

Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales: Implementation - Estyn response

1 Pioneer schools

Estyn agrees with the principle of subsidiarity that encourages ownership of curriculum reform by the teaching profession. A particular strength of the pioneer model is its engagement with schools as a whole organizations, including middle as well as senior management. Because the model has the school as its basic unit, the interdependencies of the curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and leadership are more likely to be considered in the round. A danger of the model is that 'non-pioneer schools' feel 'outside the loop'. Regular, high-quality communication is needed to mitigate this danger.

Curriculum reform requires balancing of national direction, expert advice and harnessing of practitioner expertise. The Digital Competence Framework approach of doing this worked well. A useful feature of the DCF process was having a small but representative steering group that would sift the best ideas from pioneer schools and experts and communicate them with the wider group. It is good to understand that the intention is to 'scale up' this DCF approach to the more complex context of wider curriculum reform.

2 Professional learning and ITET

The underperformance of the ITET sector in Wales is well documented (eg Tabberer, Furlong and Estyn reports). ITET in Wales needs to look internationally for best practice because of the limitations of the provision here. New accreditation arrangements for ITET, based on the most recent Furlong report, are being developed, and it is too early to judge the success of these new arrangements. A key criterion will be the extent to which partner schools are involved in the leadership and management of the new courses.

Successful Futures provides a coherent vision for curriculum reform and sets clear expectations for the outcomes for learners ('the four purposes'). The vision for professional learning is developing. Regional consortia operate various models of professional learning and most are based on school-to-school support. There has not been enough evaluation of these models and there is too much regional variation. We need a consistent all-Wales national model for professional learning, delivered regionally. The OECD 'learning organisation' model is a promising development that has the potential to bring coherence to this policy area.

Leadership capacity shortfalls exist across the education system in Wales as noted in several Estyn Annual Reports, and it is good to hear the commitment to establish a Leadership Academy.

3 Governance arrangements – Advisory Board, Change Board and Strategic Stakeholder Group

The governance arrangements for education reform programme are changing. The various boards provide suitable mechanisms for advising, scrutinising and challenging decisions made by the Programme Board. It is good to understand that the Programme Board is to be strengthened and widened.

4 Other matters

- The implications of Successful Futures are very broad and go beyond the curriculum, involving changes to pedagogy, assessment, professional learning, leadership, accountability and Welsh language education.
- It is a challenge to balance the need for quick improvements with giving enough time for considered change. For example, an initial period of reflection on the implication of the Donaldson report was necessary, so that pioneer schools developed a common understanding of the issues. After a year of thinking time, it is time to increase the pace of progress. A clear action plan for the future, particularly for developing the new ALoEs, is now needed.
- One of the most challenging priorities for curriculum reform is reviewing assessment and its relationship with accountability.
- Curriculum reform entails qualification reform. Qualification reform is necessary to ensure that qualifications do not drive the secondary school curriculum in unintended ways. In Qualifications Wales we now have the means to ensure that our qualifications are aligned with the agreed learner outcomes of the new curriculum.
- Curriculum reform occurs within the wider context of education reform in Wales. The education culture in Wales is maturing and there is a growing sense of common endeavour within an increasingly self-improving system. It is important to build on this improving education culture.
- The management of curriculum reform raises issues of capacity building across the Welsh education system. For example, the PPIW report on 'Evidence needs and the Welsh Education System' notes that 'implementation needs to be the subject of inquiry' and that there is 'no single template for successful implementation'. Common understanding of project management principles and implementation processes should be developed and feature as part of the professional learning of leaders across the system.
- Estyn agrees with the broad direction of travel of the 'Successful Futures' report including the recommendations. Prof Graham Donaldson asked Estyn to second HMI to his review team and two HMI (one full time and one part time) were seconded during 2013-14. Welsh Government has changed regulations to move from a six-year to a seven-year inspection cycle, which releases resource for Estyn to fully provide advice on curriculum reform.