



Developing our Evidence Base

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Information

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Developing our Evidence Base

Audience	All bodies with an interest, inside and outside of Wales, in the formulation of evidence that informs and challenges DCELLS strategies, policies and programmes.
Overview	This document outlines DCELLS current and future analytical priorities.
Action required	None – for information.
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Additional copies	This document can also be accessed from the Welsh Assembly Government website at: www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

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1. Foreword

Jane Hutt, Minister for the Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills



Evidence is the foundation of our policy development and evaluation work and is a vital tool in assessing the impact we are having on improving the life chances and opportunities of children and young people in Wales.

Evidence tells us how well we are progressing with our ambitious agenda. This includes our transformation work linked with creating 21st century schools, our innovative School Effectiveness Framework¹, the full roll-out of the Foundation Phase and the implementation of 'Skills that Work for Wales'².

Our policies for children and young people are based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and our Seven Core Aims for Children and Young People which state that all children should:

- have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development;
- have access to a comprehensive range of education , training and learning opportunities including acquisition of essential personal and social skills;
- enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation;
- have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities;
- are listened to and treated with respect and are able to have their race and cultural identity recognised;
- have a safe home and community that supports physical and emotional wellbeing; and
- are not disadvantaged by poverty.

¹ School Effectiveness Framework:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/schooleffectivenessframework/?lang=en>

² Skills that Work for Wales:

http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/skillsthatforwales/?lang=en

Foundation Phase:
http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/104009-wag/foundation_phase/?lang=en

Our policies for adults in relation to skills and lifelong learning are based upon 'Skills that Work for Wales' – the Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan³. This sets out a distinctive and ambitious Welsh skills agenda, explaining how we want to get more people into work, and improve the quality and relevance of all forms of learning.

My Department has now drawn together our overall approach to gathering and presenting the evidence so important in developing and improving policies specific to Wales and its learners. It is set out in this document and I hope it helps you clearly see how evidence will help us achieve our aim to create a learning country.

³ http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/skillsthatforwales/?lang=en

2. Purpose

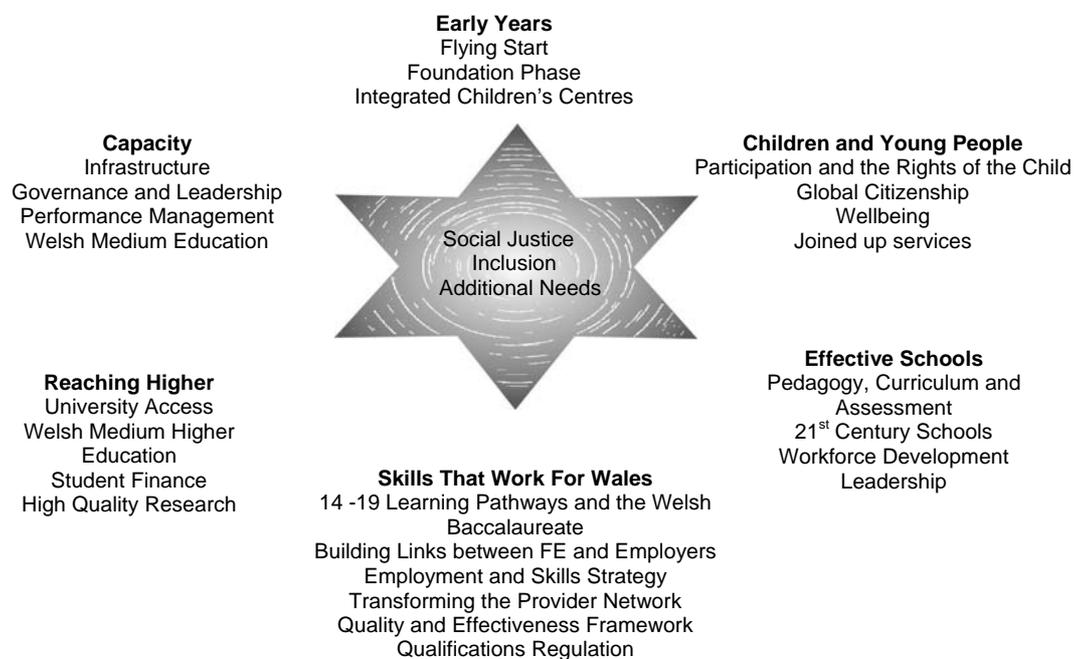
Professor David Hawker, Director General,
Department for Children, Education, Lifelong
Learning and Skills.



**“ To provide high quality ,timely evidence that informs and challenges
DCELLS strategies , policies and programmes”**

This document outlines our current and future analytical priorities.

It reflects the fact that DCELLS’ work impacts not only upon education, learning and training within and beyond Wales, but also on many other aspects of people’s lives such as health and social care, economic prospects, engagement with society, and individual and community well-being. Its content reflects our six priority areas, shown at the points of the ‘Star’ below.



Evaluation of DCELLS policies will always be a priority as we must ensure that public money is well spent and achieves the outcomes we desire. Equally important, however is that we look to the future and critically consider issues and developments that may impact on children, young people and all learners across and from Wales.

To be driven by evidence in our decision-making we must continue to be outward-looking. We must look to national and international sources of information to ensure that our policies are based upon the best available evidence.

We must of course also exchange knowledge and understanding with our stakeholders and partners. This document is shared with you in that spirit.

3. Our Approach

Current Method

DCELLS' evidence planning has traditionally focussed on the year ahead, with some elements looking further forward.

It has taken the form of an internal document, developed as part of the annual Business Planning cycle, mainly capturing the work of the Research and Evaluation Branch and their externally commissioned projects and studies.

Much of the work has focussed on evaluation of policy and activity undertaken by DCELLS and its former component parts (ELWa, ACCAC, Dysg, Wales Youth Agency and Basic Skills Agency) to identify good practice. It has been driven by the needs of individual policy teams within DCELLS to help develop specific policies and programmes.

A cross-cutting programme of research on customer motivations, needs and satisfaction with our policies and delivery has also been implemented. Alongside this, 'think pieces' reviewing international best practice and studies, and international performance comparisons assist with our strategic development.

The work undertaken during the recent period of merger and consolidation for DCELLS has informed policy, but it has also prompted us to consider the scope and nature of evidence we utilise; how we need to develop a broad evidence base for the future. It has informed our approach outlined below.

Future Approach

Our evidence base is hugely important. It drives the development, implementation and evaluation of all our policies and strategies. We are moving towards a more strategic approach to the way in which we use existing evidence and commission new evidence. Evidence needs are considered in light of DCELLS strategic priorities and evaluations are commissioned to understand the impact that DCELLS policies and programmes are having on children and young people in the long term.

We will do this in concert with partners and stakeholders. External evidence from Wales, the UK and internationally will be actively sought to complement our own evidence base.

We will also liaise closely with Estyn, Her Majesty's Training and Education Inspectorate, to ensure that we build an evidence base that supports continued improvement in all learning settings.

When collecting data we will try to minimise the burden on citizens, public bodies and the private sector by following the principle of collecting once and using many times. Where data is already available we will use it before asking for fresh research.

We will use management information in an appropriate manner, in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and the Data Protection Act and taking into account the fitness for purpose of the data.

Our demand for evidence will be met in a variety of ways, including:

- internal analytical work, scenario testing and modelling: where analysts working in multi-disciplinary teams will provide policy and strategy colleagues with advice and evidence to support their decision making
- horizon scanning activity: where we will explore emerging issues nationally and internationally and consider potential implications for children, young people and learners in Wales, their communities and the economy
- commissioning of research and evaluation work relating to DCELLS strategic priorities
- working with Higher Education Institutions in Wales and elsewhere to access expert advice in support of our distinctive policy agenda
- participating in international studies that are in line with our strategic objectives where such a study is appropriate and relevant

Ultimately, achieving our forward-looking approach will require capacity -building within DCELLS. In order to free-up the capacity of analysts to undertake the range of functions and outputs expressed in this document we must examine new ways, other than external consultancy or specialist support, of understanding whether the process and implementation of our policies and programmes are having an impact.

Important tenets

Delivering Together

We will continue to work closely with policy and strategy colleagues within DCELLS, other Welsh Assembly Government Directorates General and Departments, and with external partners. Social researchers, statisticians, economists and policy experts will work together as multi-disciplinary teams in order to produce high quality evidence.

Engaging Young People and Citizens

Our approach to developing our evidence base is intended to deliver improved results for children, young people and adults in Wales. This can only be achieved if

we engage with these groups in a meaningful way. We will gather the views of citizens and businesses through our Citizens Research Programme, and engage with young people in innovative ways through Funky Dragon, Clic and School Councils.

Assuring Quality

Alongside current quality assurance practices, Government Social Researchers across the Welsh Assembly Government are piloting a quality assurance protocol which will provide checks at pertinent stages of the research process from concept development to the dissemination of outputs. This will include peer review, utilising other government departments, higher education institutions and young people's partnerships.

Statistical work within the Welsh Assembly Government is bound by the UK Statistics Authority's 'Code of Practice for Official Statistics' and the Welsh Assembly Government 'Release Practices Protocol for Wales'⁴.

Economic advice is provided by economists who are members of the Government Economic Service (GES), which promotes and upholds professional standards for economists in government.

Sharing the Findings

Dissemination of research and statistics will continue in a transparent, timely manner according to relevant analytical protocols.

Our research and evaluation reports and statistical outputs are published bilingually where appropriate, and opportunities for citizens to participate in our activities through the medium of Welsh are readily available.

We are currently piloting a GSR (Government Social Research) publications protocol which sets out guidelines regarding notification of publication and timeframes. As such we would normally expect to publish externally commissioned reports within 16 weeks of agreeing a final report.

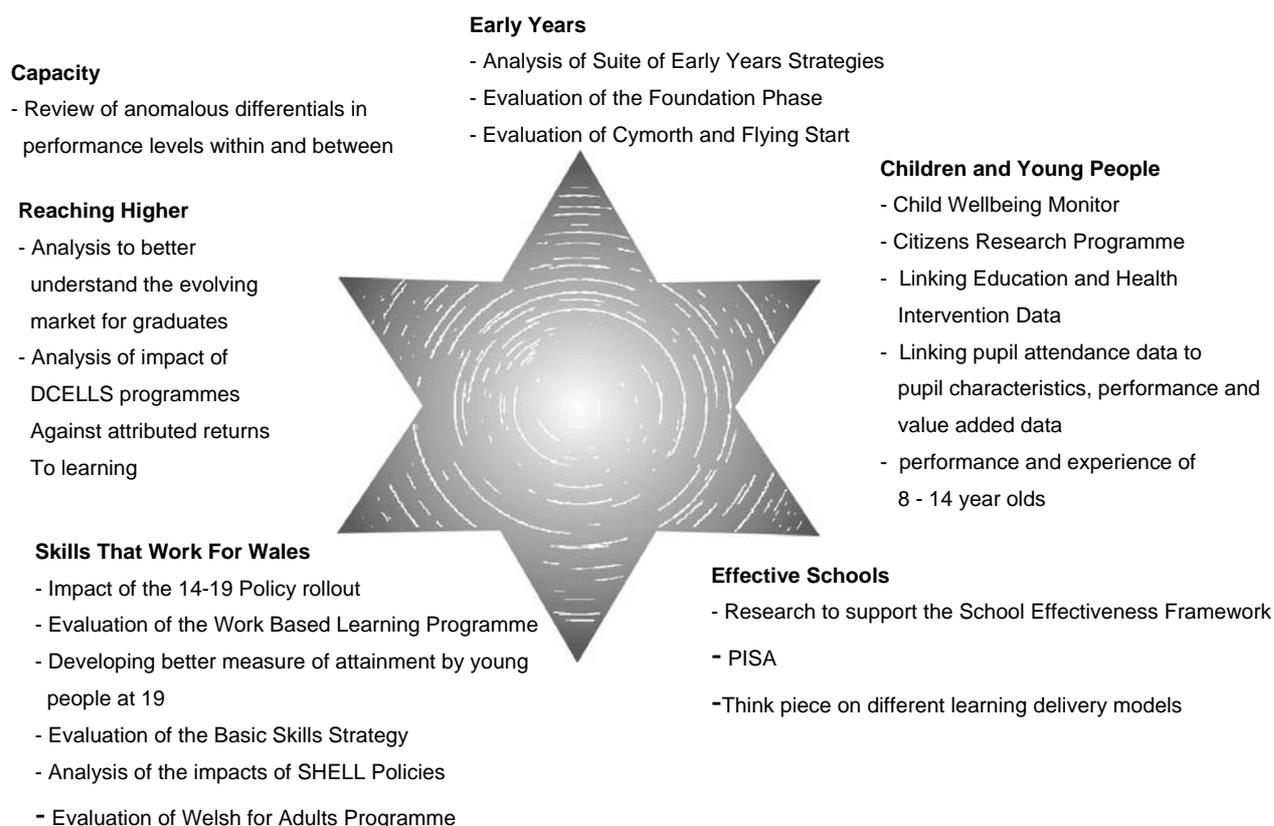
We recognise that the knowledge infrastructure in Wales is relatively weak and that we have an important role to play in the dissemination and embedding of research and evaluation findings. We will lead by establishing best practice in our approach to dissemination and knowledge transfer. This will involve short, focussed research briefs, seminars, and use of the Learning and Skills Observatory as a central vehicle to share and discuss research findings.

⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/relelase/?lang=en>

4. Evidence priorities 2009 – 2014

Our evidence priorities are governed by the strategic direction and purpose of DCELLS.

The diagram below illustrates how evidence requirements link to DCELLS' strategic priorities.



This is not an exhaustive picture, as we will be ready to respond to other pressing analytical requirements as and when they arise.

Major Activities Planned for the period

International Benchmarking

The One Wales Delivery Plan⁵ makes specific commitments to "enhance Wales' role in EU and international organisations and networks" and to "raise the international profile of Wales".⁴

⁵ The One Wales Delivery Plan 2009 – 2010:
<http://wales.gov.uk/about/strategy/publications/1walesdeliveryplan/?lang=en>

DCELLS is committed to international benchmarking activity and will participate in major Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) surveys where possible. We are participating in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which surveys 15 year-olds and assesses the level of literacy and numeracy skills held by 15 year-olds nearing the end of compulsory education. Second round results will be available in 2011. We will use this and other information from international sources to learn from countries who have improved PISA scores over time.

We will update our international benchmarking analysis at regular intervals.

Thematic Analysis

We are conscious of the need to make best use of the existing evidence base. A substantial body of evidence already exists in relation to some of the key issues that DCELLS will face in the future. It is our intention that analytical teams within the Welsh Assembly Government will review this evidence and work with policy teams and external experts to best utilise what is already known when considering current and future activity.

Four analytical pieces of work have been identified as priorities:

- an analysis of the impacts of the DCELLS programmes against attributed returns to learning. This will include a review of evidence around the accessibility and responsiveness of the system to employers' needs, both in terms of provision and funding
- an analysis of the impact of the suite of Early Years strategies implemented by DCELLS and how they interact with other programmes from across the Welsh Assembly Government. This will look at the impact of all early years interventions on young children in Wales
- a review of the degrees of difference in performance levels within and between Local Authorities across Wales
- a 'think-piece' on different learning delivery models in the context of the climate change and sustainability agenda. This work will review existing international evidence and consider potential implications for Wales

In addition we will undertake:

- ongoing economic analysis of evolving labour market circumstances and the implications for the demand for skills and qualifications;
- specific analysis to understand better the evolving market for graduates;
- review of emerging evidence of effectiveness of adult education and training particularly in respect of basic skills.;
- examination of the relative contribution of teachers, schools, Local Authorities, and other factors (including socio-economic) to pupil outcomes; and

- work to compare school performance in parts of Wales with that in other socio-economically similar parts of the UK.

Evaluations

Thorough and independent evaluation of our key policies and programmes is essential. This work provides us with important evidence which shows how policies and programmes are achieving against our long term goals and drives the Department's prioritisation of resources.

Key evaluations underway include:

- Foundation Phase;
- Impact of the 14-19 policy rollout;
- Cymorth and Flying Start;
- Basic Skills Strategy;
- Workforce Development Programme;
- Work Based Learning Programme; and
- Welsh for Adults Programme.

Strategic Research Activity

- Child Well Being Monitor⁶ - The 2008 Monitor focuses on the well-being of children and young people aged 0 to 18 years in Wales, with a view to providing a holistic picture of their lives.
- Citizens Research Programme - An ongoing programme of work to gather the views of learners and potential learners in relation to need, motivation and satisfaction.
- Performance and experience of 8 – 14 year olds. Research is required in order to fully understand the apparent declining levels of engagement and achievement in this age group, including the relative drop in attainment at age 14 compared with age 8.
- Review of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) - One of the key aims of the TLRP is to develop the UK knowledge base on teaching and learning and to make sure that the knowledge it develops is applied in practice and policy. We are working closely with representatives from TLRP and the Welsh Education Research Network (WERN) to deliver a synthesis of the findings of the TLRP. This work will examine and

⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/about/aboutresearch/social/ocsropage/2008monitor?lang=en>

interpret the relevance of the findings of the TLRP for education in Wales.
We expect this work to be published in early 2010.

5. Making an Impact on Policy

One of DCELLS key aspirations is to maximise the use of evidence in support of strategy, policy and practice.

Key tools at our disposal which we will utilise are:

- thematic and strategic analyses for DCELLS and Welsh Assembly Government management groups;
- close working on the outcomes of research and evaluation with strategy and policy colleagues and practitioners to support embedding of findings;
- full engagement with the policy development process,
- evidence seminars to discuss and debate findings with internal and external audiences;
- a clear publications policy and protocol; and
- sharing and inviting comments on our evidence priorities with external colleagues.

We will also do more work in developing and using linked datasets to inform policy. A key activity for 2010 will be to ensure that projects and their outcomes are communicated in a targeted way across DCELLS and partners. It is fundamental that data is linked and shared for a **purpose** and therefore we need to know what research questions we need to answer and how this will be achieved (i.e. internally or externally). Example projects are:

- linking education and health intervention data;
- taking forward the provisions from the Education and Skills Act for linking learner data with DWP and HMRC benefit and tax records;
- developing better measures of attainment by young people at 19; and
- linking pupil level attendance data to pupil characteristics, performance and value-added.

Linked into this is the need to move forward with the Managing Information Across Partners project (MIAP) led by the Learning and Skills Council that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of data matching through allocating a Unique Learner Number to each learner.

6. Maintaining Momentum

In developing our evidence priorities we will engage with external and internal partners to:

- consider progress towards its aims; and
- refresh the document as required.

It should be borne in mind that this strategic document is new to DCELLS: it represents an evolving framework for improving the way that DCELLS plans and utilises evidence. As the Department moves through the process of responding to the analytical priorities described, the document will be refined and developed to reflect changing requirements as they arise.

We welcome dialogue with the research community in Wales about our evidence priorities as we continue to develop this programme of work.

We welcome feedback on this document. It has been led by Chris Owen, Head of Knowledge Management Division, DCELLS, and Katie Whittaker, Head of Strategy Unit, DCELLS, who would be very pleased to receive comments. They can be contacted as follows:

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