

## Chapter 5. Realising schools as learning organisations in Wales

*This chapter explores the question of how Wales can ensure the effective implementation – or “realisation” – of its schools as learning organisations (SLO) policy. Our main findings are that Wales should: 1) develop an easy-to-understand narrative explaining how Wales’ SLO model is part of the curriculum reform; 2) continue strengthening the capacity of regional consortia; 3) Estyn to continue monitoring the progress of consortia in enhancing their services; 4) enhance the collaboration and alignment between the development of assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements, and the curriculum; 5) continue the SLO Implementation Group, while striving for greater policy coherence; and 6) expand the public dialogue generated by PISA results to align it to the ambitions of the new curriculum.*

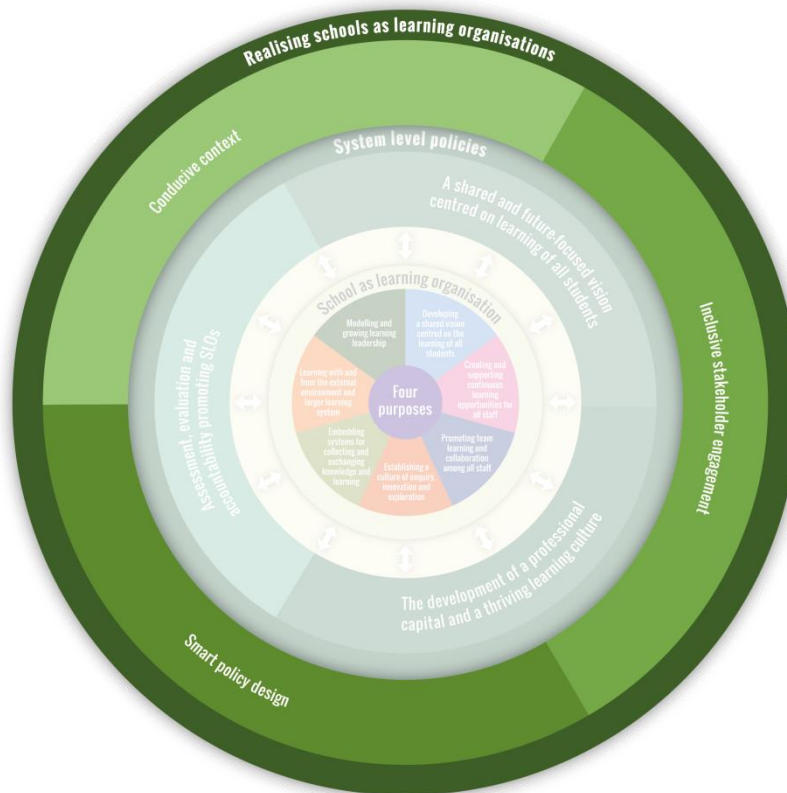
*The findings and recommendations of this report aim to inform the development of a national SLO implementation plan. This action plan should form an integrated part of the larger curriculum reform effort.*

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

This chapter completes the analysis of the system-level conditions that could enable or hinder schools in Wales as they develop into learning organisations by looking at issues of implementation (see Figure 5.1). While recognising this is a relatively new policy, it explores the question of how Wales can ensure its effective implementation, or “realisation” (the preferred term in Wales), and concludes with a number of recommendations for consideration by the Welsh Government and other stakeholders at various levels of the system.

**Figure 5.1. Realising schools as learning organisations**



## Schools as learning organisations in Wales: Moving from policy design to realisation

As part of Wales' broad education reform agenda, the action plan *Education in Wales: Our National Mission 2017-2021* states that all schools in Wales should develop into effective learning organisations (Welsh Government, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>). The development of schools as learning organisations (SLOs) has therefore become an explicit policy (see Chapter 2, Box 2.1) that is considered vital for realising the four enabling objectives of the strategic plan and the “realisation” of the new curriculum (see Chapter 2).

The policy has followed a specific process with strong stakeholder engagement. In autumn 2016 the Welsh Government established an SLO Pilot Group to develop a schools as learning organisations model for Wales. The group also supported this study by commenting on the draft SLO survey (see Chapters 2 and 3) and contributing to its field trial. This developmental work was given shape through a series of workshops and meetings between November 2016 and July 2017, facilitated by the OECD. The SLO Pilot Group (later renamed the SLO Implementation Group) consisted of representatives of 28 Pioneer Schools the regional consortia, Estyn, the National Academy for Educational Leadership, the Education Directorate of the Welsh Government and the OECD (see Chapter 1, Box 1.2).

In November 2017, Wales' SLO model was launched (Welsh Government, 2017<sup>[2]</sup>) and has contributed to the clarification of what an SLO looks like in Wales. The Welsh Government launched a website presenting the model and describing its benefits to schools, its use and the next steps for putting it into practice, which has contributed to raising awareness of the policy (Welsh Government, 2017<sup>[2]</sup>). This has been complemented by the presentation of the model in various national and regional events attended by school staff and other stakeholders.

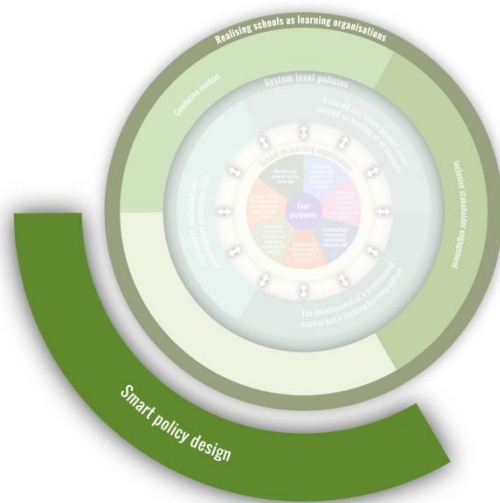
As the policy has effectively been launched since the end of 2017, it is important to understand the determinants that may hinder or facilitate its effective implementation. In general, education policies fail to be effectively implemented due to a range of factors such as the lack of a clear vision of the policy itself and how it fits in with the other policies that surround it, potential reactions against the reform by those who are supposed to implement it, or a lack of staff capacity or investment in their training (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). More directly, the lack of a clear implementation strategy may leave those in schools without guidance or information and support to make it happen. Policy makers need to consider these issues if they want education policies reach the classrooms. Recent research has grouped a set of determinants for successful implementation into a framework with four dimensions:

- smart policy design
- inclusive stakeholder engagement
- a conducive institutional policy and societal context
- a coherent implementation strategy or plan (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>).

This chapter looks at how these four determinants can facilitate or hinder the realisation of Wales' SLO policy.

## Smart policy design

Research evidence shows that whether a policy is well justified, and offers a logical and feasible solution to the issue at hand will determine to a great extent whether it can be put into practice and how. The nature of a policy solution, and the way it is formulated, influence its “enactment” (Bell and Stevenson, 2015<sup>[4]</sup>). The core attributes of a policy, the underlying issues which may not have been acknowledged or explored during its formulation phase, carry over to the implementation phase and may alter it (Fullan and Quinn, 2015<sup>[5]</sup>). Therefore, to understand a policy’s potential to be realised, it is important to consider the underlying factors that underpin it: the policy justification, its logic and its feasibility (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>).



### *Policy justification and logic*

A policy responds to a need, or to the perception of a need, and this need should be outlined clearly to facilitate the formulation, legitimacy and implementation of a solution. Clarifying the reasoning behind a policy, the characteristics of the issue it is supposed to address and the way policy makers analyse these, help make sense of how to put it in practice and can contribute to getting stakeholders on board with the policy reform. In addition, it is important that the justification presents a clear idea of the expected results if it is to move actors and supporters forward (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>).

In Wales, the SLO policy has had a clear trajectory. In September 2017 the Welsh Government launched its new strategic education action plan, *Education in Wales: Our National Mission*. It formulated its objective to develop schools in Wales into learning organisations and outlined the rationale for this policy: that such schools are vital for realising the four enabling objectives and ultimately for putting the new curriculum in practice (Welsh Government, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>).

As covered in Chapter 2, research evidence shows that schools that operate as learning organisations can react more quickly to changing external environments and embrace changes and innovations in their internal organisation. The evidence also shows a positive association between the SLO and a range of staff outcomes like job satisfaction, self-efficacy, readiness for change and experimentation (Schechter, 2008<sup>[6]</sup>; Silins, Mulford and Zarins, 2002<sup>[7]</sup>; Schechter and Qadach, 2012<sup>[8]</sup>; Erdem, İlğan and Uçar, 2014<sup>[9]</sup>; Razali, Amira and Shobri, 2013<sup>[10]</sup>).

The Welsh Government and many of the key stakeholders like Estyn, the regional consortia, local authorities and many of the school staff the OECD team interviewed all understand that it will take concerted efforts and collaborative working and learning within and across schools to realise the new curriculum. There is recognition that in many cases the teachers, learning support workers, school leaders and many others involved will need to expand their skills (Donaldson, 2015<sup>[11]</sup>; Welsh Government, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>).

Previous OECD reviews and other reports have pointed to several challenges, including the capacity of teaching staff to conduct quality assessments and differentiate their teaching approaches to adapt to students' learning needs. There are also concerns about the quality of some school and system leaders who will play a pivotal role in creating the conditions for the curriculum to be put into practice (OECD, 2014<sup>[12]</sup>; OECD, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>; Estyn, 2018<sup>[14]</sup>).

The development of a thriving learning culture in schools and other parts of the education system is expected to play a pivotal role in responding to these challenges and ultimately for putting the curriculum into practice in schools throughout Wales. The development of SLOs – and other parts of the system – has consequently become part of the Welsh Government's strategy to establish strong, mutually supportive connections between schools, aimed at moving towards a self-improving school system.

The OECD has been able to assess progress in the understanding of this policy among stakeholders since September 2016, when it undertook a rapid policy assessment that formed the starting point of a longer-term collaboration with various strands of OECD Education Policy Implementation Support provided to the Welsh Government (see Chapter 1).

Initially the majority of stakeholders the OECD team met were not clear about what the concept of a school as a learning organisation actually entailed in the Welsh context and how it related to the curriculum reform and other policies such as school self-evaluation and development planning. Throughout 2017, the OECD team have gathered information and interviewed a range of stakeholders at various levels of the system and has seen a growing understanding of the rationale or logic behind developing schools as learning organisations. Still, there is clearly more work to be done on this.

The interviews and the OECD team's participation in several policy meetings revealed that the regional consortia have not made equal progress in promoting Wales' SLO model in their regions. The regional consortia are expected to continue to play an important role in helping schools understand how the model can help them in their daily work and supporting them in developing as learning organisations. There would appear to be a need to reduce the variability in the support schools receive from their consortia to develop as learning organisations. However, the OECD team see some challenges here, as the consortia vary in their capacity to take on this role, as will be discussed further below.

The OECD team also believe that further communication and capacity building are needed to ensure school staff, local authorities and other stakeholders are familiar with the model and understand “why” it was developed, and “how” it can be used to support the development of their schools and relates to the larger curriculum reform effort and other policies.

On the latter, the Welsh Government has been striving for greater policy coherence and has been increasingly successful in this, as noted in an earlier OECD assessment (2017<sup>[13]</sup>). However, it has not always been as successful in communicating its efforts and achievements in this area. An easily understood narrative that explains the logic of developing SLOs and how this fits the curriculum reform effort should form a key component of Welsh Government's communication strategy on the curriculum reform (see below).

### *The feasibility of developing all schools in Wales into learning organisations*

The feasibility of a policy means thinking carefully about the resources and technology involved in putting it into practice (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). The Welsh Government has invested in making Wales' SLO model a long-term commitment, with resources to develop and support the realisation of the policy. In addition to the establishment of the SLO Pilot Group, it has commissioned this OECD study primarily to take stock of how far schools in Wales have developed into learning organisations, and identify strengths and challenges as well as areas for further improvement at both school and system level.

### *Responding to identified challenges and areas of improvement*

Chapters 2 and 3 of this study suggest that many schools in Wales are on their way towards developing into learning organisations. However, the data show that a considerable share of schools are still far from realising this objective, with particular challenges at the secondary level. The SLO dimensions “developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students” and “establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration” would repay particular attention.

Triangulation of various sources of data and information has pointed to the conclusion that there is a need for more critical reflections among school staff for deep learning to take place and to make sustainable progress towards developing as learning organisations. When the OECD team presented the preliminary findings of this study to key stakeholders, they recognised this finding, which some attributed to the high-stakes assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements that they believed have negatively affected people's confidence, or for some even their skills, to critically reflect on their own behaviour, that of peers and the wider school organisation.

Responding to these and other identified challenges and areas for further action will have resource implications and improvements will take time. Many schools are likely to need additional support to develop into learning organisations.

### *System infrastructure for supporting schools developing as learning organisations*

Developing SLOs calls for consideration of what kind of structures schools need to support them in their developmental journeys. This sounds obvious but international evidence shows that in many cases, reforms and change initiatives pay too little attention to the actual implementation effort, in particular by failing to make sufficient investment in developing the system infrastructure to support the realisation of the policy (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>; OECD, 2015<sup>[15]</sup>; Schleicher, 2018<sup>[16]</sup>).

There are examples of successful reforms and change initiatives that have invested in developing specific infrastructures to deliver a policy. One of the better known examples is Ontario's (Canada) education strategy, launched in 2003. It set out to 1) improve students' acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills; 2) improve the high school graduation rate; and 3) build public confidence (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010<sup>[17]</sup>). As part of the implementation strategy, Ontario paid particular attention to developing the leadership capacity at all levels of the system. It also created a new 100-person secretariat responsible for building the capacity and expertise to do the work. Teams were created in each district and each school in order to lead the work on literacy and numeracy. The strategy paired external expertise with sustained internal leadership and promoted the sharing of knowledge and collaborations across the system to push the initiative.

The Welsh Government has also taken several measures to strengthen its system infrastructure, in particular the establishment of the regional consortia.

### The four regional consortia

Four regional consortia were established in 2012 to strengthen the infrastructure for improvement and the delivery of school support services (see Chapter 1). These consortia were intended to help the 22 local authorities streamline their school improvement services and to reshape local school improvement functions. The Welsh Government established its National Model for Regional Working in 2014 (Welsh Government, 2015<sup>[18]</sup>), further clarifying the consortia's core responsibilities and services. These included challenge and support strategies to improve teaching and learning in classrooms, collating data from local authorities and schools on school and student performance and progress and using that data for improvements, and delivery of the national system for categorising schools (Welsh Government, 2016<sup>[19]</sup>). The national model also introduced the role of challenge advisors to act as agents of change, supporting and challenging school leaders to improve performance and brokering support that has a positive impact on students. The model has helped promote improvements in the quality of services provided to schools by the regional consortia 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 (OECD, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>).

The OECD team found that much progress has indeed been made in strengthening the regional consortia's school improvement services since their inception; a finding that was corroborated by recent Estyn monitoring reports on the consortia (Estyn, 2017<sup>[20]</sup>; Estyn, 2017<sup>[21]</sup>; Estyn, 2017<sup>[22]</sup>; Estyn, 2017<sup>[23]</sup>). However, several challenges and areas of improvement remain, a number of which are particularly relevant to the development of schools across Wales into learning organisations.

First, a major challenge not only for developing SLOs, but for supporting schools in their development more generally, concerns the capacity challenges of the regional consortia, which need to be resolved. Estyn's follow-up inspections of the consortia noted Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith (South West and Mid Wales regional consortium; ERW) as failing to make progress in developing its own capacity and improvement services in recent years (Estyn, 2017<sup>[20]</sup>). The report showed that part of the challenge lies in a lack of clarity over the respective roles and accountabilities of the local authorities and the regional consortium in relation to all school improvement functions and services. The organisation also has a relatively small core team compared to the other consortia, which is believed to have hindered it from building up its own capacity. As Wales is in the middle of a curriculum reform, which will likely increase demands for support by schools, this places further emphasis on ensuring all consortia are fully operational.

Second, this assessment suggests that a considerable proportion of schools in Wales are not yet functioning as learning organisations. Representatives of the four regional consortia and other stakeholders recognised these findings and acknowledged the need to devote particular attention to the secondary sector, and therefore more of their resources.

Third, in all consortia, the emphasis is still too much on accountability and on challenging schools (Estyn, 2018<sup>[14]</sup>), rather than on providing support and promoting a learning culture in schools and in the hearts and minds of the people working in them. The interviews with consortium representatives showed they were aware of this challenge and have recently started changing their operations to provide more support to schools. They have set up structures to encourage and support schools to work in partnership (Estyn,

2018<sup>[14]</sup>). The consortia's different governance structures, organisational cultures and ways of working mean they are all at different stages in this process, however.

Recognising that change is a complex, multifaceted process (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>; Walker, 2006<sup>[24]</sup>) it is important to recognise the pivotal role the senior management of consortia will have to play in the months to come to change their organisational cultures (which have long been geared towards a primary challenge function with too little attention to providing support), adjusting their operations and developing the capacity of staff to support schools in developing as learning organisations and changing and innovating teaching and learning, with particular reference to the new curriculum.

On the last point, the school staff and various other stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team expressed the need for challenge advisors to receive training to enhance their ability to support schools in putting the new curriculum and assessment and evaluation arrangements into practice. One positive development is the strong involvement of the regional consortia in the curriculum reform, including through their participation in the Pioneer Schools Network. This will be important to help the consortia identify what the new professional learning needs will be within schools and consider what these entail for the capacity of their own organisations.

Furthermore, various stakeholders also raised their concerns that many of the challenge advisors are not yet familiar with Wales' SLO model. The planned workshops for challenge advisors in the summer term will be a much-needed first step towards ensuring they are able to explain the logic of this policy to school staff and support them in their efforts to develop their schools as learning organisations. However, the approaches taken by the different consortia to enhance their own capacity vary. It is too early to assess fully the strengths, weaknesses and impact of the individual consortia's different strategies (Estyn, 2018<sup>[14]</sup>). It is therefore essential that Wales continues to monitor the progress they are making and that they are collectively looking for ways to enhance their services to schools.

Fourth, despite recent improvements, there is scope to deepen collaboration and co-ordination between consortia. The consortia are positive about the improvement in collaboration and co-ordination so far. They noted it has opened up opportunities for peer learning between them, as well as opportunities to improve the quality of and/or rationalise services, and collaborate over new services they provide to schools (OECD, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>). This is an important development as it would be a waste of human and financial resources for a small country like Wales, with a tight public budget, to continue doing otherwise.

However, although this assessment has identified several examples of good collaboration between the consortia, such as the development of Wales' SLO model and in the area of leadership development, interviews with various stakeholders and observations by the OECD team also revealed that in some other areas or activities collaboration and co-ordination could be deepened – and that the consortia have room to grow trust and reduce the competition between them.

Fifth is the need for better monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of school improvement services (OECD, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>). According to Estyn, three of the four consortia are progressing well in their efforts to improve their monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of school-to-school collaborations and other school improvement services. The OECD team learned of several examples of collaborations between the consortia and higher education institutions (see Chapter 3, Box 3.17 for example) with the latter



supporting consortia in the monitoring and evaluation of their improvement services. These collaborations can benefit both sides and help realise the Welsh Government's ambition to establish a self-improving school system (Welsh Government, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>). Schools in turn are also likely to benefit from the application of research to improve their teaching and learning (Ainscow et al., 2016<sup>[25]</sup>; OECD, 2013<sup>[26]</sup>); a clear issue for further improvement for many schools in Wales as was discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

The need for better monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of school improvement services, as noted by consortia representatives, continues to be an area where further progress can and needs to be made in the years to come.

### Higher education institutions

Partnerships with higher education institutions can offer schools clear advantages by drawing on their expertise and capacity (Ainscow et al., 2016<sup>[25]</sup>; Harris and van Tassell, 2005<sup>[27]</sup>; OECD, 2013<sup>[26]</sup>). Examples from OECD countries and beyond show that the benefits can work both ways, as innovative ideas and practices can in turn influence the higher education/university level, and the teacher education and service missions of higher education institutions may be very well served by such partnerships (OECD, 2013<sup>[26]</sup>; Harris and van Tassell, 2005<sup>[27]</sup>) (see Box 5.1).

Based on the OECD team's interviews with various stakeholders and participation in several policy meetings and events, higher education institutions have also recently started engaging more in collaborations with schools, thereby enriching Wales' system-level infrastructure to bring about change and innovation in education. This development is partly the result of the reform of initial teacher education that was started in 2015, as discussed in Chapter 4. This reform has also promoted collaborations with higher education institutions abroad to complement and enrich the initial teacher education and research capacity currently available in Wales. This increased engagement of higher education institutions with the school system is without a doubt a positive development but, as several stakeholders noted, it is still in its infancy.

#### **Box 5.1. Partnerships between higher education institutions and schools – examples from the United States and the Netherlands**

##### **University of Michigan, United States**

Teacher preparation programmes at the University of Michigan are run in close partnership with schools in the city of Ann Arbor, and there are close links between research and practice. For example, the secondary programmes use an approach called Learning and Teaching the Disciplines through Clinical Rounds to integrate the content knowledge and practices that teachers need to teach specific subjects. Candidates present a video of their teaching practice and deeply analyse it with peers, school-based mentor teachers, and university faculty course and field instructors. The approach began in 2005 and has grown to cover five content areas: social studies, mathematics, science, English language arts and world languages.

The Elementary Master of Arts with Certification programmes involve full-year internships in an elementary school classroom and focus on high-leverage content and teaching practices that are critical for teaching the school curriculum, such as place value in mathematics and leading a group discussion in class.

The University of Michigan has a clinical professorship track that promotes faculty based on their ability to train teachers and conduct research on how students learn, which helps them prioritise teacher education and applied research. Clinical professors often stay in touch with their graduates and involve them in school-based research projects, such as how to improve elementary school social studies instruction, which contributes to their ongoing professional development.

**Schools and teacher education institutions co-creating primary initial teacher education programmes in the Netherlands**

Responding to concerns from schools and school boards about the “classroom readiness” of newly qualified primary teachers, the Netherlands Ministry of Education in 2014 launched a range of initiatives to improve the fitness for purpose of primary initial teacher education (ITE). These initiatives have included facilitating and funding much closer integration of the Universities of Applied Sciences, which provide training in primary education, with school boards at the strategic level and with individual schools at both the strategic and operational level.

The initiatives have had a major impact on the ITE system, and almost half of ITE courses are now working closely with schools on course design and delivery. Clearly, there is some variation in the depth of the partnerships between schools and universities. The partnership between LUCAS school board, Snijderschool (a primary school in the city of Rijswijk), and the Hogeschool Leiden (a University of Applied Sciences in the city of Leiden) is a strong example of the deepest type of partnership. The key characteristics of the partnership are:

- LUCAS employs a teacher educator to oversee the partnership, and provides strategic leadership.
- The school and Hogeschool exchange staff who work in each other’s institutions.
- The staff from the school and Hogeschool work closely together to develop and refine the ITE curriculum and delivery.
- The school board and the Hogeschool have jointly constructed a selection programme for students and are jointly involved in selection (the programme has a dispensation to select recruits).
- The Hogeschool employs a link person to provide training for teachers interested in becoming mentors, and to brief mentors on what is happening in the Hogeschool element of the programme to ensure good co-ordination between the theory and practice elements.
- The school grades the student on their teaching practice, and the student must achieve a pass mark to be awarded their teaching certificate as part of their bachelor’s degree.
- Students, mentors and school leaders are asked every two years for feedback on the programme.

Source: OECD (2018<sub>[28]</sub>), “TALIS Initial Teacher Preparation study”, [www.oecd.org/education/school/talis-initial-teacher-preparation-study.htm](http://www.oecd.org/education/school/talis-initial-teacher-preparation-study.htm).

### Private companies

In OECD countries such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Israel, Japan, Luxembourg and Spain private companies play a prominent role in providing professional learning activities (OECD, 2014<sub>[29]</sub>). The evidence from this assessment suggests that a considerable proportion of schools in Wales are also seeking the services of private companies to support them in their development. The eight school visits the OECD team conducted revealed several examples of schools purchasing services from private providers including specific staff training approaches, information and communications technology (ICT) tools to facilitate professional learning and knowledge sharing among staff, and management information systems to monitor school performance data or specific surveys to monitor (aspects of) student well-being.

Although still relatively small players at present, private companies are part of the system infrastructure in Wales. They could be strategically deployed by the Welsh Government, regional consortia and others to advance the ongoing reforms in Wales in the years to come, including the development of SLOs.

### *Ensuring adequate funding*

The inputs needed to implement education policies consist mainly of the funding, technology and knowledge available to the actors, as well as their capacity to use them. The amount, quality and distribution of resources allocated to implementation determine to a great extent whether and how a policy is realised (OECD, 2010<sub>[30]</sub>; Viennet and Pont, 2017<sub>[3]</sub>; Schleicher, 2018<sub>[16]</sub>). Research evidence shows that one of the key factors for schools to develop as learning organisations is the extent to which financial and other resources are perceived as sufficient for learning to occur (Silins, Zarins and Mulford, 2002<sub>[31]</sub>).

School staff and various other stakeholders the OECD team interviewed expressed their concerns about the recent budget cuts coming just as Wales is in the midst of a curriculum reform which will undoubtedly require additional effort and further professional learning and collaborative working for many. Also, only 40% of schools have been invited to participate in the SLO survey as part of this study. Wider roll-out of an online self-assessment version of the SLO survey scheduled during the 2018 autumn term and other efforts to promote Wales' SLO model will likely significantly increase national engagement. It is obvious that some of the OECD findings and recommendations have resource implications. Future resource requirements will have to be carefully estimated to inform for the development of the proposed SLO implementation plan.

The Welsh Government recognises the challenges to schools and among other things has increased the Pupil Development Grant and allocated an additional GBP 100 million to support the realisation of the new curriculum. Despite these and other investments many schools in parts of Wales seem to be facing budget pressures.

Research evidence shows that while the United Kingdom (UK) has high levels of general public administration efficiency, its health care and education efficiency is weak (Dutu and Sicari, 2016<sub>[32]</sub>). As covered in Chapter 4, the lack of a level playing field remains a clear challenge for schools in Wales, with the differences in funding allocations between schools across Wales' 22 local authorities. The evidence from this assessment suggests schools in Wales do not have equal access to time and resources to support their staff's professional learning which causes obvious barriers to their ability to establish a learning culture and is likely to affect their ability to put the new curriculum into practice.

The OECD team believe that – especially in light of the fiscal reality the education sector is facing, with possible further budget cuts to come – the Welsh Government should consider reviewing its school funding model as discussed in Chapter 4. The proposed in-depth analysis of school funding in Wales should be used to respond to concerns about unequal treatment of schools in similar circumstances as a result of different local funding models – see Recommendation 1.1.1.

Having said that, it is important to note that many steps to ensure staff have the time and resources to engage in collaborative working and professional learning are within the control of schools. As mentioned earlier (in Chapter 3) several of the examples from Wales presented in this report show that pressures on funding do not need to lead to a reduction in ambition, but rather the opposite. Such good practices could serve to inspire and inform other schools and as such should be systematically collected and shared widely across the system.

### Inclusive stakeholder engagement

Whether and how key stakeholders are recognised and included in the design and implementation process is crucial to the success of any policy (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>; Schleicher, 2018<sup>[16]</sup>). It is widely acknowledged that stakeholders, whether individual actors or collective entities, formal (e.g. labour unions and implementing agencies) or informal (e.g. parents and political coalitions), should display some agency, which contributes to shaping the policy design and subsequent realisation process (Nakamura and Smallwood, 1980<sup>[33]</sup>; Spillane, Reiser and Reimer, 2002<sup>[34]</sup>; Schleicher, 2018<sup>[16]</sup>).



### Co-construction of policies

The interests and capacity of actors determine how they engage or react to a policy. The probability that a policy will be effectively implemented increases significantly when regional or local-level actors, education providers, teachers, principals and parents are on board with it as opposed to protesting against it (Malen, 2006<sup>[35]</sup>; Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>; Tummers, 2012<sup>[36]</sup>). Policy makers thus look for ways to get these key actors to agree with the policy and to help implement it. One of the most effective ways to do this is involving them from the start in the design and implementation of the policy (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>).

As an earlier OECD assessment (2017<sup>[13]</sup>) concluded, the drive for policy coherence and process of co-construction of policies have become characteristic of the Welsh Government's reform approach. In recent years, many of its policies have been developed together with key stakeholders. This has been done through various means, including the creation of multi-stakeholder working groups for different topics, and the use of stakeholder consultation events to engage schools, local authorities, regional consortia, and other stakeholders in the shaping of policies – from the early stages through to drawing on their active support when putting them into practice.

The evidence collected during the course of this assessment, which included many interviews and discussions with stakeholders at all levels of the education system, suggests that stakeholders welcome this relatively new process of co-construction of policies in support of the curriculum reform effort. For example, several of the school leaders and teachers the OECD team spoke to noted they much appreciated “being asked” to share their views on policies, rather than being informed of what to do – as had often been the case in the past.

The teachers’ unions also seem supportive of this new approach and the curriculum reform more generally (of which the SLO policy is a part) although they have raised concerns about the pressures on the school budgets and called on the UK Government to raise the salaries of teachers and school leaders in Wales and England (WalesOnline, 2018<sup>[37]</sup>); although discussions are ongoing to devolve this responsibility to Wales, the UK Government is currently still responsible for the setting of teachers’ and school leaders’ salaries. However, these concerns and demands have been raised as issues needing to be resolved to support the ongoing reforms, rather than opposing them. The concerns about the school budget have also been raised by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) Wales, which has also in general been supportive of the curriculum reform and related policy thrusts. ASCL representatives and members are actively contributing to various working groups and participating in consultation events, for example.

Furthermore, Estyn (the inspectorate of education and training in Wales) has also been actively supporting the curriculum reform effort. Its staff are also participating in consultation events and taking part in various working groups, in particular the SLO Pilot/Implementation Group and the development of a national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit.

As discussed above, Wales’ SLO model was developed as part of a process of co-construction. This has played an important role in developing ownership of the model and building support among various stakeholders for putting it into practice. For instance, as discussed above, the SLO Pilot Group’s main role when it was founded was initially to make the Welsh Government’s SLO policy more concrete by defining the SLO model which was launched in November 2017. Since then this stakeholders’ group has been renamed the SLO Implementation Group as the policy moves into the implementation phase. Its membership at the time of finalising this report consisted of representatives of the Welsh Government, the regional consortia, Estyn and the National Academy for Educational Leadership, and it is supported by OECD.

This move into the implementation phase also means the role and responsibilities of the group need to be reviewed. Several stakeholders the OECD team interviewed agreed this multi-stakeholder group should take the lead in developing an SLO implementation plan (see below), monitoring progress and ensuring collective learning among the various stakeholders involved about the most effective ways to support schools in their innovation journeys.

In addition, the group should take on a more explicit role of supporting the Welsh Government’s efforts towards greater policy coherence, most immediately in the areas of professional learning and school self-evaluation and development planning. Additional stakeholders may also be engaged in the process. For example, the Education Workforce Council could be invited to join this working group given its mandate as the national regulator and promoter of professionalism and high standards within the education workforce.

In recognition of the fact that the implementation group is well established and the integration of Wales' SLO model in other policies and programmes has gained the necessary momentum, the OECD should scale back its contributions to the implementation group and its work on SLOs in Wales more generally.

### A conducive institutional, policy and societal context

An effective policy implementation process recognises the influence of the existing policy environment, the educational governance and institutional settings, and the external context. Acknowledging the institutional, policy and societal context in which the policy is to be put into practice makes success more likely (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>).

#### *PISA 2009: Recognition of the need for change*

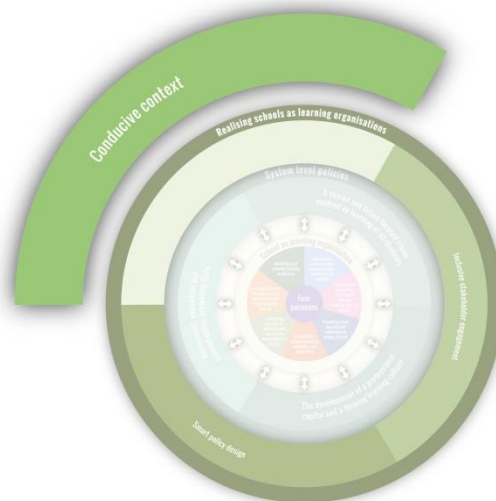
Wales' disappointing 2009 PISA results served as a catalyst for a public dialogue on the future of its education. This "PISA shock" had a positive influence in that it resulted in a broad conviction within Welsh society that things needed to change. In 2011 Wales embarked on a large-scale school improvement reform that sought to improve the quality and equity of the Welsh school system (OECD, 2014<sup>[12]</sup>). This reform effort has evolved and become increasingly comprehensive and guided by a vision of the Welsh learner (OECD, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>). The curriculum reform, starting with a public consultation process, has further clarified this vision which, as discussed above, is broadly shared by the education profession, key stakeholders and other sections of Welsh society.

#### *PISA 2018 results*

One issue raised by several people the OECD team interviewed was their concern that if PISA 2018 results did not show sufficient improvements in student performance, some may use this as evidence against the curriculum reform – of which the SLO policy forms a key part. However, the curriculum reform was only started in 2015, and although the Digital Competence Framework (i.e. the first part of the new curriculum) became available in September 2016, the whole curriculum will only be made available in April 2019 – after the PISA 2018 tests will be conducted. It will therefore be too soon to make any judgements on the curriculum based on PISA 2018 results.

Furthermore, a meta-analysis of effect studies of comprehensive school reforms showed the existence of an "implementation dip" (Borman et al., 2002<sup>[38]</sup>; Fullan, 2011<sup>[39]</sup>; Fullan and Miles, 1992<sup>[40]</sup>). It may take a few years before changes are consolidated and then results keep improving for five to eight years after the initial implementation (Borman et al., 2002<sup>[38]</sup>; Fullan and Miles, 1992<sup>[40]</sup>). The results of PISA 2021 and following cycles may therefore be more useful for monitoring progress of the curriculum reform.

In addition, attention should be paid to expanding the public discussion of student performance to align it with the concepts included in the new curriculum. International



comparisons of literacy, numeracy and science could be complemented with more in-depth analysis of the data in areas such as the factors influencing student performance, collaborative problem-solving skills and student well-being. These are at the heart of Wales' ambitions for the new curriculum but are often overlooked in public dialogue on PISA results in Wales. A more explicit recognition of the wider PISA results in the system-level monitoring by the Welsh Government and Estyn may support a broader discussion about the learning and well-being of students in Wales.

### *The (possible) influence of Brexit*

An obvious change in the societal context in recent years is the decision of the UK to withdraw from the European Union, often referred to as “Brexit”. Although it is impossible to foresee the full impact of these changes for the education sector in Wales, some have warned of possible changes in demand for public services, and in education and housing in particular (Bevan Foundation, 2017<sup>[41]</sup>; Husbands, 2016<sup>[42]</sup>; Kierzenkowski et al., 2016<sup>[43]</sup>). Much will depend on the outcome of ongoing discussions between the UK Government and the European Union.

As mentioned earlier, there are concerns that in the short-to-medium term the education budget is likely to continue to be under pressure (Bevan Foundation, 2017<sup>[41]</sup>; Kierzenkowski et al., 2016<sup>[43]</sup>). Whether the funding provided will be enough to support all schools in Wales to develop as learning organisations is impossible to tell at this stage. It is essential that the Welsh Government, local authorities and others to carefully monitor the impact of this fiscal reality on schools throughout Wales.

The findings of this assessment are encouraging however; as discussed above, the OECD team learned of several examples of schools that have not lowered their ambitions due to budget pressures but rather have found other, sometimes creative ways of using the skills and resources available within their school and elsewhere to promote professional learning and improvements in teaching and learning.

### *Changes in the governance structure*

#### *Possible restructuring of local government*

The institutional structure of the decision-making and implementation levels influence the way education policies may be put into practice (Fullan and Quinn, 2015<sup>[5]</sup>). Changes in the institutional context change the rules of the game, leaving the implementers to adapt their practices. The OECD team learned of an ongoing discussion about the possible restructuring of the governance structure, i.e. a possible reduction in the number of local authorities, the bodies responsible for the delivery of school education in Wales.

In 2014 the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery had concluded that Welsh public services needed comprehensive reform, including a reduction in the number of local authorities to ensure the provision of integrated and high-quality health and social services across Wales (Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery, 2014<sup>[44]</sup>). The OECD team understand this potential restructuring has again become an issue under discussion in Wales, especially considering the challenging fiscal situation.

If the decision is indeed made to reduce the number of local authorities and restructure public services accordingly, the Welsh Government may want to consider delaying action for a few years to help ensure the efforts of all those involved remain focused on



working together on establishing a learning culture and bringing the new curriculum to life in schools across Wales.

*The need to enhance the support for students with additional learning needs*

As covered in Chapter 4, equity, inclusion and well-being are central to the Welsh Government's policy agenda (Welsh Government, 2017<sup>[1]</sup>) and are as such also explicitly recognised in the first dimension of the SLO model for Wales (Welsh Government, 2017<sup>[2]</sup>).

Recognising that the system for supporting children and young people with special education needs was no longer fit for purpose, Wales recently decided to introduce new legislation to create a unified system for supporting all learners with “additional learning needs” (Welsh Government, 2016<sup>[45]</sup>). As noted in the 2017 OECD assessment report, this would seem an important step towards realising Wales' ambitions for equity in educational opportunities and its well-being agenda (OECD, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>). The OECD assessment also noted that Wales' current governance model offers challenges to the provision of services for students with additional learning needs. Interviews with various stakeholders corroborated these earlier findings and suggested that several of the 22 local authorities, especially the smaller ones, lacked the capacity, both human and financial, to respond to the growing need for support for this group of students.

An additional challenge is what one stakeholder called the “awkward” separation of responsibilities. Local authorities manage the services for students with special education needs (i.e. health and social services), while the regional consortia are responsible for school improvement services.

The new system for additional learning needs aims to respond to this challenge. It will transform the separate systems for special educational needs in schools and learning difficulties and/or disabilities in further education, to create a unified system for supporting students from 0 to 25 with additional learning needs (ALN) (Welsh Government, 2018<sup>[46]</sup>). The transformed system aims to:

- ensure that all students with ALN are supported to overcome barriers to learning and can achieve their full potential
- improve the planning and delivery of support for students from 0 to 25 with ALN, placing students' needs, views, wishes and feelings at the heart of the process
- focus on the importance of identifying needs early and putting in place timely and effective interventions which are monitored and adapted to ensure they deliver the desired outcomes.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act is expected to come into force from September 2020 and the implementation period will last until 2023. The Welsh Government recognises that the successful transformation to the new system depends on helping services to prepare for the changes ahead and to develop closer multi-agency and cross-sector working practices. It therefore established an ALN Transformation Programme for the skills development of the education workforce, to deliver effective support to students with ALN in the classroom, as well as easier access to specialist support, information and advice. This includes the establishment of a small team of “ALN transformation leads” who will support local authorities, schools, early years settings, further education institutions and other delivery partners to prepare for and manage transition to the new ALN system. Four of the five ALN transformation leads are



operating at the regional level and are responsible for supporting local authorities, schools, early years settings and local health boards prepare for and implement the new system. The fifth is responsible for providing the same support to the further education sector (Welsh Government, 2018<sup>[47]</sup>).

The various stakeholders the OECD team spoke to were all in favour of the new system. Several of them however questioned whether the current local government structure would enable it to be realised across all parts of Wales, with particular reference to some of the smaller local authorities that are believed to lack in capacity. The representatives of the regional consortia the OECD team interviewed recognised they also had to do their part to make this reform into a success.

The Welsh Government should – as it intends to do – carefully monitor the progress made in putting the new ALN system into practice. If progress is lacking and/or there are inconsistencies across parts of Wales, it could consider making regional consortia also responsible for services for students with ALN. Consideration of this option should be done in light of the possible restructuring of public services discussed above.

### ***Moving towards greater policy coherence***

#### *The need for continuing efforts towards greater policy coherence*

The number and variety of policies can make education a crowded policy field, with the possibility of two policies contradicting or misaligning with each other. This misalignment can arise from a contradiction in the educational practices the policies advocate (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>; Porter, 1994<sup>[48]</sup>; Schleicher, 2018<sup>[16]</sup>). As noted in an earlier OECD assessment (2017<sup>[13]</sup>) Wales has made considerable progress in recent years in ensuring greater policy coherence. However, the assessment also concluded that there was still scope for further improvement and recommended clarifying the connections between the various reform initiatives.

The Welsh Government has responded positively to this recommendation and used the development of the strategic education action plan, *Education in Wales: Our National Mission* (Welsh Government, 2017<sup>[11]</sup>) as an opportunity to bring about greater policy coherence. As it progresses from plans to action, the government's reform approach, centred on a process of co-construction, continues to move towards greater policy coherence. The various working groups the government has established for the development and realisation of policies and the established Change Board are important ways to maintain this momentum.

The OECD team have identified several examples where there is scope for greater policy coherence, however. One example is the ongoing development of the assessment, evaluation and accountability framework which, as some stakeholders have pointed out to the OECD team, seems insufficiently connected to the ongoing work on the development of the curriculum and assessment arrangements by the Pioneer Schools (see Chapter 4). There is also a need for better co-ordination of the ongoing work on the development of system-level key performance indicators with the development of the school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit. International evidence shows that failing to co-ordinate and align these strands of work may result in a lack of coherence between the curriculum and the assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements (OECD, 2013<sup>[49]</sup>) which in turn puts the whole curriculum reform effort at risk.

Wales' SLO model has been developed to support the curriculum reform but initially was not fully integrated into the current reform efforts. It was not directly linked to related policy areas such as professional learning and school self-evaluations and development planning. However, the Welsh Government and other stakeholders have recognised the need for greater coherence with other policies. The OECD team have been witness to – and asked to contribute to – several attempts to bring about greater policy coherence. One example of this is the recently started development of a national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit, as mentioned in Chapter 4. This is of particular relevance to realising the SLO model in schools throughout Wales, as the model is likely to be integrated into it. This toolkit is also likely to ensure greater coherence between school self-evaluation and external evaluations. As Chapter 4 covered, another example is the decision to integrate the SLO model into all future leadership development programmes. The OECD team agree this is an important step towards ensuring that present and future leaders develop into “change agents” and work to create the conditions for a learning culture to thrive in schools across Wales.

These efforts towards greater policy coherence and the integration of Wales' SLO model into the larger curriculum reform effort should be continued. One area for further policy coherence – or, more accurately, communication on policy coherence – is the need raised above to better explain to stakeholders how Wales' SLO model is aligned with and supports the realisation of the new curriculum, the teaching and leadership standards, the national approach to professional learning, and Wales' ambitions for a self-improving school system.

#### *Enhancing coherence in policy and practice across the four regional consortia*

The regional consortia as discussed play a crucial role in the school improvement system infrastructure of Wales. The earlier OECD assessment made note of the recent progress made in co-ordination and collaboration between the regional consortia (OECD, 2017<sup>[13]</sup>). As discussed above, this positive trend in collective thinking and working and developing trusting relationships has continued. These collaborative efforts should continue and, where possible, be deepened as they bring many benefits, including more consistency in the quality of school improvement services. Enhanced insight into duplications and best practice may lead to consolidation and jointly offered school improvement services.

These services include helping schools develop into learning organisations. It is essential that schools throughout Wales are equally supported in this. However, although the four consortia have all contributed to the development of Wales' SLO model through the SLO Pilot Group, the OECD team as mentioned found considerable differences in how they are engaging with schools in their region to disseminate this model and support them in putting it in practice.

Therefore, the work of the SLO Implementation Group (previously the SLO Pilot Group) would need to continue to ensure co-ordination and collaboration among consortia and other stakeholders, and collectively look for the best ways to support schools in developing into learning organisations. The joint formulation of a national SLO implementation plan, which is partially made up of regional action plans, will be an important step forward in this area, while still leaving room for regional variation.

### The next step: Developing a coherent implementation plan

As this report was being finalised, work was started on the development of an SLO implementation plan that is intended to form an integrated part of a larger reform effort. Several activities are planned or have already been started as part of the plan. These include:

- the establishment of the SLO Pilot Group (September 2016)
- the inclusion of the objective to develop all schools and other parts of the system into learning organisations in the education strategic action plan *Education in Wales: Our National Mission* (September 2017)
- the co-construction and release of Wales' SLO model (November 2017)
- the integration of the SLO model into leadership development programmes (autumn 2018)
- the development of the school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit in which the model is likely to be integrated (started in May 2018)
- ongoing development of an animation aimed at children and young people that explains Wales' SLO model and its relation to the curriculum reform
- scheduled workshops for the regional consortia's challenge advisors (July 2018)
- ongoing development of an online SLO self-assessment survey that can be freely used by school staff (scheduled to be launched November 2018)
- ongoing efforts by the Welsh Government's Education Directorate and several middle-tier organisations to develop into learning organisations.

The OECD team agree these are all important activities to support schools in their development efforts. However, this assessment has identified several other issues and policy areas that call for further action by the Welsh Government, regional consortia, local authorities, Estyn and other stakeholders at various levels of the system that are aim to inform the development of the implementation plan.

Furthermore, recognising the equity challenges and different starting points of schools across Wales, the plan should pay particular attention to bringing on board and supporting those schools that for various reasons are less likely to participate in networks and other forms of collaborative learning and working, but which need it most.

Research evidence calls for the development of an implementation plan or strategy to cover the objectives to be achieved, task allocation (i.e. who does what), the resources and timing involved, communication and engagement with stakeholders, and monitoring of the policy (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). The OECD team however would like to urge caution in defining objectives and the monitoring of progress. It is essential that the development of SLOs is not seen as a high-stakes exercise by schools: one that primarily serves the purpose of accountability, rather than serving the purpose of informing professional learning and their developmental journeys.

For example, the Welsh Government could make selective use of research to inform itself and other stakeholders on the progress schools are making in putting the learning organisation dimensions into practice, ideally through a mixed-methods design as this allows for the triangulation and deepening of findings. Data from the planned online SLO

self-assessment survey could possibly be used in a limited way for this purpose, as long as individual schools are not identified, as that would raise the stakes. Case study research could provide an insight in the change and innovation journeys schools have undergone, thereby potentially serving as an example to others.

However, these are suggestions; the key issue is to be aware of unintended consequences that could stand at odds with the ambition of developing schools into learning organisations.

## Recommendations

### *Implementation issue 1: Policy design: Enhance the policy justification, its logic and its feasibility*

To enhance a policy's implementation potential – in this case the policy to develop all schools in Wales as learning organisations – it is important for it to be well justified, that is, to be built on evidence and respond clearly to a need; to complement other policies; and to be feasible (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). The evidence suggests Wales' SLO policy has been well received and is increasingly well understood by the education profession and other stakeholders in Wales. Progress has also been made in strengthening the system infrastructure that is to support schools in developing as learning organisations.

Three issues call for further attention to ensure all schools are able to develop as learning organisation:

**Implementation issue 1.1:** Improving the communication of the justification and logic of Wales' SLO policy and how it forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform and relates to other policies.

**Implementation issue 1.2:** Ensuring the education budget and school funding model support schools developing as learning organisations and putting the curriculum into practice.

**Implementation issue 1.3:** Continuing to strengthen the system infrastructure for supporting schools in their change and innovation efforts.

### *Recommendations*

**Recommendation 1.1.1: Develop an easy-to-understand narrative that explains how Wales' SLO model can guide schools in their development, forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform and relates to other policies** like the teaching and leadership standards, and contributes to realising the objective of a self-improving school system. This narrative should be shared widely through various means, including policy documents, blogs and presentations by policy makers.

**Recommendation 1.3.1: Continue strengthening the capacity of the regional consortia to support schools developing as learning organisations.** The Regional consortia should:

- **Continue their efforts to provide greater support to schools and promote a learning culture**, with less emphasis on challenging schools and greater attention to the secondary sector. Regional consortia should optimise their structures and services to be able to meet the demands for support by schools that are likely to grow because of the curriculum reform. Consortia should pay particular attention

to enhancing challenge advisors' skills to support schools in establishing a learning culture and putting the new curriculum into practice.

- **Continue expanding and deepening collaborations and co-ordination between consortia.** The senior management of the consortia have a vital role to play in this, including by encouraging and facilitating their staff to work together on projects and activities, and explore ways to reduce duplications and streamline services.
- **Continue improving the monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their services provided to schools.**

**Recommendation 1.2.2: Estyn should continue to monitor the progress the consortia are making in enhancing and streamlining of their services to schools.** Local authorities should continue to also be monitored by Estyn.

***Implementation issue 2: Continuing the process of co-construction for the realisation of SLOs across Wales, while supporting greater policy coherence***

Whether and how key stakeholders are recognised and included in the design and implementation process is crucial to the success of any policy (Nakamura and Smallwood, 1980<sup>[33]</sup>; Spillane, Reiser and Reimer, 2002<sup>[34]</sup>; Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>; Tummers, 2012<sup>[36]</sup>). The process of co-construction which characterises the reform approach in Wales has played a pivotal role in ensuring a strong ownership of Wales' SLO model among key stakeholders and their active support for its implementation. Further work is needed however to enable and support all schools in Wales to develop as learning organisations and continue the drive for greater policy coherence.

***Recommendations***

**Recommendation 2.1: Enhance the collaboration and alignment between the various work strands on the development of assessment, evaluation and the curriculum.** The ongoing development of the assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements and the work by the Pioneer Schools on the curriculum and assessment arrangements call for better co-ordination. Similarly, is there a need to better co-ordinate and align the ongoing work on the system-level key performance indicators and the school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit. Failing to co-ordinate and align these work strands may lead to a lack of coherence and put the whole curriculum reform at risk.

**Recommendation 2.2: The SLO Implementation Group should continue to support the realisation of Wales' SLO policy, while striving for greater policy coherence.** The group should lead the development of an SLO implementation plan (see below), monitor progress in realising Wales' SLO policy and ensure further action is taken when necessary. The group should continue to support greater policy coherence, including through collective working and learning about how best to support schools in their innovation journeys. It should furthermore co-ordinate with and collaborate with other working groups, most immediately in the areas of professional learning and school self-evaluation and development planning, and agencies such as the Education Workforce Council.

***Implementation issue 3: Continue shaping, monitoring and responding to the changing institutional, policy and societal context***

The successful implementation, or realisation, of a policy is more likely when it takes into account the institutional, policy and societal context in which the policy is to be put into practice (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). In Wales, the institutional, policy and societal context has been conducive to large-scale curriculum reform and this includes Wales' SLO policy.

There however are two contextual issues to take into particular consideration to ensure that the SLO policy is sustainable:

**Implementation issue 3.1:** The need to broaden the public dialogue generated by Wales' PISA results.

**Implementation issue 3.2:** The need to optimise governance arrangements to enable all schools in Wales to develop as learning organisations.

*Recommendations*

**Recommendation 3.1: Expand the public dialogue generated by PISA results to align it to the ambitions of the new curriculum.** Skills such as collaborative problem solving, and student motivation for learning and their well-being are central to the four purposes of the new curriculum but are often overlooked in public discussions about PISA in Wales. More explicit recognition of such skills in the system-level monitoring of PISA results by the Welsh Government and Estyn could help support a constructive and broader discussion about how PISA can inform the learning and well-being of students in Wales.

**Recommendation 3.2: Continue monitoring the effectiveness of recent and possible further changes to governance structures** to ensure all schools in Wales are able to developing as learning organisations and realise the ambitions of the new curriculum for all students.

***Implementation issue 4: The need for a coherent implementation plan***

While this report was being finalised, work had started on the development of an SLO implementation plan intended to form an integrated part of the larger reform effort. Several activities have been taken already, are planned or ongoing that should be part of this plan. The OECD team agree these are all important activities to support schools in their development efforts. This assessment however has identified several other issues and policy areas that call for further action by the Welsh Government, regional consortia, local authorities, Estyn and other stakeholders at various levels of the system and as such should inform the development of the implementation plan.

*Recommendation*

**Recommendation 4.1: Develop and put in practice a national SLO implementation plan to empower schools across Wales in developing as learning organisations.** The SLO Implementation Group should lead the development of an SLO implementation plan, monitor progress in realising Wales' SLO policy, and ensure further action is taken when necessary.

The findings and recommendations of this report are aimed to inform the development of the implementation plan, not as a separate action plan but rather as an integrated part of

the larger curriculum reform effort. The national action plan – to be partially made up of four regional action plans – should ensure *all* schools have the opportunity to develop as learning organisations and ultimately put the new curriculum into practice. Particular attention should be paid to bringing on board and supporting those schools that for various reasons are less likely to seek support, participate in school-to-school collaboration and other forms of collaborative learning and working, while needing it most. Furthermore, attention should be paid to:

- **The setting of objectives and the monitoring of progress should not become a high-stakes exercise for schools.** One option could be to regularly mine the anonymised data that will be collected through the online SLO survey. Qualitative research could complement the analysis, aimed at exploring progress, including identifying good practices that should be widely shared, challenges and areas for further improvement.
- **Task allocation.** The regional consortia play a pivotal role in supporting schools in their change and innovation journeys. However as highlighted through this report, higher education institutions and other parties could do their part and complement the system infrastructure.
- **The timing and sequencing of actions will require prioritisation.** Phasing in actions allows efforts to be focused, bearing in mind schools' capacity to develop as learning organisations and bring the new curriculum to life. One action that requires immediate attention is the need to clarify the transition period to the new approaches to school self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations.
- **Communication and engagement strategy with education stakeholders.** An important first step will be, as recommended above, to develop and widely share an easily understood narrative that explains how Wales' SLO model can guide schools in their development, forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform and relates to other policies. The systematic collection and sharing of good practice is another area to consider.

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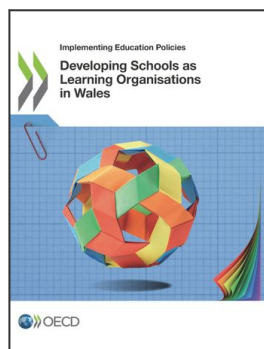


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