



Department
for Education

Analytical Review

Executive Summary

April 2013

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Introduction

The Analytical Review looked at the role of research, analysis and data in the Department for Education, English schools and children's services. It assessed current systems and looked at the role for evidence in today's more autonomous, diverse education sector. The review was conducted by independent reviewers – Dr Ben Goldacre and Roger Plant.

In 2010 the Importance of Teaching set out the defining criteria that have driven up standards in high-performing education systems: autonomy, excellent teaching and accountability. Since then the Department has applied many of these key principles – significantly increasing the number of Academies, introducing Free Schools, cutting guidance and providing more data and clear accountability so that there is an effective way to improve performance.

There is, however, significant evidence to suggest that we have not fully realised these reforms, or broken the monopoly of Government as the source of orthodoxy in educational practice. Not all schools make the most of new freedoms and some teachers still hark after central guidance.¹ While data is the engine of reform in some schools, others coast without realising its potential to drive improvement². Funding doesn't follow evidence and children and young people lose out: a recent Sutton Trust / NFER survey found that less than 3% of teachers know the most cost-effective classroom approaches, potentially wasting much of the £1.25 billion Pupil Premium. Earlier this year an Ofsted survey found 50% of schools responding said the Pupil Premium was making little or no difference to the way they work.³

Our interviews with staff in schools and the Department found pockets of brilliant professional practice where evidence is at the heart of improvement. We found international best practice, other Government Departments and the medical profession showing how evidence can drive improvement in an autonomous system. Evidence wasn't just part of the solution, it was very often the bedrock of reforms.

¹ *Plan A+ - Unleashing the potential of Academies* (Bassett, D; Lyon, G; Tanner, W; Watkin, B., 2012) The Schools Network, The Specialist Academies Trust and Reform *Academies freedoms survey* (NAO 2012).

² *Data dictatorship and data democracy* (Kelly, A.; Downey, C. and Rietdijk, W., 2010). Reading, Berkshire: CfBT Education Trust).

³ *Teacher Voice Omnibus survey* (EEF-Sutton Trust analysis of the NFER Omnibus Survey February 2012); *The Pupil Premium* (Ofsted September 2012).

Evidence driving improvement: four common factors

The factors in driving improvement are:

1. A pervading culture of enquiry with leadership setting high expectations.
2. Professionals with the skills to find and use evidence about what works.
3. An efficient and plentiful supply of data that is used for improvement and accountability.
4. Central bodies that enable rather than mandate good practice – ‘government doing what only government can do’.

Our system has some of the pre-conditions for success: good data, some world-class systems and practice, increasing natural diversity in schools with the opportunity to test, learn and adapt. The Department itself has strong and well respected analytical capability, noted in a number of external assessments. In both schools and the Department, however, we have been limited by barriers that are cultural, systematic and practical.

The Department needs to refocus its role in order to support an autonomous sector while at the same time making efficiency savings, particularly in the way it accesses data. The biggest challenge to tackle is not that too much data is collected or that the Department commissions too much research, but that this evidence is not being used consistently to drive improvement.

A new role for the Department to drive use of evidence in an autonomous, improving system

This review recommends that the Department focuses on five key roles:

- Leading culture change: setting an expectation that evidence is an integral part of education policy and delivery and that research skills are the key to professional improvement and freedom.
- Supporting improvement to workforce capability: fostering the growth of evidence based practice in teaching and considering the application of the model to children’s services.
- Championing a move to more quantitative analysis with greater numbers of randomised controlled trials in schools.
- Making sharing real-time data easier, more efficient and more attractive.
- Encouraging a flourishing secondary market to improve data access and analysis by parents, schools and others.

We must also organise ourselves to ensure evidence drives improvements within the Department. We need to get better at providing Ministers with the latest research thinking and the essential evidence required for difficult policy decisions. Analysis needs to be

valued, integrated with policy making and we need to develop better analytical awareness in everyone who works at the Department.

Getting better value from existing public investment

We have failed to extract the full value of potentially world-class data and systems, or to reap the significant savings to the public purse that could arise from adoption of these systems. We do not know how much investment and professional enthusiasm flows into interventions that do not produce attainment gains – but neither do schools, which leaves the sector either investing in untested interventions or looking to the Department for an authorised view to avoid this.

Ben Goldacre and Roger Plant's reforms offer a way forward by equipping professionals with the data and skills they need to make good value-for-money choices that improve outcomes. Better data systems will also save delivery organisations substantial amounts of time and money currently spent administering data, as well as making data far easier to access and use.

These reforms will also improve efficiency within the Department. Making it easier to share real-time data could halve the DfE staff resource required to collect and process data. We are already investing substantial sums in upgrading our data storage and sharing capability. These further reforms will help to realise the full potential of that investment. By increasing basic analytical capability across the Department, we will make better use of the data, research and specialist analytical skills that we already have.

The aspiration of the review is not just for the Department to improve its own capacity but to improve the capacity of the 24,000 schools in this country. It is a feasible aspiration - this has been achieved in other countries and in other sectors: medicine was in a similar position 30 years ago. The specific proposals in the report are deliverable within the next few years within a limited budget. The ambition, however, extends much beyond the recommendations and we would wish the report to be the prompt for further reform. It should be seen as a staging point in a continuous story that started with the first Academies and takes us into fully realised autonomy and accountability in schools, in which schools generate, test and own the interventions that work to raise standards.



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