and service-oriented workers (OECD, 2014[1]).

While the economic crisis had a negative effect on the Welsh economy and on the lives of many of its people, it steadily recovered and officially came out of the crisis in 2011-12 (Figure 1.1) (Eurostat, 2018[18]). Figure 1.1 however shows a decrease in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016 which can be partially attributed to the insecurity caused by the (at the time) potential decision of the UK to withdraw from the European Union, often referred to as "Brexit".

Figure 1.1. Gross domestic product at current market prices in Euro per inhabitant as a percentage of the EU-28 average
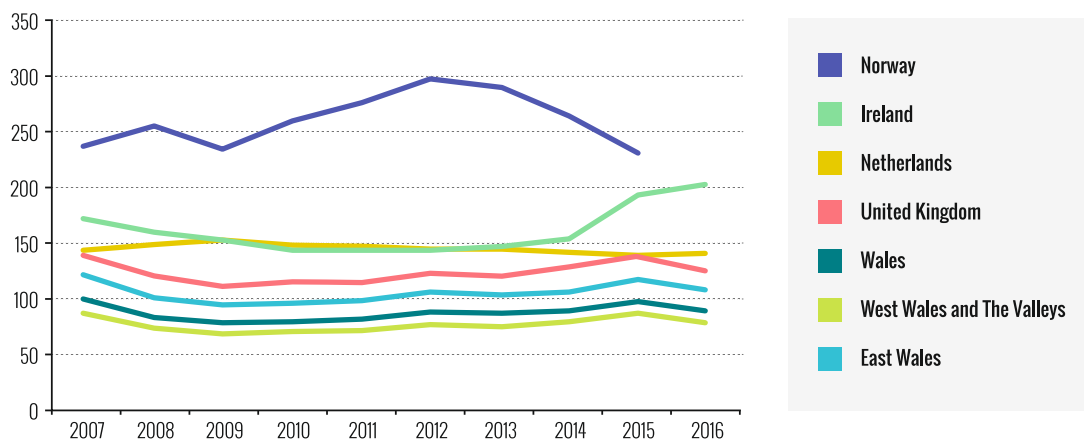
Note: EU-28 = 100. West Wales and The Valleys consists of the local authorities Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy and Denbighshire, South West Wales, Central Valleys, Gwent Valleys, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot, and Swansea. East Wales consists of Monmouthshire and Newport, Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan, Flintshire and Wrexham, and Powys.
Source: Eurostat (2018[18]), *Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at Current Market Prices by NUTS 2 Regions*, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nama_10r_2gdp&lang=en.

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GDP in Wales is below that of the other regions of the UK and other OECD countries like Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway, but is above that of countries like Poland, Portugal and Spain (not shown in Figure 1.1). The differences in socio-economic opportunities

across Wales are also extensive. In West Wales and The Valleys for example GDP per capita was EUR 23 100 in 2016, while it was EUR 31 500 in East Wales (Eurostat, 2018[18]).

For the three months to May 2017, the unemployment rate was 4.6%, which is close to the UK average (4.5%) and below the OECD average (6%) (Figure 1.2) (OECD, 2017[19]; Welsh Government, 2017[20]). This is a significant decrease in the unemployment rate compared to five years before, when 8.6% of the labour force was unemployed (Welsh Government, 2017[20]).

Figure 1.2. Unemployment rates in Wales, the European Union and the United Kingdom (2005-15)
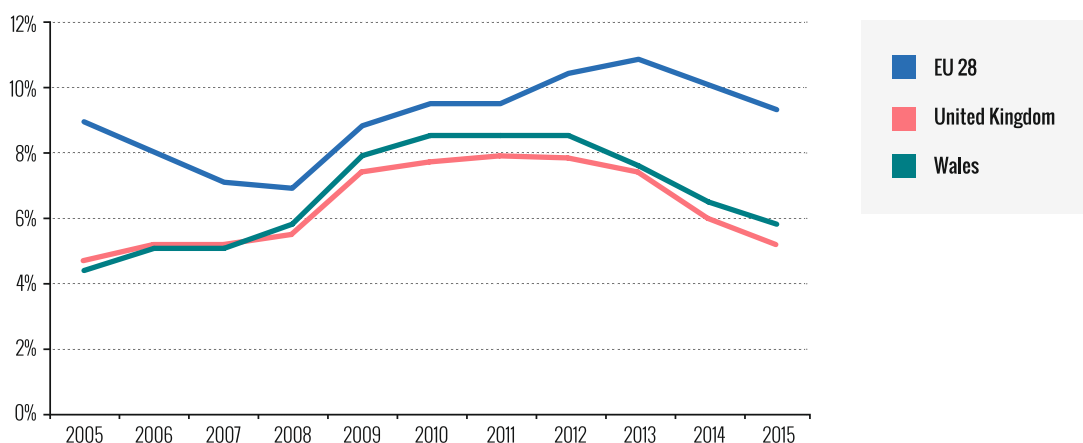
Note: Rate of economically active people aged 16 and over unemployed for less than 12 months.
Source: Welsh Government (2016[21]), "European Union harmonised unemployment rates by gender, area and year", https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/People-and-Work/Unemployment/ILO-Unemployment/ilo-unemployment-europeanunionharmonisedunemploymentrates-by-gender-area-year.

StatLink ⟲ http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933837169

Close to a quarter (24%) of all people in Wales were living in relative income poverty[2] between 2014/15 and 2016/17 (i.e. the financial years ending March 2015 and March 2017). This is up from 23% between 2013/14 and 2015/16, the rate it had stood at for the last five time periods.

Children are the group most likely to be in relative income poverty in Wales and this has remained unchanged for some time: 28% of children in Wales were living in relative income poverty between 2014/15 and 2016/17. However, the rate has fallen from 30% between 2013/14 and 2015/16. A possible reason for children consistently being the age group most likely to be in relative income poverty is that adults with children are more likely to be out of work or in low-paid work due to childcare responsibilities (Welsh Government, 2018[22]).

School education in Wales: A brief overview

The Welsh school system is relatively small. In January 2017 there were approximately 467 000 school and pre-school students in Wales, in 11 nurseries, 1 287 primary schools, 10 middle schools (which include both primary and secondary education), 200 secondary schools and 39 special schools. There were 1 547 "maintained" – i.e. public – schools and 70 private (independent) schools in Wales that year (Welsh Government, 2017[23]).

In January 2017, there were 151 fewer public schools than there had been in 2012, while the student population remained stable (Welsh Government, 2012[24]; Welsh Government, 2017[23]). This resulted from the closing and consolidation of mostly (very) small schools by local councils. During the same period Wales also witnessed a small increase in the number of independent schools, from 66 to 70. In response to the closures of small schools, the Welsh Government created a small and rural school grant to encourage innovation and school-to-school work. Also, closures can now only be pursued if all viable alternatives have been explored (Welsh Government, 2016[25]).

Education is compulsory in Wales from the age of 5 to 16, but 98% of children begin their education as 4-year-olds and 80% continue beyond 16 (Eurydice, 2016[26]). The period of compulsory education is divided into four stages: Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 (see Table 1.1). Vocational education is available for students in post-compulsory education, and students may take a combination of academic and vocational courses.

Table 1.1. Overview of education phases, ages and International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels

Educational phase	Stage	Ages	ISCED 2011 level
Early years/primary	Foundation Phase	3-7	ISCED 0 and 1
Primary	Key Stage 2	7-11	ISCED 1
Secondary	Key Stage 3	11-14	ISCED 2
Secondary	Key Stage 4	14-16	ISCED 3

Source: Eurypedia (2016[26]), "Overview: United Kingdom (Wales)", https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-Wales:Overview.

The Foundation Phase, introduced in 2010, combines early years education with the first two years of compulsory education (formerly known as Key Stage 1) and aims to produce a more developmental, experiential and play-based approach to teaching and learning (Welsh Government, 2015[27]). The Foundation Phase included all 3-7 year-olds for the first time in 2011/12 and initial evaluations have found that children are more likely to have higher levels of well-being and involvement in learning when they attend schools that make greater use of Foundation Phase pedagogies (Welsh Government, 2015[28]).

Students with some form of special education needs[3] make up approximately 23% of all students in Welsh public schools; however, only about 12% of these have official statements of special education needs. A major challenge is that statements are often interpreted differently across local authorities; there are no nationally defined, clear criteria for giving statements (OECD, 2017[29]). The Welsh Government is in the process of transforming the existing special education system into a more unified one with the aim to better support learners with "additional learning needs" – the preferred term in Wales nowadays – from age 0 to 25.

Wales has a distinct cultural identity and is officially a bilingual nation. Education is delivered in Welsh-medium, English-medium and/or bilingual settings. Regardless of the medium of instruction, all children in Wales are required to learn Welsh throughout the compulsory schooling period (Eurydice, 2016[26]). As of January 2016, about 33% of public primary schools and 24% of public secondary schools were Welsh-medium schools.

Welsh-medium pre-school education is also available, and some further and higher education courses are also taught in Welsh (Eurydice, 2016[26]). In addition, in 2006 the Welsh Baccalaureate was made available to secondary students at all levels: foundation, intermediate or advanced, in academic or vocational qualifications. Since 2005, the Welsh Government has also offered an intensive Welsh language sabbatical for teachers, lecturers, instructors and classroom assistants who want to raise their standard of Welsh and gain confidence in using the language in their teaching practice (Duggan, Thomas and Lewis, 2014[30]).

Towards a new school curriculum

Welsh schools follow the National Curriculum for Wales for 3-19 year-olds (Welsh Government, 2016[31]), which specifies the compulsory subjects and programmes of study (Eurydice, 2016[26]). The curriculum is now being revised following an independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements by Graham Donaldson in 2015. The review has provided the background for developing a 21st century curriculum in Wales from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4 (ages 3 to 16). In his review Donaldson took note of a wide number of independent reports, visited around 60 schools and met various other key stakeholders, including students, parents and representatives of the further education sector, resulting in the *Successful Futures* report (Donaldson, 2015[5]).

The recommendations of the report were accepted in full by the Welsh Government in June 2015 and have provided Wales with the foundations for developing a 21st century curriculum. The report that followed, *A Curriculum for Wales – A Curriculum for Life*, set out, in broad terms, the steps that Wales will take to achieve the *Successful Futures* report (Welsh Government, 2015[32]) (see Box 1.1).

One of the first steps the government took was to establish the Pioneer Schools Network. In autumn 2015 schools were invited to become "Pioneer Schools" to work with local authorities, regional consortia, the Welsh Government, Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training), and a range of experts on the design and implementation of a new curriculum for Wales (see Box 1.2). The work of the network of almost 200 Pioneer Schools is given shape through three strands of work:

- designing and developing the Digital Competence Framework (DCF)
- designing and developing the curriculum and assessment arrangements
- supporting the professional development and learning of the workforce.

Box 1.1. A new curriculum for Wales

A Curriculum for Wales – A Curriculum for Life (Welsh Government, 2015[32]) calls for all children and young people in Wales to develop as:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives

- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work

- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world

- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Donaldson, 2015[5]).

These "four purposes" of the new curriculum will be operationalised in six Areas of Learning and Experiences and include cross-curriculum responsibilities: 1) expressive arts; 2) health and well-being; 3) humanities; 4) literacy, languages and communication; 5) mathematics and numeracy; and 6) science and technology.

The new curriculum consists of a cross-curricular framework rather than a subject-based framework. Digital competencies will be given the same priority as literacy and numeracy as part of the three cross-curriculum responsibilities. The Digital Competence Framework (DCF) was the first element of the new curriculum to be developed and was launched in September 2016. The framework encourages the integration of digital skills across the full range of lessons and has four strands: citizenship, interacting and collaborating, producing, and data and computational thinking.

Source: Donaldson, G. (2015[5]), *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales,* http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150225-successful-futures-en.pdf.

Each of the three strands of work has been responsible for specific policy initiatives to achieve its objectives. For example, the Pioneer Schools working on the professional development and learning of the workforce have been contributing to the development of a new framework of professional standards for teachers and formal leaders, *the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership* (see below) (Welsh Government, 2017[33]). A sub-group of this network of schools also took the lead in the development of Wales' SLO model.

While writing this report the development of the new curriculum was starting to take shape as were the initial parameters of new assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements being clarified. In addition, a large scale reform of initial teacher education was ongoing to ensure the quality of Wales' present and future work force. These are some of the major policy initiatives that are part of Welsh Government's strategy to support schools in putting the new curriculum into practice in all schools across Wales. (Welsh Government, 2017[6]). As will be explained in Chapter 2, schools developing as learning organisations is considered an essential means for realising this objective.

Box 1.2. Objectives of the Pioneer Schools Network

The Pioneer Schools Network consists of three subgroups working on the following objectives (Welsh Government, 2017[34]):

Digital Pioneer Schools (13 schools)

- Design and develop the DCF and make it available from September 2016.

- Refine the DCF, based on feedback from the sector (December 2016 and ongoing).

- Support the integration of the DCF into the emerging curriculum.

- Develop the professional support required so that practitioners are confident and capable in applying the framework (by September 2017).

Curriculum and Assessment Pioneer Schools (94 schools)

- Design the high-level framework for the new curriculum based on clear design principles and taking account of key cross-cutting themes:

  o enrichment and experiences

  o Welsh dimension, international perspective and wider skills

  o cross-curriculum responsibilities (see Box 1.1)

  o assessment and progression

- Develop the Areas of Learning and Experience with the aim of making the new curriculum and assessment arrangements available for feedback from April 2019.

- Make the final curriculum and assessment arrangements available by January 2020. In September 2022 all public schools should be using the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

Professional Development and Learning Pioneer Schools (83 schools)

- Shape the professional learning offer to support practitioners and leaders to acquire the skills they need now and for the curriculum of the future.

- Have a leading role in developing and exemplifying the characteristics and behaviour that all schools in Wales need to show to be successful learning organisations.

- Work with the regional consortia to build capacity so that all schools and settings in Wales are able to develop the characteristics and behaviours needed to be effective learning organisations.

- Work with the regional consortia (see below) to develop a wide range of high-quality professional learning opportunities that is nationally consistent and accessible to all practitioners.

Source: Welsh Government (2017[34]), "Announcement of further Pioneer Schools focussing on curriculum design and development", http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2017/pioneerschools/?lang=en.

The education profession

Teachers

In January 2017 the school system of Wales had 22 531 qualified teachers in service. The number of qualified teachers in public schools in each local authority ranged from 3 103 in Cardiff to 470 in Merthyr Tydfil. The average student-teacher ratio was 22:1 at the primary level and 16:1 at the secondary level, compared to the OECD averages of 15:1 and 13:1 respectively (Welsh Government, 2016[35]; OECD, 2016[36])

To qualify as a teacher in Wales requires a bachelor's degree and Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Individuals can take a university-based route or through employment-based training that offers a way to qualify while working in a public school. For the former, individuals can either study at undergraduate level and achieve QTS at the same time as undertaking their degree, or pursue a post-graduate course of study (PGCE) after they obtained their bachelor's degree.

For the employment-based route, individuals with a bachelor's degree can undertake the Graduate Teacher Programme to gain QTS while they work as an unqualified teacher in a school. They can work as an unqualified teacher until they successfully complete the programme or cease the programme (Welsh Government, 2013[37]). They can also enter Teach First Cymru that offers a two-year programme during which they teach in the most deprived schools. The evidence shows however that many of the Teach First Cymru participants leave the country after completing the programme to teach outside Wales (Estyn, 2016[38]).

During recent years a range of policies have been implemented to improve the quality of the teaching workforce in Wales. For example, in 2014 the requirements to enter initial teacher education were raised. Since then aspiring teachers must have at least a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grade B in English and mathematics. In addition, aspiring primary teachers need at least a GCSE grade C in science to enter teacher education.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government recently established the mentioned new framework of professional standards for teachers and formal leaders (Welsh Government, 2017[33]). Among other things, these new standards aim to set clear expectations about effective practice throughout a practitioner's career and to allow them to reflect on their practice, individually and collectively. Newly qualified teachers must complete an induction period of three school terms or the equivalent. Those who started induction after September 2017 were required to work to the new standards. All practising teachers and formal leaders are expected to use them by September 2018.

Wales has also developed a number of tools to support teachers in their professional learning. For example, it introduced the Professional Learning Passport in 2015. This digital tool aims to help teachers plan and record their professional learning (Education Workforce Council, 2017[39]) in line with the new professional standards.

Various actors such as the regional consortia, local authorities and private companies offer professional learning opportunities for teachers and other school staff in the form of workshops, courses and programmes. In recent years, however, school-to-school collaboration and engagement in networks have gained in prominence as a means of facilitating professional learning in and across schools. Wales is moving away from a model of delivering professional learning within the school setting, towards a more collaborative, practitioner-led experience which is embedded in classroom practice. The

professional learning model for Wales currently under development is aimed at reflecting and further promoting this development.

School leaders

In January 2017 Wales had 3 641 school leaders working in public schools. This number consisted of 1 577 head teachers, 1 170 deputy head teachers and 894 assistant head teachers.

Head teachers in Wales must hold a National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) qualification, have QTS and be registered with the Education Workforce Council. The NPQH is a professional learning programme aimed at practitioners who aspire to become head teachers. The programme lasts between 6 and 18 months (depending on the speed of study and the credentials of candidates). Candidates must complete three mandatory modules: 1) leading and improving teaching; 2) leading an effective school; and 3) succeeding in headship, as well as two modules of choice. They are also required to spend at least nine days in a school from a different context to their own and undertake a final assessment which is made up of two interviews and a case study exercise (Welsh Governement, 2016[40]).

In recent years, several reports have raised concerns about the quality of leadership and management in a significant number of schools in Wales (Estyn, 2016[41]; Hill, 2013[2]; OECD, 2014[1]; OECD, 2017[29]). These reports have highlighted the lack of attractiveness of the profession, mostly due to administrative burdens and the lack of succession planning, as well as the very few professional learning opportunities for senior and middle-level leaders and teachers.

In its 2016/17 annual report Estyn concluded that the overall quality of leadership has been good or better in around three-quarters of primary schools and around a half of secondary schools. These proportions have changed little during recent years (Estyn, 2018[42]). It also found that in a quarter of primary schools and two-fifths of secondary schools, leadership requires improvement. In these schools, there is a lack of strategic direction that focuses on improving outcomes for students. Their leaders have not established a culture of professional learning where staff have open and honest discussions about their own practice and its impact on student learning and outcomes. As a result of these and other shortcomings, leaders are not well prepared for their role in supporting teachers to improve their practice (Estyn, 2018[42]).

In recent years, the Welsh Government has shown a clear intention to develop leadership capacity across the education system, but many national-level efforts to foster leadership seem to have either stalled or are still in the planning and design phase (OECD, 2017[29]). An important step forward has been the recent establishment of the National Academy for Educational Leadership (in June 2018). The academy has the mandate to promote leadership across education, including senior and middle-level leaders in schools, local authority education staff, and Welsh Government education officials. The academy will also consider the structure of qualifications of head teachers, including the NPQH, and develop career routes for aspiring head teachers.

Support staff

The proportion of support staff in Wales is high compared to other OECD countries (OECD, 2014[1]). In January 2017 there were 23 559 full-time equivalent support staff in public schools; comparing this with the number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers

and school leaders means support staff make up more than half (54%) of the total staff in schools in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017[23]).

Wales does not currently require its support staff to have specific qualifications, including those deployed in the classroom to support teachers and work directly with students (i.e. higher level teaching assistants, teaching assistants, foreign language assistants, special needs support staff). This group of support staff make up the majority of support staff and in Wales are often referred to as "learning support workers".

In 2007, the Higher Level Teaching Assistants policy was introduced to determine and recognise teaching assistants who meet the teaching assistant standards, but this is not mandatory. Since April 2016, however, support staff are required to register with the Education Workforce Council, which regulates teachers and support staff in Wales (see below). This is intended to help build a more detailed picture of Wales' support staff, what they do and what qualifications they have. It is also aimed at offering essential assurances to students, parents and the public about the credentials, conduct and performance of support staff (Education Workforce Council, 2017[39]). The government's action plan, *Education in Wales: Our National Mission*, also states plans to develop professional standards for support staff working directly with students, i.e. learning support workers, to enable them to improve their skills, commit to professional learning and facilitate clearer pathways to the role of Higher Level Teaching Assistant (Welsh Government, 2017[6]).

Appraisal and performance management of school staff

Teachers' and school leaders' appraisals are expected to be conducted on a yearly basis within schools as part of their performance management. Teachers are normally reviewed by their direct line managers, which might include members of the school leadership team, while school leaders are appraised by a panel comprising members of the school governing board and local authority representatives. For both school leaders and teachers, objectives are set and reviewed during performance management discussions, which can help address their professional learning needs. All practising teachers and formal leaders are as mentioned expected to use the new teaching and leadership standards by 1 September 2018.

Support staff are currently not required to go through appraisals. It appears however that many schools do ensure they are appraised and these form an integrated part of the school's performance management. Despite these mechanisms, appraisals remain underdeveloped in Wales (Education Workforce Council, 2017[39]; OECD, 2014[1]).
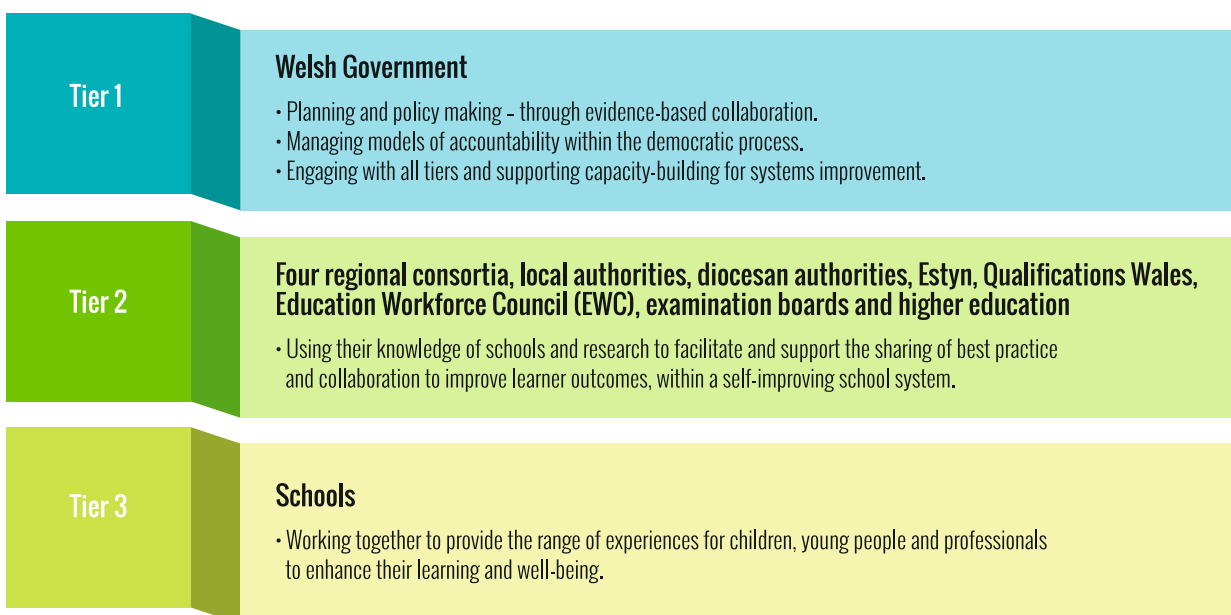
Governance of the school system

Since the devolution settlement in 1999, Wales, like Scotland and Northern Ireland, has had responsibility for nearly all areas of education policy, except for teachers' pay and working conditions. However, as mentioned above, a new amendment was included in the Wales Act 2017 to devolve teachers' pay and conditions to the National Assembly and the Welsh Government in the coming years (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2017[13]).

The Welsh Government's Education Directorate is the highest-level planner and policy maker (Tier 1 in Figure 1.3) and is responsible for administering all levels of education, except for further and higher education. Although the overall responsibility for the school system lies in the hands of the Directorate, the 22 local authorities in Wales are

responsible for direct allocations of funding to publicly funded schools (see Chapters 4 and 5) and for supporting vulnerable students. The local authorities work closely with the governing bodies of education institutions and the four regional consortia, collectively considered to be the second tier of governance.

Figure 1.3. The education system three-tier model

Tier 1

Welsh Government
· Planning and policy making – through evidence-based collaboration.
· Managing models of accountability within the democratic process.
· Engaging with all tiers and supporting capacity-building for systems improvement.

Tier 2

Four regional consortia, local authorities, diocesan authorities, Estyn, Qualifications Wales, Education Workforce Council (EWC), examination boards and higher education
· Using their knowledge of schools and research to facilitate and support the sharing of best practice and collaboration to improve learner outcomes, within a self-improving school system.

Tier 3

Schools
· Working together to provide the range of experiences for children, young people and professionals to enhance their learning and well-being.

Source: Welsh Government (2017[6]), *Education in Wales: Our National Mission*, http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/170926-education-in-wales-en.pdf.

Wales established the regional consortia in 2012 to help local authorities streamline their school improvement services and to reshape local school improvement functions. Their profiles vary (see Figure 1.4 and Table 1.2). In 2014 the Welsh Government established its National Model for Regional Working that further clarified the consortia's core responsibilities and services (Welsh Government, 2016[43]). These include challenge and support strategies to improve the teaching and learning in classrooms, collating data from local authorities and schools on school and student performance and progress, using that data for improvements, and delivery of the national system for categorising schools. The model has helped promote improvements in the quality of services the regional consortia provide to schools and signalled a deeper commitment to regional working. It emphasised a model of school improvement based on mutual support that was largely new across most of Wales.

Figure 1.4. Map of regional consortia and local authorities in Wales
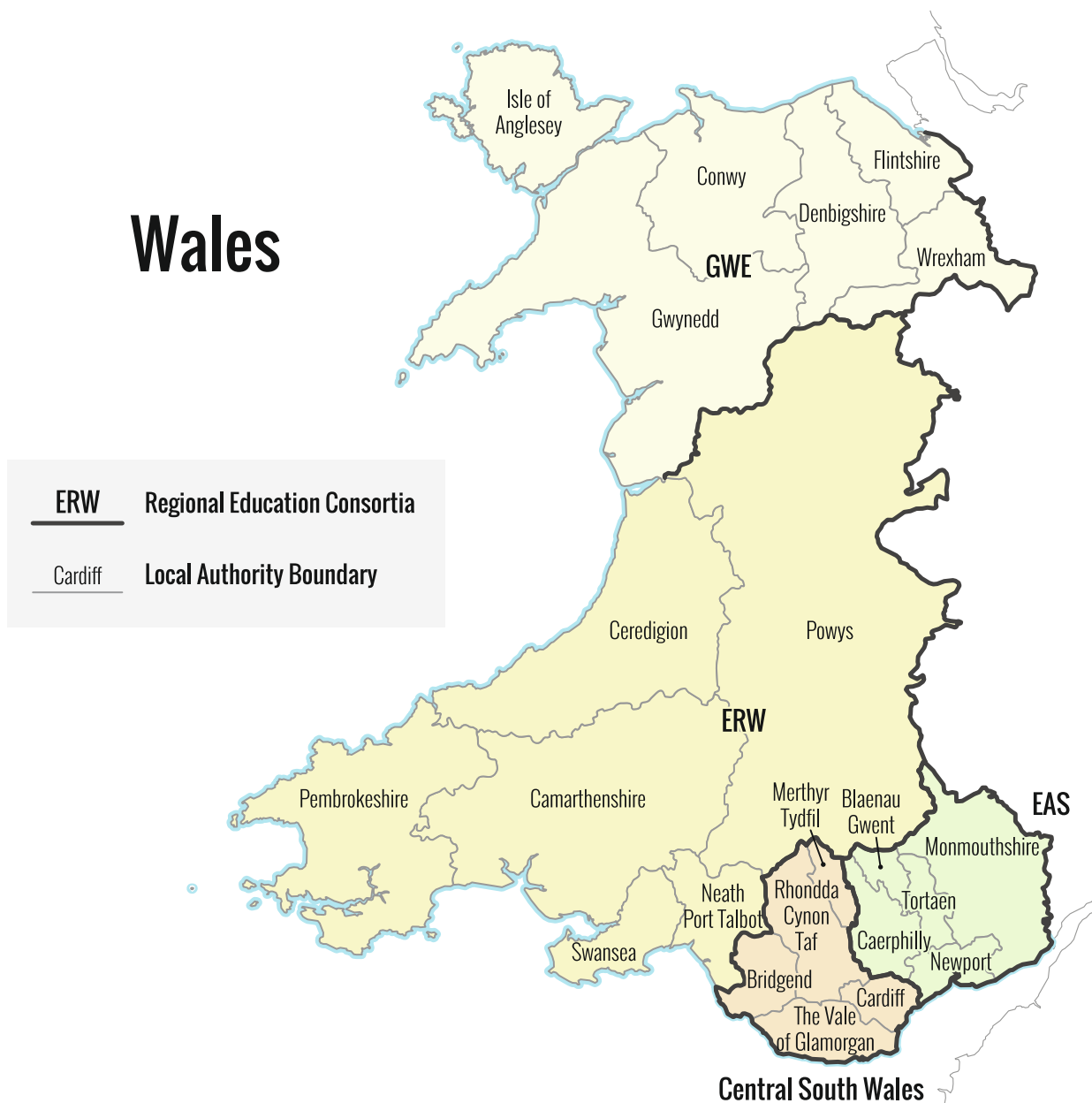
Note: Wales has four regional school improvement services. Gwasanaeth Effeithiolrwydd (GwE) in North Wales; Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith (ERW) in South West and Mid Wales; Education Achievement Service (EAS) in South East Wales; and Central South Consortium (CSC) in Central South Wales.
Source: Crown Copyright and database right 2014, Ordnance Survey 100021874, Cartographics, Welsh Government, January 2014.

Table 1.2. Profiles of the four regional consortia in Wales

Regional profile indicators	Gwasanaeth Effeithiolrwydd (GwE), North Wales	Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith (ERW), South West and Mid Wales	Education Achievement Service (EAS), South East Wales	Central South Consortium (CSC), Central South Wales
Percentage of students in Wales	22	28	19	31
Number of public schools	439 public schools; 28% of all public schools	513 public schools; 32% of all public schools	245 public schools; 15% of all public schools	398 public schools; 25% of all public schools
Percentage of self-reported Welsh speakers aged 3+ (Welsh average 19%)	31	24	10	11
Percentage of students eligible for free school meals (Welsh average 19%)	16	17.5	20.8	20.7
Percentage of population belonging to an ethnic minority	2	4	4	7
Percentage of looked-after children in Wales	18	27	19	36

Note: Children in care are children who are "looked after" by a local authority under the Children Act 1989 and Social Services and Well-being Act 2014.

Source: Estyn (2016[41]), *A Report on the Quality of the School Improvement Services Provided by the ERW Consortium*, www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/ERW%20Eng.pdf; Estyn (2017[44]), *A Report on the Quality of the School Improvement Services Provided by the EAS Consortium*, www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/EAS%20Consortium.pdf; Estyn (2017[45]), *A Report on the Quality of the School Improvement Services Provided by the Central South Consortium*, www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/Central%20South%20Consortium_0.pdf; Estyn (2017[46]), *A Report on the Quality of the School Improvement Services Provided by the North Wales Consortium*, www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/GwE_1.pdf.

Schools, networks of schools and school communities (Tier 3) have an evolving role in the co-construction of education policy. These local-level stakeholders are increasingly considered a primary resource for designing and putting in practice sustainable and innovative policies and practices. The development of the new school curriculum through the Pioneer Schools Network is a case in point.

Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, is responsible for inspecting the education system. This includes pre-school education, public and private schools, initial teacher education, further educational institutions, local authorities, and the regional consortia. To assess these various actors and levels of the education system, Estyn uses different components of the Common Inspection Framework (Estyn, 2017[47]). From September 2017, Estyn applied a new inspection framework that focused on five aspects: 1) standards; 2) well-being and attitudes to learning; 3) teaching and learning experiences; 4) care, support and guidance; and 5) leadership and management. Schools are judged using a 4 point scale:

- Excellent – Very strong, sustained performance and practice

- Good – Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement

- Adequate and needs improvement – Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement

- Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement – Important weaknesses outweigh strengths.

Schools receive 15 working days' written notice of an inspection. Inspection reports are aimed to be shorter than before and focus more on actions to be taken to support improvement, with a follow-up by the inspection and support by the providers and the local authority. The new inspection period lasts seven years so the aim is for all schools to be inspected at least once during this period.

While writing this report however an independent review into the role of Estyn in supporting education reform in Wales was ongoing (Donaldson, 2018[48]). The review report was released in June 2018 and contained 34 recommendations. Welsh Government and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training had not responded to the report's recommendations at the time of finalising this report. It is expected however that the review report will result in changes to the inspection framework (see Chapter 4).

The Education Workforce Council (EWC) was established in 2014. The EWC acts as an independent regulatory body for teachers in public schools and further education institutions and is responsible for safeguarding the interests of learners, parents and the public; and maintaining trust and confidence in the education workforce (Eurydice, 2016[26]). It also plays a role in improving teaching and professional learning through several reform initiatives, such as the development of the Professional Learning Passport mentioned above. The Education Workforce Council has fourteen members. Seven members are directly appointed through the Welsh Government public appointments system and seven members are appointed following nomination from a range of stakeholders. Council members are appointed for a period of four years. The Council sets the strategic direction for the EWC, and is responsible for its governance.

Qualifications Wales was established in 2015 as the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales. It aims to ensure that the qualifications system effectively meets the needs of learners and the economy while promoting public confidence in Welsh qualifications. Currently, Qualifications Wales does not have awarding functions, but regulates non-degree qualifications, general qualifications such GCSEs and Advanced Levels (A Levels),[4] and vocational qualifications. It has already introduced new GCSEs that aim to emphasise students' understanding of concepts and the ability to function in various types of situations – similar to how skills are assessed in OECDs Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Welsh Government, 2014[49]). It furthermore revised the Welsh Baccalaureate and A Level qualifications in 2015 (Qualifications Wales, 2015[50]).

Student performance

The PISA 2015 results showed that students in Wales performed below the OECD average in the mathematics, reading and science tests (see Figure 1.5). Although the data suggests student performance had improved compared to PISA 2012, their performance in science was worse than in previous PISA cycles (OECD, 2016[51]). The mean performance in PISA 2015 in Wales was:

- 478 score points in mathematics, 10 points higher than the score in 2012 but still below the OECD average (490 score points). Wales performed below England (493), Northern Ireland (493) and Scotland (491), but above the United States and similar to Lithuania, Malta and Hungary.

- 477 score points in reading, significantly below the OECD average (493 score points), England (500), Northern Ireland (497) and Scotland (493) and similar to Luxembourg, Lithuania and Iceland.

- 485 score points in science, below the OECD average (493 score points), England (512), Northern Ireland (500) and Scotland (497), but similar to Latvia, Russia, Luxembourg and Italy.

Figure 1.5. PISA results for Wales (2006-15)
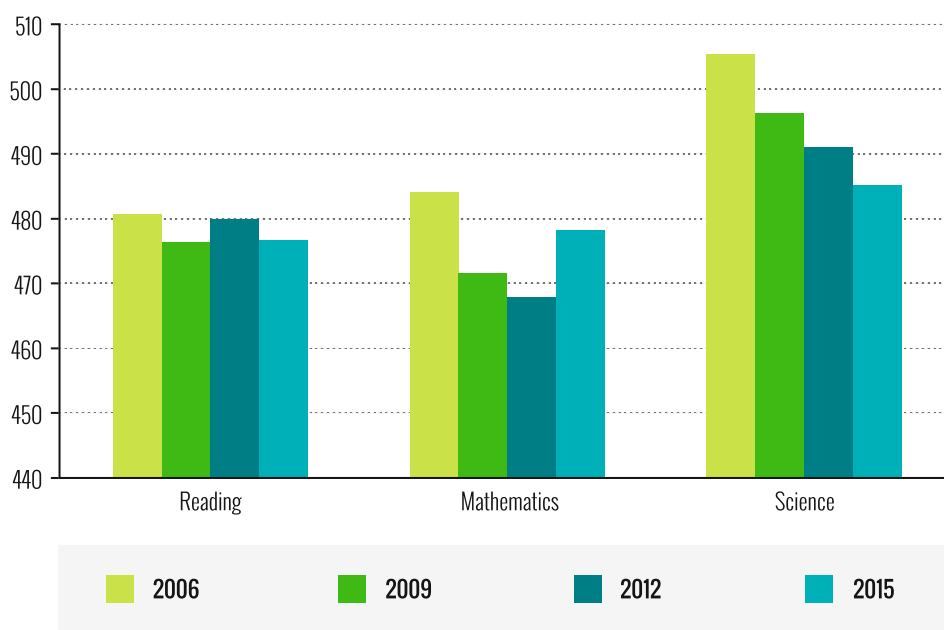
Note: In 2015 changes were made to the test design, administration, and scaling of PISA. These changes add statistical uncertainty to trend comparisons that should be taken into account when comparing 2015 results to those from prior years. Please see the Reader's Guide and Annex A5 of *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education* (OECD, 2016[51]) for a detailed discussion of these changes.
Source: OECD (2016[51]), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en; OECD (2014[52]), *PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014): Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading and Science*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264208780-en; OECD (2010[53]) *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I)*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091450-en; OECD (OECD, 2007[54]), *PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World: Volume 1: Analysis*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264040014-en.

StatLink 🔗📊 http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933837188
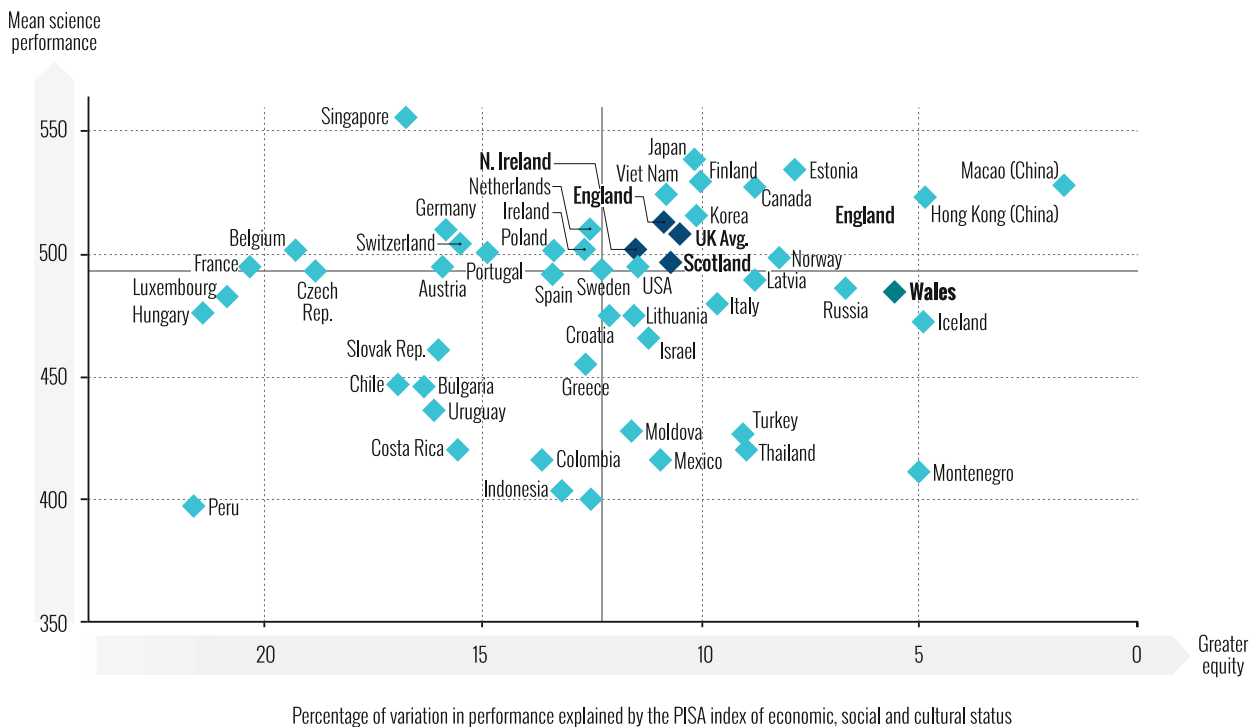
National student performance data show that results are slightly improving, although there are some comparability issues as several changes have been made in the way student performance is measured at Key Stage 4. These changes are a result of a 2011 review of qualifications for 14-19 year-olds (Welsh Government, 2012[55]). Reporting on school performance is based on the assessment results of students enrolled in Year 11 (aged 15). Overall performance figures now include data on children who are educated other than at school and no longer include results for independent schools (Welsh Government, 2016[56]). This creates year-to-year comparability issues but the figures suggest that examination results are slightly on the rise. In 2016/17, close to 55% of

students in Year 11 achieved the Level 2 threshold in each of the core subjects,[5] meaning that these students achieved GCSE at grades A*-C in English or Welsh language and mathematics; under the former system this translates to roughly 1.8 percentage points higher than the previous year (Welsh Government, 2016[56]).

Wales has a relatively equitable education system according to the PISA results. PISA 2015 suggests that students' socio-economic background in Wales has less impact on their performance than for students in other parts of the United Kingdom. Less than 6% of the variation in student performance in science is associated with students' socio-economic status in Wales, which is significantly lower than the OECD average (13%) and other UK countries (see Figure 1.6). The difference in science scores between the most disadvantaged students and the most advantaged is also only 52 points, whereas in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland this difference is at least 80 points (OECD, 2016[51]).

Figure 1.6. Science performance and equity (PISA 2015)

Percentage of variation in performance explained by the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status

Source: OECD (2016[51]), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education,* http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en.

StatLink ⟪⟫ http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933837207

However, Wales still faces a number of equity challenges, including large performance variability within schools. In addition, many students are low performers and there are few high performers. For the 2015 PISA mathematics assessment, for example, 23% of students did not achieve the Level 2 threshold – similar to the OECD average, which is considered the baseline level of proficiency needed to fully participate in society.

Furthermore, although the gap between students who receive free school meals (FSMs), a proxy measure of students living in poverty, and those that don't (i.e. non-FSM students) has steadily decreased across the years, their performance is still lower at all levels of education (Welsh Government, 2016[57]).

School performance

In addition to school self-evaluations, school performance is externally evaluated in Wales through Estyn inspections and the national school categorisation system; two different approaches that are considered by many to be not well aligned (OECD, 2017[29]).

Starting with the first of these, over the period 2010-17 Estyn carried out some 2 700 inspections. All education and training providers in Wales were inspected at least once during this six year inspection cycle. Inspections were guided by a common inspection framework aimed to bring greater consistency and transparency to the inspection of all education functions across the system in Wales, including schools, other education providers and local authorities through its Common Inspection Framework (OECD, 2014[1]). An Estyn inspection results in an inspection report that highlights recommendations for improvement and results in a grading of schools into four categories: "excellent", "good", "adequate and needs improvement", and "unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement". The introduction of inspection follow-ups is believed to have helped make inspection more proportionate, as well as focusing attention onto the schools that need it most (OECD, 2014[1]).

Estyn's annual report 2016-17 shows that almost eight out of ten of primary schools had good or excellent provision (Estyn, 2018[42]). This judgement is based on an assessment of students' learning experiences, teaching, support and the learning environment. Outcomes were more polarised at the secondary level: the share of excellent schools rose to 16%, higher than any year since 2010, but the share of unsatisfactory schools also increased (Estyn, 2015[58]; Estyn, 2016[59]).

Overall, Estyn's 2016-17 annual report reveals that half (50%) of the secondary schools it inspected have good or excellent outcomes. The share of secondary schools judged to be good or excellent for their provision decreased from 72% in 2013-14 to 58% in 2016-17 (Estyn, 2015[58]; Estyn, 2018[42]) although this trend needs to be interpreted with some caution because of the small sample sizes. Estyn notes inconsistency in the quality of teaching or assessments as one of the main factors influencing the performance of secondary schools.

In September 2017 Estyn as mentioned revised its inspection framework. As part of this new framework, Estyn plans to move away from overall judgements in favour of paragraphs summarising findings that focus on actions to support improvement – a positive development that fits well with the directions set out for the new curriculum. The cycle of Estyn inspections is also extended to seven years to allow schools enough time to implement changes, while following up with low-performing schools to monitor improvements more closely. Further changes to Estyn inspections are envisaged in response to the independent review into the role of Estyn in supporting education reform in Wales as will be elaborated in Chapter 4.

Since 2014 a national school categorisation system has been in place; a system that combines school self-evaluation with external evaluation or review by challenge advisors of the regional consortia. Developed collectively by the regional consortia and the Welsh Government, this system identifies schools most in need of support over a three-year

period, using a three-step colour coding strategy. Step 1 assesses publicly available school performance data and Step 2 the school's own self-evaluation in respect to leadership, learning and teaching. Challenge advisors examine how the school's self-evaluation corresponds to the performance data under Step 1. This is intended to ensure the process is robust. Under Step 3, judgements reached in the first two steps lead to an overall judgement and a corresponding categorisation of each school into one of four colours: green, yellow, amber and red. Categorisation then triggers a tailored programme of support, challenge and intervention agreed by the local authority and the regional consortia (Welsh Government, 2016[43]).

Although national school categorisation in general is considered an improvement on the system it replaced ("school banding"), it is still perceived by some as a high-stakes exercise and may stigmatise professionals and schools working in the most challenging communities (OECD, 2017[29]). The lack of synergies between Estyn inspections and the national categorisation system has been recognised as an area for improvement. Chapter 4 will elaborate on this issue.

Conclusion

Wales finds itself in the middle of an ambitious curriculum reform, aimed at the successful implementation, or as it is often referred to in Wales the "realisation" of the new curriculum in all schools across Wales by September 2022. The reform approach taken by the Welsh Government can be characterised by a drive for greater policy coherence and a process of construction of policies with stakeholders across the three "tiers" of Wales' education system. This chapter has highlighted some of the changes and new policy initiatives taken in recent years to enable schools to make the transition to the new curriculum.

The Welsh Government and other stakeholders however recognise it will take sustained effort to achieve this objective. In many cases teachers, learning support workers, school leaders and many others involved will need to expand their skills (Donaldson, 2015[5]; Welsh Government, 2017[6]). As such, the Welsh Government considers the development of schools as learning organisations essential for putting the curriculum into practice in schools throughout Wales (Welsh Government, 2017[7]).

This report (*Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales*) aims to support Wales in realising this objective. It assesses the extent to which schools in Wales have developed as learning organisations and as such gives an indication of schools' "readiness for change". It identifies areas for further improvement at both school- and system levels. The assessment has been guided by three questions:

1. To what extent do the key characteristics of a learning organisation already exist in schools in Wales? (see Chapters 2 and 3).

2. Are the system-level policies enabling (or hindering) schools to develop in learning organisations? (see Chapter 4).

3. How to ensure the effective implementation or "realisation" of Wales' schools as learning organisations policy? (see Chapter 5).

These last two questions stem from the knowledge that although many actions proposed by Wales' schools as learning organisation model (Welsh Government, 2017[7]) are within the control of schools, local authorities, parents and communities, some warrant

policy action and a conducive context to enable and empower them to make this transformation.

The analysis has allowed the formulation of several points for reflection and action for schools, as well as a number of concrete policy recommendations that are aimed at empowering schools and local partners to develop their schools as learning organisations.

Notes

[1] The total fertility rate in a specific year is defined as the total number of children that would be born to each woman if she were to live to the end of her child-bearing years and give birth to children in alignment with the prevailing age-specific fertility rates. It is calculated by totalling the age-specific fertility rates as defined over five-year intervals (OECD, 2018[16]).

[2] Living in relative income poverty is defined as when a person is living in a household where the total household income from all sources is less than 60% of the average UK household income (as given by the median) (Welsh Government, 2018[22]).

[3] The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004[61]) defines that children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Children have a learning difficulty if they: (a) have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or (b) have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority and (c) are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would so do if special educational provision was not made for them.

[4] General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) are the main Level 1 and Level 2 general qualifications for 14-19 year-olds in Wales. They are available in a wide range of subjects and are compulsory. A-Levels are the main general qualifications for Level 3 and are usually taken at age 16-19. They can be used as a basis for higher level study or training, or direct entry into employment (Qualifications Wales, 2015[50]).

[5] For students in Key Stage 4, learning outcomes and objectives are contained within subject criteria for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations. GCSEs are examinations in single subjects taken at the end of Key Stage 4. The pass grades, from highest to lowest, are: A* ("A-star"), A, B, C, D, E, F and G. Grade U (ungraded/unclassified) is issued when students have not achieved the minimum standard to achieve a pass grade; the subject is then not included on their final certificate. A GCSE at grades D–G is a Level 1 qualification, while a GCSE at grades A*–C is a Level 2 qualification. GCSEs at A*-C (Level 2) are much more valued by employers and educational institutions. Level 1 qualifications are required to advance to Level 2 qualifications. Likewise, Level 2 qualifications are required to advance to Level 3 qualifications (Eurydice, 2012[60]).

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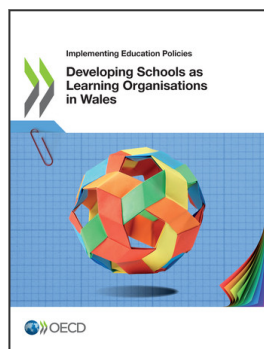
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Part II. The schools as learning organisations assessment