School Effectiveness Framework pilots: an evaluation

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School Effectiveness Framework pilots: an evaluation

Audience   Schools, local authorities, unions, professional and national bodies and other stakeholders involved with children and young people's learning and well-being.

Overview   This report provides an evaluation of the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) pilots. It provides an assessment of the effectiveness of the pilots and seeks to inform the direction and development of future implementation of the Framework.

Action required   None – for information.

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Additional copies   Further copies may be obtained from the above address.
This document can be accessed from the Welsh Assembly Government website at: www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Related documents   None.

The People and Work Unit

Development and Implementation of an Evaluation Programme for the Piloting in Schools of the School Effectiveness Framework for Wales

Final Report

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Uned Pobl a Gwaith

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

This report looks at the pilot to introduce the School Effectiveness Framework in schools in Wales. The School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) is an ambitious Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) programme that aims to raise attainment, to close the gap in attainment and improve children and young people's well-being (WAG, 2008a). It has been developed through three phases and this external evaluation focuses upon the second phase, in which school pilot programmes were established in each of the four regional consortia (Central South Wales, North Wales, South East Wales and swamwac). Two models were piloted. Each used Head Teachers and experienced school improvement professionals, but each developed distinct roles for them, those of Associates and Improvement Facilitators.

2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation's methodology included interviews with SEF Associates and Improvement Facilitators (n=20); LEA Link Advisers (n=3); key stakeholders (n=10) and the Consortia Coordinators (n=4) and visits to SEF pilot schools (n= 20).

The principles that underpin the evaluation's methodology, included:

- working with Assembly Government SEF team and the four consortia, whilst maintaining an independent and objective stance;
- engaging a wide range of stakeholders in dialogue, discussing and sharing ideas and insights through interviews, meetings and conferences; and
- exploring processes and changes in each of the three levels, the Assembly Government, Local Authorities and schools, from multiple perspectives (the principle of triangulation).

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEF PILOT

The SEF represents an ambitious and in many ways radical vision that brings together two strands of reform:

- "tri-level reform" and "systems thinking", which aim to align policies and resources in order to improve outcomes for children and young people; and
- the means to systemically apply evidence about school effectiveness, including the identification of the elements of an effective school and the development of models to embed these within schools, such as the establishment of the roles of Associates and Improvement Facilitators (WAG, 2008a).

We found that, initially, many people did not fully understand or support the SEF vision, but that the more involved people were in the SEF process, the greater their understanding of the SEF (as would be expected) and more importantly, the greater their support for the SEF vision (which could not be taken for granted). Overall, we found strong support for the SEF vision amongst those involved in the pilots.

4. THE PROCESS AND OPERATION OF THE PILOTS

The pilots involved the development of two models, one based upon Associate, the other based upon Improvement Facilitators. Each shares the same goals and has a broadly comparable approach. For example each use Head Teachers or experienced school improvement professionals, working with schools and networks of schools and using the SEF. However, there are differences in areas such as structure and the discretion given to Associate and Improvement Facilitators in how they work with schools and Local Authority Link Advisers.

Although the Assembly Government and the four consortia experienced some challenges, pilots were effectively established in each region. The challenges

included recruiting sufficient numbers of Associates and Improvement Facilitators with the requisite skills and experience and developing training for the new roles.

Across the four regions, Associates and Improvement Facilitators have demonstrated the value of the new role, its distinctiveness, and the potential of networks of schools to share ideas and good practice. They have also explored different ways of working with schools. This has led to differences in:

- The relationships that have developed between Associates or Improvement Facilitators and Head Teachers, including those of critical friend, mentor or adviser;
- The people they worked with within schools, most notably Head Teachers, but in some cases other school leaders and teachers; and
- The way that the networks of schools they established operated and in the focus of their work.

We considered the key differences in the roles of three key school improvement partners: Associates and Improvement Facilitators, Local Authority school advisory services and Estyn. We found agreement amongst those we spoke to that they share a common aim and a strong message from pilot schools, Associates and Improvement Facilitators that the roles of Associates and Improvement Facilitators are very valuable and complement the work of Local Authority school advisory services and Estyn.

We reviewed the experiences of pilot schools. We found that their motivations for taking part differed and that some were initially sceptical. However, by working with Associates and Improvement Facilitators and using tools such as the School Effectiveness Profile, they have developed a stronger understanding of the SEF and are enthusiastic about what it offers and that most expect it to have a positive and measurable impact upon their schools within two years.

5.   TRI-LEVEL REFORM AND SYSTEMS THINKING

Tri-level working is a process where policy is "designed and implemented collaboratively and coherently through all levels of the system: nationally, locally and at the level of the individual learning setting" (p. 5, WAG, 2008a). Systems thinking is a key component of tri-level reform. It "requires the focus at all levels, and throughout all the organisations that work to improve outcomes for children and young" (p. 6, WAG, 2008a).

There are examples of tri-level working and systems thinking in the pilot, including the involvement of wide range of stakeholders in the initial development of the SEF and the alignment of the SEF with Assembly Government policies and the forthcoming Estyn Inspection Framework (Estyn 2010).

Nevertheless, overall, the pilots fell far short of true tri-level working and systems thinking. Neither the Associate or Improvement Facilitator model fully involved each of the three levels, schools, local authorities and the Assembly Government, nor have they led to a truly holistic approach in which the reform is focused upon the whole system, rather than on the individual components, such as schools. This was not an inherent weakness of the SEF vision, but was a consequence of the way it was implemented.

6. THE IMPACT OF THE PILOTS

The pilots were intended to trial the SEF approach in order to inform a proposed roll out of the programme. The consensus amongst the stakeholders we interviewed was that the pilots had enabled one strand of the SEF's vision, the elements of an effective school, the themes and the school effectiveness profile, and two distinctive models of implementation, using Associates and Improvement facilitators respectively, to be trialled. However, there was also consensus amongst the stakeholders we interviewed, that the second strand of the SEF vision, tri-level reform and systems thinking, had not be trialled by the pilots.

Although it is still too early to judge the impact of the pilots, they are expected to make an important contribution to the Assembly Government goals, laid out in the Learning County: Vision into Action, including the objectives "Tackle poverty of educational opportunity and raise standards in schools" and "Develop the skills and knowledge of our learning workforce" (p. 10, p. 19, WAG, 2007). They have also strengthened the emphasis upon schools' role in promoting children and young people's well-being.

The interviews with Associates and Improvement Facilitators and visits to schools support the conclusion that the impact of the SEF has been different in different schools. Those schools that were ready and able to change got the most out of the SEF pilots. This is consistent with the literature on school effectiveness, which suggests that schools are at different points in the effectiveness pathway, and that their capacity and readiness to change and the type of support needed to change, differ at different points in the pathway (Hopkins, 2007). Because the needs of schools differed, Associates and Improvement Facilitators needed the skills and experience to take on different roles, which included those of critical friend, coach, and mentor.

7. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

We proposed that the evaluation framework for the SEF should focus upon:

- Changes in the effectiveness of pilot schools;
- Changes in the educational performance of children and young people in SEF pilot schools (learning outcomes); and
- Changes in the well-being of children and young people in SEF pilot schools.

We consulted SEF pilot schools, Associates and Improvement Facilitators and key stakeholders about these proposals and found broad consensus in support of a focus upon each of the three areas we proposed, but less agreement about the best way to measure the impact upon them. Given the concerns that were raised, we revised our proposals about how change in

each of these areas could be measured and we recommend that changes in the effectiveness of pilot schools should be measured using Estyn's forthcoming inspection framework (Estyn 2010); that changes in the educational performance of children and young people be based upon value added measures of attainment; and that measures of changes in the well-being of children and young people be aligned with the Assembly Government's work to develop a common measure of well-being.

8. CONCLUSIONS

A key purpose of a pilot, such as phase 2 of the SEF programme, is to trial or test an approach on a relatively small scale so that lessons can be learnt before decisions are taken about its future development. The key lessons from this pilot are:

- The consensus on the need to raise the bar, narrow the gap and improve the well-being of children and young people in Wales and the widespread support for the SEF, as a means for this, amongst those involved in the pilot;
- The value and potential of the new roles of Associates and Improvement Facilitators, which complement the work of others school effectiveness partners such as Estyn inspectors and Local Authority Advisers;
- The skills and knowledge that Associates and Improvement Facilitators need to be effective; skills and experience that some Head Teachers and some Advisers have, but which cannot be taken for granted;
- The importance of not equating the SEF with the role and work of Associates or Improvement Facilitators: all schools can benefit from the SEF, but not all schools will need or necessarily benefit from the support that Associates or Improvement Facilitators offer;
- The need to use data, as a means for enabling not only accountability, but also development and the creation of knowledge and understanding;

- The value and potential of professional learning communities which go beyond sharing solutions to problems, to enable schools to explore and understand the underlying causes of problems;

- The importance of tri-level working and systems thinking, of working collaboratively with each level in the development, implementation and evaluation of policy and of adopting a holistic approach, that focuses upon the system as a whole, rather than upon individual components;

- The importance of leadership at all three levels, the Assembly Government, Local Authorities and schools, in order to drive reform;

- The time and resources needed to plan and implement a major programme such as the SEF in a tri-level way;

- The critical role of dialogue, through both formal events such as steering and reference groups and more informally, on an on-going day to day basis, to build understanding and relationships and enable true collaboration; and

- The importance of capacity building to enable consistency of quality across Wales.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) is an ambitious Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) programme that aims to raise attainment, to close the gap in attainment within schools, between schools and within and between local authorities and to improve children and young people's well-being (WAG, 2008a).

1.2. In order to develop the SEF and enable it to be "trialled and refined", a three stage process of "research, development and implementation" was established:

- Phase 1, January to July 2008, involved the work of five seconded head teachers, working with local authority school improvement officers and other key stakeholders to develop the framework and the materials needed to enable the programme to be rolled out to schools, such as the School Effectiveness Profile. This process culminated in the publication of the central guiding document, the *School Effectiveness Framework: Building Effective Learning Communities Together*" (WAG, 2008a), commonly known as the "red book";
- Phase 2, September 2008 to July 2009, in which the School Effectiveness Framework pilot was established in schools in each of the four ADEW consortia[1]; and
- Phase 3, mid 2009 onwards, when the Assembly Government would decide in light of the pilot phase and its evaluation, on arrangements for rolling out the SEF (pp. 23-27, WAG, 2008a)

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[1] Central South Wales (comprising Caerphilly Bridgend, The Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil); North Wales (comprising Gwynedd, Ynys Mon, Conwy. Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham); South East Wales (comprising Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Newport and Cardiff) and swamwac (comprising Swansea, Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot)

1.3. In order to test different approaches to delivery, it was envisaged that two models would be piloted. One model was intended to involve a "head teacher or school improvement professional working as an 'associate' with the schools in a developmental capacity". The second was intended to be a Local Authority consortium approach "building on school improvement activity they already have in place rather than using associates". This has involved the development of the role of Improvement Facilitators as an alternative approach to the Associate model.

1.4. An external evaluation of the phase two pilots was commissioned in August 2008. Its objectives[2] were structured around four overarching themes:

- The development of an evaluation framework (in essence, identifying what should be measured and how);
- Reviewing the process and operation of the pilot projects;
- Identifying and reporting on any changes brought about by the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF); and
- Making recommendations for the future.

1.5. This Final Report outlines the evaluation's methodology (section two), our findings on the process and operation of the pilot projects to date (sections three to six); proposals for an evaluation framework (section seven); and our conclusions and recommendations (presented as a series of lessons), based upon these (section eight).

1.6. The final report considers the impact of the SEF only through interviewees' observations and our analysis of the changes brought about by the SEF in schools. The consensus amongst all those that we spoke to was that it was too early to expect or measure many of the changes. Although schools, Improvement Facilitators and Associates identified

examples of changes that were already happening in schools, most suggested that the impacts of those changes would not be seen for at least 12-24 months. Similarly, the report deliberately does not seek to systematically identify and report on the changes in the way the three levels, schools, Local Authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government, collaborate with each other (tri-level reform). Nor does it systematically identify and report on changes in the way in which a wide range of actors within each level collaborate with each other in order to coordinate change and reform across a system or systems (systems thinking). This is because it is likely to be many years before the impact of these structural changes can be measured. This timescale reflects the breadth and ambition of the SEF and is consistent with the evidence from comparable reforms elsewhere in the world (Fullan, 2001a).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. **Principles**: In line with the spirit of the SEF, the external evaluation was designed to be collaborative, whilst remaining objective. This meant that the external evaluation has:

- worked with Assembly Government SEF team and the four Consortia, whilst maintaining an independent and objective stance;
- engaged a wide range of stakeholders in dialogue, discussing and sharing ideas and insights through interviews, meetings and conferences; and
- explored processes and changes in each of the three levels, the Assembly Government, Local Authorities and schools, from multiple perspectives (the principle of triangulation).

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[2] The full list of objectives is included in Appendix 1.

2.2. **Using the pilot's systems**: We have sought to work in a collaborative way with the Assembly Government's SEF team and each of the Consortia. We have, for example, consulted Consortia about the range of pilot schools to visit. We have negotiated access to a sample of Associates and Improvement Facilitators' Logs, the records of activity kept by Associates and Improvement Facilitators. We have also drawn upon the Consortia progress reports and, as outlined in section three, have proposed that the evaluation framework for the SEF uses existing tools, such as Estyn's forthcoming common inspection framework (Estyn 2010) and existing data sources, such as school data on children and young people's achievement.

2.3. **Dialogue with stakeholders**: The core of our fieldwork has been based upon exploring the SEF from the perspective of Associates or Improvement Facilitators and pilot schools. We have interviewed 20 Associates and Improvement Facilitators, eight of whom were interviewed twice; three LEA Link Advisers; the five Coordinators[3] with responsibility for SEF at Consortia level and visited 20 pilot schools. We have also informally consulted a range of non-pilot and pilot schools about the SEF through a planned programme of visits as part of our external evaluation of RAISE.

2.4. We have contextualised this 'insider' perspective on the SEF with a wider process of consultation, which has included a series of meetings with the Assembly Government SEF project team, interviews with eight stakeholders drawn from Estyn, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), the Welsh Assembly Government, the teachers' unions, Local Education Authorities and the academic and voluntary sectors. [4]

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[3] There are two coordinators in swamwac.
[4] A full list of interviewees is included in Appendix 2

2.5.	The process has been deliberately structured as a two way dialogue, rather than a purely extractive process. For example, the interviews have all been semi-structured, providing us with flexibility to explore interesting, but unexpected issues, we have invited and responded to questions put by interviewees in the course of interviews and the interview guides used have evolved, so that as issues emerged, we could test them out with subsequent interviewees. More broadly, we have taken opportunities to feedback and discuss emerging findings with:

- The Assembly Government SEF Team;
- The Association of Directors of Education Wales (ADEW);
- Associates and Improvement Facilitators, through a presentation and workshops at a national training conference in Llandudno; and
- The SEF Programme Board.

2.6.	This iterative process has enabled us not only to share emerging findings, building knowledge and understanding, but also to test out and validate these findings with different groups of stakeholders, a principle we consider further below.

2.7.	**Triangulation and a tri-level focus**: By examining an issue from the perspective of different stakeholders and sources and using different methods, evaluators can develop a more rounded and balanced understanding of an issue (Chambers, 1997). Where there is agreement amongst stakeholders and sources (e.g. performance data), evaluators can have greater confidence in the validity of their findings. In contrast, where there is disagreement, there is a need to consider and understand why. For example, do some stakeholders' judgments differ? That is to say is there disagreement about the issue? If so, why? Or were the flaws in the research that meant that the views of some stakeholders have been misunderstood, or data misinterpreted? In making these sorts of

judgments we have considered both the evidence from our fieldwork and the wider literature, including both that which was produced for the pilot[5], and the wider literature on school effectiveness, tri-level reform and systems thinking.

2.8.   This independent external evaluation faces the challenge of understanding processes and changes at three different levels: the Assembly Government, Local Authorities and schools, in multiple sites (most notably the 96 schools in the pilot). Given the evaluation aims and objectives and in order to make the best use of the available resources, the fieldwork has been weighted toward understanding process and actions within pilot schools and the contribution of the SEF to this. Wherever possible we have considered these actions and processes from multiple perspectives, so for example, in assessing the work of Associates and Improvement Facilitators, we have interviewed a sample of Associates and Improvement Facilitators, visited a sample of the schools they were working with, reviewed a sample of their logs, interviewed the Consortia Coordinators, spoke to external stakeholders and then fed back our emerging findings to a large group of Associates and Improvement Facilitators at a national training conference, ADEW and to a SEF planning seminar in the spring of 2009.

2.9.   **Maintaining objectivity**: The collaborative approach has important strengths. It reflects the spirit and ethos of the SEF. It has helped foster support, understanding and ownership of the external evaluation amongst key stakeholders. It has also minimised unnecessary duplication, by ensuring that 'data is collected once, but used many times'.

2.10. The collaborative approach also creates some risks. They include the danger of external evaluators getting 'too close' and losing their objectivity,

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[5] Such as 'red book', *School Effectiveness Framework: Building Effective Learning Communities Together* and *School Effectiveness Profile*

and the limits collaboration may place upon the evaluation. The research team was deliberately structured to ensure that while some members of the team worked closely with the SEF project team, others maintained their distance, and could act as critical friends, testing out and challenging conclusions. In specific areas, such as looking at the impact of SEF on schools, a balance was maintained between seeking guidance from Consortia Coordinators on which schools to visit to gain a good range of experiences, and triangulating findings by seeking out a range of data and views on each of the issues considered, ensuring that the evaluation can reach a balanced judgement.

2.11   Figure 1 provides an overview of the different strands of the evaluation.

Figure 1. Overview of the Evaluation

Jul-Sep 08	Oct-Dec 08	Jan-Mar 09	Apr-Jun 09	Jul-Sep 09
Rolling Literature Review				
Key stakeholder interviews (n=10)				
Scoping	Interviews with Associates and Improvement Facilitators (n=19)	Interview Consortia Co-ordinators (n=4)	Visits to pilot schools (n=11)*	Interviews with Consortia Coordinators (n=4)
		Visits to pilot schools (n=9)		
Development of proposals for an evaluation framework		Review a sample of Improvement Facilitators' logs	Interviews with Associates , Improvement Facilitators & LEA Link Advisers (n=12)	Review a sample of Associate and Improvement Facilitators' logs
		Feedback, listen, discuss and learn through conferences etc, prepare interim report	Consult and then finalise evaluation framework	Feedback, listen, discuss and learn. Prepare final report

* The visits included discussions with school leaders, and where appropriate, teachers and children or young people.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEF PILOT IN SCHOOLS

3.1.   In order to 'raise the bar and narrow the gap' the SEF aims to:

- align policies in support of improving outcomes for all children and young people, through "tri-level reform"[6] and "systems thinking"[7]; and
- systemically apply evidence about school effectiveness, through the identification of "the core themes"[8] and "the elements" of an effective school[9] and the development of a model to embed these within schools (WAG, 2008a).

3.2.   These two high level aims were developed in phase one of the SEF programme by different groups within the Welsh Assembly Government. The first was led by the, then, Director for Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Steve Marshall, working with Michael Fullan; the second was developed by a team of three academics, Professors David Egan, David Hopkins and David Reynolds. The work of these two groups was brought together, along with the contributions of a range of other stakeholders, by a group of five seconded Head Teachers working with the SEF team within the Assembly Government, and the *School Effectiveness Framework: Building Effective Learning Communities Together,* the so called "red book", was published in 2008.

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[6] In summary, a collaborative approach to policy development and implementation, working with and through each of the three levels of the system: nationally, locally and at the level of individual learning settings.

[7] In summary, the recognition that "schools do not exist in isolation"; that schools work within a local context that is always changing and in which the interactions between the different people and different institutions in this context (or system) shape policy implementation and outcomes for children and young people. Therefore for tri-level reform to work, different policies within and between each of these three levels must be aligned (pp. 6-7, WAG, 2008a).

[8] I.e. "Systems Thinking", "Bilingualism", "High Performance Culture", "Equality" And "Supportive and Interdependent" , which should inform work within each of the three levels (p. 12, Ibid)

[9] I.e. "Leadership"; "Working With Others", "Networks Of Professional Practice"; "Intervention And Support", "Improvement And Accountability" And "Curriculum And Teaching" (Ibid.)

3.3. The 'red book' is visionary and complex. Interviewees praised its ambition, and many were clearly enthused by its promise and the breadth of the initial consultation was also praised. There was a broad consensus around the need to raise the bar, narrow the gap and enhance children and young people's well-being. There was also broad support for the SEF's approach to addressing this challenge and there has been international interest in the developments.

3.4. **Alignment of the SEF with WAG objectives, values, initiatives and policies**: Although radical in their implications, both tri-level working and systems thinking have clear roots in earlier strategies and practice. Although not called "tri-level working", the approach has clear antecedents in the longstanding commitment of the Assembly government to work in partnership with Local Authorities and schools, a commitment reflected in strategies such as "Making the Connections" (WAG, 2006). As a consequence, as one interviewee put it, describing tri-level working could feel like "a statement of the obvious". Nevertheless, we were told, "in practice", the Assembly Government, Local Authorities and schools were not always fully aligned and there is a need to strengthen tri-level working. Similarly, although not always described as "systems thinking", the concept has clear antecedents in the efforts made to 'join up' policy in order to better meet the needs of children and young people. The establishment of Children and Young People's Partnerships offers a good example of this type of thinking (WAG, 2004).

3.5. The second strand of the SEF, the "elements" and "themes", are drawn from the existing body of school improvement and school effectiveness research, and are not in themselves particularly radical. Crucially, however, the SEF offers a new framework to enable them to be more widely employed and systematically applied in Wales, helping realise one

of the aspirations of the *Learning Country; Vision into Action*[10] (WAG, 2007) document. The Framework also emphasises the importance of these elements to all schools, and not only to schools whose pupil attainment is below average, reflected in the Assembly Government's aim of both raising the bar and narrowing the gap.

3.6. The SEF places children's and young people's well-being, alongside learning, at the heart of the framework. Although the focus upon improving learning outcomes is a longstanding commitment, the decision to place well-being alongside it was judged by interviewees to represent an important new emphasis upon schools' role and purpose. A wide range of factors influence children and young people's well-being and its prominence in the SEF helps stress schools' responsibility to work with others in order to promote children and young people's well-being. This is consistent with the Assembly Government's overarching vision and strategy for children and young people *Rights to Action* (WAG, 2004), but is a relatively new development for schools in Wales. Well-being has very little prominence in the *Learning Country: Vision into Action* (WAG, 2007), and in the Guidance for Learning Pathways 14-19 (NAfW, 2006), although it is a key element of the Foundation Phase Curriculum for 3-7 year olds (WAG, 2008b).

3.7. The focus upon well-being also represents a subtle, but important difference in emphasis to the focus upon rights and entitlements in the Assembly Government's strategy for children and young people, *Rights into Action* (WAG, 2004). A focus upon rights means focusing upon the conditions that enable children and young people to experience a 'good life'. It is useful for highlighting the areas where the state, and by extension schools, can intervene to promote this. In contrast, a focus upon

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[10] "There is a body of knowledge on how schools can transform themselves using the outcomes of research on school effectiveness and improvement, which should be more widely employed"

well-being means focusing upon outcomes. Crucially, well-being as an outcome is linked to, but is not synonymous with, access to rights and entitlements. For example, children and young people may make choices that damage their well-being and internal factors such as disposition and temperament also influence well-being.

3.8.   The 'red book' makes reference to rights and entitlements but the discussion is largely restricted to core aim 2, that "children and young people have the right to education, training and work experience" (p. 3, WAG, 2008). Schools clearly have a central role here but schools can also make an important contribution to the other six aims, and will need to do so, if they are to promote children and young people's well-being (see boxed text).

The Seven Core Aim for Children and Young People

The seven core aims are based upon the UN Convention On The Rights Of The Child and are the basis for all policy toward children and young people in Wales. They are that children and young people:

- 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, treated with respect, and are able to have their

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(p. 8, WAG, 2007).

> race and cultural identity recognised;
>
> - have a safe home and a community that supports physical and emotional wellbeing; and
>
> - are not disadvantaged by child poverty.

3.9.   Overall therefore, at a strategic level, the SEF is aligned with the Assembly Government's values and objectives. Nevertheless, at an operational level, as outlined in section 4, it has taken time to work out how the SEF aligns with, for example, the Pedagogy initiative, existing Local Authority school improvement and advisory services and local planning structures, such as Children and Young People's Partnerships. This development of understanding, though, is part of the purpose of a pilot, to provide the scope to work out the operational detail of how different initiatives and areas of policy fit together in practice. As one interviewee commented "this [the SEF] is a sophisticated piece of policy and you would expect a pilot to throw up these sort of issues".

3.10.   **Communicating the Vision**: The 'red book' is a challenging agenda to communicate because:

- The ideas and concepts used, such as "tri-level reform and systems thinking", are complex. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as one interviewee forcefully argued, "yes it's complex, we have to recognise this, [and] not address it by simplifying things…complex problems need complex solutions"; a position we agree with;

- The SEF is ambitious. It "is designed to bring together the range of existing programmes of action directed at school improvement" and provide "the vehicle for taking forward these commitments [to improving outcomes for all learners], by aligning polices and their implementation" (p. 5, WAG, 2008a). This vision, together with the consultation both within

the Assembly Government and beyond, meant the 'red book' addresses a broad swathe of principles and policy for and about children and young people; and

- There is a need to integrate the separate strands of work (i.e. tri-level reform and systems thinking and the "elements" and "themes" ('the pizza') which underpin the SEF, together with a range of other complementary polices, such as the pedagogy initiative and the improvement/accountability pilots in Local Authorities into a single coherent vision.

3.11. The challenge of communicating the SEF vision was compounded by two further factors. Firstly, a number of interviewees suggested, and we would agree, that the final section, "Researching, Refining and Implementing the Framework", which includes details on the pilots (pp. 23-27, WAG, 2008a) is probably the least developed section of the document. This meant that those involved in the pilots were not always clear about how the vision would be trialled through the pilots. Secondly, a number of interviewees, and the schools we visited, reported that it was only as they began working with and through the SEF process that they came to understand it. As a consequence, many Associates, Improvement Facilitators and pilot schools were initially not entirely clear what they were signing up to. As one Head Teacher described, "at first, we didn't really know what we were doing".

3.12. Generally, we found that the more involved people were in the process, the greater their understanding of the SEF (as would be expected) and, more importantly, the greater their support for the SEF vision (which could not be taken for granted). This provides powerful testimony to the strength of the SEF vision, but indicates a significant challenge in stimulating commitment to it amongst stakeholders who are uninterested or even sceptical. We found, for example, that in the early stages of the pilot, even

amongst some 'key stakeholders', awareness and understanding of the SEF was somewhat limited. Moreover amongst those schools who were not involved, we found much lower levels of awareness and understanding and in some Local Authority School Improvement services, the often limited understanding of the SEF and of the pilot programme had fostered some suspicion and mistrust about the SEF.

3.13. Some interviewees suggested that the scope for effectively communicating the SEF vision has not yet been fully implemented. Most notably:

- many of those who were initially involved in phase one, reported that they were not involved as the SEF moved into phase two and developments were, for a time, driven by a small team within the Assembly Government;

- the involvement of individual representatives from particular sectors, such as schools and Local Authorities, was seen by some as being equated with participation of the whole sector, with the result that insufficient effort was being devoted to engage other representatives from each sector;

- the support of leaders of organisations was sometimes seen as being equated with support from the organisation they led, which was not always the case (that is to say, the leaders might support the SEF, but this did not necessarily mean that front line staff also understood and supported the SEF); and

- a number of interviewees reported that the strong initial leadership of the SEF weakened as a series of changes in the key personnel took place, against the backdrop of wider reorganisation of the Department of Children, Education and Lifelong Learning (DCELLs), with the departure of Steve Marshall, followed by changes in the Head

Teachers seconded to develop the SEF, and changes in the project management of the SEF.

3.14. In considering these challenges, it is important to bear in mind that the SEF was still in a pilot phase and although a communication strategy was being developed, it had not been launched when the pilot projects were started. Moreover, many interviewees stressed the commitment of the Assembly Government SEF team throughout, in what they recognised had been a challenging process. A number also highlighted the strengthening of leadership in early 2009, citing the clear sponsorship from Professor David Hawker, Director General of DCELLS, and strong leadership from the re-structured DCELLS team in the Assembly Government in particular. The new team made strenuous efforts to re-establish links with key partners and the feedback we received in the summer of 2009 suggested that good progress had been made in strengthening links between the SEF team and partners such as Estyn and ADEW.

4. THE MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOTS

4.1.   ***The Delivery Models***: As outlined in the introduction, in order to test different models for delivery of the SEF in schools, it was envisaged that two approaches would be trialled. The models would be trialled by consortia of local authorities in the four Welsh regions.[11] The first approach was devised by the WAG and based upon employing headteachers and advisers as Associates and a second was to be devised by consortia and use a different approach. In practice, three consortia (North, South East and Central South Wales) opted to pilot an Associate led model and only one consortium, swamwac, developed a distinctive alternative approach based upon Improvement Facilitators.

4.2.   The Assembly Government drew up the key policy documents for all four Consortia (most notably, *School Effectiveness Framework: Building Effective Learning Communities Together*), tools (such as the *School Effectiveness Profile* and the *School Effectiveness Data Packs*); job specifications, and developed and delivered training for Associates and Improvement Facilitators. Moreover, the Assembly Government drew up criteria for the recruitment of Pilot schools and Associates. Consortia were asked to recruit pilot schools and Associates but within specified criteria and it was reported by one Consortium Coordinator that the Assembly Government initially indicated that the role of SEF Regional Coordinators and the Consortia in the Associate model was primarily an administrative one. Members of the SEF project team reported that the Coordinators' and Consortia's roles were not intended to be administrative but it was clear that there was some confusion about roles. As a result Local Authorities

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[11] The South East Wales consortia includes the Local Education Authorities of Cardiff, Newport, Torfean, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent; the Central South Consortia includes the Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan. The swamwac consortia includes the Local Education Authorities of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port

and SEF Coordinators in three of the four regions, Central South, South East and North Wales, did not feel that the Consortia had shaped the structure of the pilot project.

4.3. As the pilot progressed, the Coordinators in the North, South East and Central South Wales Consortia and Regional Coordinators took a more active role in developing the pilot. Consortia and Regional Coordinators have responded to this in different ways. In South East Wales the consortia has actively encouraged Associates to engage non-pilot schools in networks (which in some cases are becoming professional learning communities – PLCs) and has initiated dialogue between Local Authority Advisers and Associates; In Central South, the Regional Coordinator organised briefings for Local Authority Advisers and established meetings and a website to enable Associates to share their experiences and learning; and in North Wales the Coordinator has provided support for Associates and coordinated links between schools, Local Authorities and the Advisory services. In effect though, each has seen their role as primarily facilitating and testing rather than developing or shaping a model.

4.4. In contrast, the establishment of the SEF model in South West and Mid Wales has been led by the Consortium, swamwac, and its two Coordinators. This model shares the same aim, improving outcomes for children and young people by systematically applying evidence about school effectiveness. It also uses a broadly similar methodology, with Head Teachers or an experienced school improvement professional working with individual schools, fostering the development of networks of schools and using the SEF tools, the six "elements of an effective school" and the five "core themes" (commonly referred to as the 'pizza') and the School Effectiveness Profile and some Improvement Facilitators have attended the SEF training organised by the Assembly Government.

Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Swansea. The North Wales Consortia includes the Local Education Authorities of Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Ynys Môn and Wrexham.

4.5.   However, the model also has some important differences to the Associate led model being piloted in the other consortia. The tools and materials developed by the Assembly Government are supplemented, or sometimes substituted, by training and detailed guidance developed by swamwac. In many ways the approach is more structured, giving Improvement Facilitators a stronger framework to work within[12], but less discretion about how they work with schools. Moreover, the aim is that Improvement Facilitators are required to work more closely with Local Authority Link Advisers and spend less time with each school, whilst working with a greater number of schools in total. Table 1. below illustrates some of the main differences between the Associate and Improvement Facilitator models.

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[12] This is based around five phases: Understanding the School Context; Agreeing Themes for Improvement and Barriers to Effectiveness; Action Planning; Implementation and Review and Planning for Sustainability

Table 4.1 The Associate and Improvement Facilitator 'models'

	SE, CS & North Wales Consortia	Swamwac
Leadership	The framework and model were developed by the WAG. Consortia were encouraged to play a more active role in the development of the model.	Although the framework was developed by the WAG, the model was not defined, and has been developed by the swamwac Consortia. Swamwac have established their own systems for monitoring and evaluating the pilot.
Recruitment of schools and Associates or Improvement Facilitators	The WAG defined the size of the pilot and Consortia were asked by the WAG to recruit Associates and SEF pilot schools which represented a balance of primary and secondary schools. Many pilot schools were 'encouraged' to join by Local Authorities.	The WAG defined the size of the pilot and swamwac were asked by the WAG to recruit Improvement Facilitators and SEF pilot schools that represented a balance of primary and secondary schools. Many pilot schools were 'encouraged' to join by Local Authorities.
Training of Associates or Improvement Facilitators	The WAG organised and funded 10 days training for Associates (and Improvement Facilitators). All Associates were expected to attend the training.	Swamwac developed its own 4 day training programme for Improvement Facilitators. In addition, the WAG has organised and funded training for Improvement Facilitators (and Associates), however not all Improvement Facilitators have attended this training.
Matching schools with Associates or Improvement Facilitators	Consortia matched schools with Associates. Associates were then responsible for bringing their schools together into networks and, where appropriate, linking them to other schools. In North Wales, Associates were	Swamwac matched Improvement Facilitators with schools. More time and attention was paid to matching not only the language and interests of Improvement Facilitators and schools, but also personalities, when

	instructed not to involve non-pilot schools in the networks.	compared to the other Consortia. Pilot schools were organised into thematic networks and a notional £5k was devolved to each cluster of schools.
Process	Associates and pilot schools have considerable discretion about how to proceed and the process has consequently been jointly negotiated, with Associates taking on different types of role with different schools (see paragraphs 4.14-4.16).	Improvement Facilitators and pilot schools are expected to work through a five step process (understanding the school context; agreeing themes for improvement and barriers to effectiveness; action planning; implementation; and review and planning for sustainability).
Intensity of support	Associates work with between 4 to 10 schools and can spend up to 25% of their time working with these schools and training (about 50 days)	Improvement Facilitators work with between 1 and 3 schools and are allocated 6 days per school (together with up to 7 days training)
Relationship to Link Advisers	Associates and pilot schools have considerable discretion about the extent to which LA Advisers are involved in the process. In most cases informal links have been established and is some cases Advisers attend meetings.	Improvement Facilitators are expected to contact LA Link Advisers to discuss the school and the support they provide early in phase one. Advisers may choose to share additional information with Improvement Facilitators and are asked to liase with Head Teachers to avoid any risk of duplication of their work with that of Improvement Facilitators. Advisers' involvement in phases two to five is at the discretion of the school.

Development & quality assurance	Associates are expected to attend training and submit logs to their Consortia. However, the capacity of the SEF team within the WAG to scrutinise Logs is limited. Consortia have established networks of Associates to enable them to share experiences, but are not actively monitoring the quality of their work.	Improvement Facilitators are required to attend training and submit logs to swamwac. Logs were closely scrutinised and if considered unsatisfactory, payment could be withheld. Improvement Facilitators were required to work to a code of conduct and arrangements made to observe (and monitor) the work of Improvement Facilitators.

4.6.   ***The Recruitment of Associates and Improvement Facilitators***:   A number of interviewees highlighted problems in recruiting sufficient numbers of people with the skills and experience needed and as we outline further below there were some concerns over the skills, experience and approach of a minority of Associates and Improvement Facilitators. The role, as conceived for the pilots, was a challenging one that demands knowledge and experience of work in schools[13] , analytical skills, a strong understanding of and commitment to SEF and a range of social and emotional skills, such as self-efficacy (or self-belief), empathy and the ability to manage relationships effectively. These social and emotional skills are difficult to formally 'train' people in, but can be nurtured over time (Goleman, 1995). This suggests that it is very important that Associates and Improvement Facilitators already have many of these skills but also that training is geared to helping them understand, refine and develop their skills.

4.7.   Associates were asked to provide up to 50 days during the school year for their work on SEF, Improvement Facilitators up to 20 days. In South East and Central South Wales, the plan was to have 6 Associates working with 24 schools in each consortium and in North Wales, there were 8 Associates, working with 24 schools. In swamwac 16 Improvement Facilitators worked with 28 schools. Associates and Improvement Facilitators applied for the role and went through a selection process.

4.8.   The problems the pilot experienced in recruiting Associates and Improvement Facilitators may have reflected the level of understanding of the SEF (outlined in section three) and the concerns, reported by many Associates and Improvement Facilitators, of School Governing bodies

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[13] Different types of role involving, for example, a professional without knowledge and experience of schools, but with the requisite analytical and social and emotional skills have not been tested.

about the amount of time that they would need to spend out of school. It was reported that their ability to take on this role depended upon their own success in establishing distributed leadership within their own schools.

4.9. ***Training and development opportunities that have been provided to the Associates and Improvement Facilitators***: Both Associates and Improvement Facilitators praised elements of the training they had been provided with, but were critical of other elements. There was some variation about which elements Associates and Improvement Facilitators praised and which they criticised. For example, whilst many highlighted the value of the training provided by the Hay group, a minority were critical of it or said that they had already done this course and so found it repetitive. In general, Improvement Facilitators praised the training provided by swamwac, and the level of detail and guidance offered by the Handbooks that swamwac had prepared. In contrast, a number of Associates were critical of training provided by the WAG, reporting that elements of it were not sufficiently tailored to the SEF. A vocal minority expressed the view that elements were patronising. There appeared to be some evidence of a misunderstanding of the Associate and Improvement Facilitator role within the Assembly Government, because some training sessions were used to disseminate Assembly Government policy developments, an approach seen as more appropriately targeted at Advisers whose role includes supporting schools to comply with national and local policy.

4.10. Responses to the training appeared to depend, in part, upon Associates' and Improvement Facilitators' prior experience and their feedback may highlight the challenge of providing a generic training programme to learners whose skills, knowledge and experience vary. There was reported to be a greater need to focus time in the training to developing an

in-depth knowledge of the School Effectiveness Framework, exploring the role of the School Effectiveness Profile; and developing facilitation skills.

4.11. A number of Associates reported that the training had not clarified their role. There was also reported to have been "mixed messages" most notably over the use of data by Associates and Improvement Facilitators. Even where they were not initially clear about the role, all reported that they were able to develop a good understanding through their work. However, there was a view amongst some stakeholders we interviewed that a lack of real understanding of the role meant that some Associates and Improvement Facilitators fell back on existing roles that they were familiar with, such as that of adviser, and were too reliant upon tools such as the School Effectiveness Profile, limiting their effectiveness.

4.12. Both Associates and Improvement Facilitators highlighted the networking opportunities that training offered as a key strength. There are regular meetings of Associates and Improvement Facilitators within their consortium area. These were held as frequently as once a month in some areas, but geography was identified as a barrier to meeting in other areas, because it creates the need to travel long distances.

4.13. ***Differences in Approach:*** Table 4.1 illustrates some of the variations in the way Associates and Improvement Facilitators worked. Although Associates had greater discretion than Improvement Facilitators, there was still reported to be considerable variation in the way Improvement Facilitators operate. This was attributed to differences in the preferences, skills, knowledge, experience and confidence of individual Associates and Improvement Facilitators and pilot schools and cultural differences between primary and secondary schools. The main differences that were reported were:

- The relationship between Associates or Improvement Facilitators and Head Teachers;

- The people they worked with within schools; and

- The way that the networks of schools they established operated.

4.14. *The relationship between Associates or Improvement Facilitators and Head Teachers:* the descriptions given by Associates and Improvement Facilitators of their relationships with pilot school Head Teachers suggested three broad models. The first was that of mentor/mentee, with Associates and Improvement Facilitators taking on the coaching role of a more experienced professional supporting, for example, an inexperienced Head Teacher who might lack confidence. In the second model, Associates or Improvement Facilitators adopted a problem-solving role that could be characterised as a quasi-advisory role. The third was characterised in terms of "peer" or "professional" support and challenge, in which Associates or Improvement Facilitators and Head Teachers met as equals and took more of a critical friend role by, for example, helping a colleague stand back from, and reflect on, their work. Some Associates and Improvement Facilitators reported that they took on different roles with different schools so that in one setting they were operating as a coach and in another as critical friend. Despite the differences, all were agreed that the key characteristic of the relationship was that it was based on the school's agenda.

4.15. *The depth of engagement with schools:* Some Improvement Facilitators and Associates reported working only with a pilot school's Head Teacher, whilst others were seeking to engage a number of different members of a pilot schools' senior management team. Some also reported on work with governors and children and young people including a pupil learning community that had been developed and bi-lateral pupil visits. Although Associates or Improvement Facilitators were not usually working directly

with other teachers in many of the pilot schools we visited, teachers were actively involved in working through the SEP and in the networks that Associates or Improvement Facilitators had helped establish.

4.16. ***Networks and professional learning communities***: Both Associates and Improvement Facilitators established networks of pilot (and occasionally non-pilot) schools and most involved their own schools in these networks. It was intended that these Networks would become professional learning communities (PLCs) (see boxed text) (Stoll, et al, 2004 and the edited collection by Stoll & Louis, 2007) and by the end of the pilot some were reported to have done so. In the swamwac area a distinction has been made between intra-school Professional Learning Communities and inter-school Network Learning Communities.

Professional Learning Communities

In their discussion of PLCs, Louise Stoll and others describe them as an "inclusive group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other, finding ways, inside and outside their immediate community, to enquire on their practice and together learn new and better approaches that will enhance all pupils' learning". They go on to identify eight key characteristics that define PLCs.

- "Shared values and vision";
- "Collective responsibility for pupils' learning";
- "Collaboration focused on learning";
- "Group as well as individual professional learning";
- "Reflective professional enquiry";
- "Openness, networks and partnerships";
- "Inclusive membership"; and
- "Mutual trust, respect and support"

4.17. Although all the pilot schools we spoke to were already sharing ideas and information with other schools, through fora such as school cluster meetings and training sessions run by Advisory services and through relationships between Head Teachers, most have responded very positively to the new networks that Associates and Improvement Facilitators have established. They reported that opportunities to "share ideas and information" with other schools was one of the key strengths of the SEF Pilots. In particular, the networks were reported to have expanded the number of schools they were in contact with and, critically, linked them to schools in other counties. This not only gave them access to new ideas and approaches, some pilot schools also reported that it gave them opportunities to expose their teachers to new ways of working, helping cultivate their support for change.

4.18. Schools, Associates and Improvement Facilitators agreed that the cross-county dimension to the SEF and the networks of schools they worked with was a key strength. Schools reported that they rarely had opportunities to work with schools in other counties and the networks brought together schools which did not feel in competition with each other. This, combined with Associates' or Improvement Facilitators' freedom from holding schools to account, meant that some Head Teachers said they felt able to discuss problems more openly than they were comfortable doing with other school improvement partners such as LA Link Advisers and Estyn. The extent to which they saw this as a *different way* of working varied according to the school and Head Teacher's own level of awareness of the SEF.

4.19. Although positive overall about the new networks, some problems were reported and by the end of the pilot some of the schools were reported to

have dropped out of networks because they felt they were not addressing their needs. The importance of effective facilitation within the Networks was identified, and it was pointed our that the skills needed to keep a Network operating well were not the same as those needed for working with individual schools. A number of pilot schools we visited reported that they were already in contact or working with most of the schools in their networks, limiting the added value. Some questioned what they could learn from schools in very different circumstances. For example there were schools serving disadvantaged areas that were most interested in learning from other schools in similarly disadvantaged areas. The practical problems of finding times when everyone could meet and the distances between schools (and consequent long travel times), particularly in rural areas, were also highlighted.

4.20. The accounts given by pilot schools of the networks that have developed suggest that many are focused upon sharing ideas and good practice rather than operating as true "professional learning communities" developing, for example, "shared values and vision"; "collective responsibility for pupils learning"; and "group as well as individual professional learning"; (Stoll, et al, 2004). This is likely to have limited their impact to date, because rather than focusing upon changing the fundamentals, what David Hopkins has called the "key drivers of change", they have focused upon what might regarded as more superficial solutions[14] (p. 6. Hopkins, 1995). Interviewees confirmed this, questioning how "deep" the networks had gone in addressing effectiveness. In contrast, there is some evidence that the networks that have developed and been consolidated within schools, may come closer to becoming true PLCs.

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[14] This analysis has parallels to David Hopkins's distinction between the adoption of "tactics", "strategies", in which tactics are co-ordinated, and "capacities" in which "schools collectively understand the cause of positive change and the areas of resistance in school. They know when

4.21.   The initial networks between schools have provided a good starting point and many have decided to go on meeting after the pilot project has ended. They have build trust and relationships between schools, enabled schools to secure some 'quick wins' and they exhibit some of the characteristics of PLCs, such as openness, reflective professional enquiry and mutual trust, respect and support. If they develop into true professional learning communities, the way in which they work and their membership may need to change as multiple, often overlapping, communities develop around particular issues. They may need to involve different school leaders and teachers and bring in new schools and new partners that may not be part of the pilot.

4.22.   The focus upon sharing good practice may help explain why some schools saw limited value in working with schools with very different characteristics to their own.   If the aim were to simply 'borrow' models and ways of working, there would be a clear logic in working with schools in comparable contexts. In contrast when the aim is to encourage and enable deeper reflective learning, there is strong case for working with schools operating in different contexts and in different ways so that different approaches can be explored.

4.23.   ***The roles played by Associates and Improvement Facilitators***: Despite the differences in emphasis and approach outlined above, Associates and Improvement Facilitators described their roles in similar ways. They were clear that it complemented the work of LA Link Advisers and Estyn and, although acknowledging that there were some areas of potential overlap most notably in data analysis[15], also clearly identified

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change is happening and understand the reasons why and are abele to sustain positive change in the medium an long term" (p. 145, Hopkins, 2007).
[15] This reflects the acknowledged expertise of Local Authorities in analysing school and pupil performance data.

differences. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the descriptions provided by schools, Associates and Improvement Facilitators of the key characteristics of the work of SEF Associates & Improvement Facilitators, LA Link Advisers and Estyn.

4.24. ***Introduction to Table 4.2.*** The Table is descriptive rather than normative, that is to say it describes how schools, Associates and Improvement Facilitators see the characteristics, rather than how they think they should be. The table is also selective as it is only based upon the views of a sample of SEF schools, Associates and Improvement Facilitators and it does not describe the role of other important school improvement partners such as those involved in performance management.

4.25. We have discussed the table with some of the other stakeholders we interviewed. Some elements of the description of Estyn's characteristics were strongly disputed by interviewees from Estyn, with particular concerns voiced about the impression given by the table that their role was simply one of making judgments, what might be thought of as an accountability function. Estyn interviewees highlighted what they saw as their complementary roles sharing good practice, developing practice in school and building capacity, suggesting that their role was in many ways much closer to that of Associates and Improvement Facilitators. The current proposals for a new inspection framework (Estyn, 2010), which includes a greater use of peer assessors, self-evaluation and follow up activity are likely to further blur the boundaries.

4.26. Moreover, feedback from LA Advisers suggests a concern that the work of Associate or Improvement Facilitators overlaps with theirs, and could duplicate or even undermine their role. Some were reported to feel in the dark or excluded from the SEF programme, creating suspicion of a 'hidden agenda' and some Head Teachers were reported to want greater

involvement of LA Advisers. Efforts were made in each Consortium area to inform and include Advisory services as the pilot developed but, in practice, collaboration depended upon the relationship between each Associate or Improvement Facilitator and the Link Adviser(s) for the schools they worked with.

4.27.   Whilst recognising that the table is a selective and therefore potentially a partial view, it describes the consensus amongst those schools, Associates and Improvement Facilitators we interviewed about these different roles and therefore helps illustrate how these key groups see the relationship between the new roles of Associates and Improvement Facilitators and the more established roles of LA Link Advisers and Estyn. Their judgments about, for example, the added value offered by the SEF rest in part upon this view that the role is distinct to but "dovetails" with (as one Head Teacher put it), or complements, the roles of LA Link Advisers and Estyn.

Table 4.2 Schools', Associates' & Improvement Facilitators' descriptions of the roles of key school improvement partners			
Role Characteristics	**SEF Associates & Improvement Facilitators**	**Local Authority School Improvement Services**	**Estyn**
Aim	Better outcomes for children and young people	Better outcomes for children and young people	Better outcomes for children and young people
Roles	Critical friend, coaching by a peer who understands the context; sometimes a mentor, supporting a less experienced professional and sometimes an Adviser, disseminating good practice	Adviser, promoting good practice and monitoring performance, supporting, and where appropriate, challenging schools	Inspector, providing an objective, external judgment on a school's performance
Framework	SEF & SEP	Local Authority Support and Challenge	Common Inspection Framework (CIF)
Process	Focus upon dialogue, exploratory, holistic, sharing and exploring 'good practice'	Data driven, with a focus upon strategic objectives (e.g. inclusion policy), standards & school management.	Inspection
Agenda	Schools or negotiated between schools and Associate/Improvement Facilitator	Promoting national and local education policy	7 key questions
Frequency	Regular (often bimonthly), likely to be time limited	Annual, unless a school is causing concern	6 year cycle, unless a school is causing concern

4.28. Table 4.2 illustrates how schools and Associates or Improvement Facilitators recognise that each of the partners share a common aim but perceive that they have quite different approaches. Moreover, they reported that there was value in each partner having distinct roles. As we consider in the conclusions, this does not mean that Associates or Improvement Facilitators and School Advisory services should operate independently of each other. In contrast, interviewees reported that whilst it was important that Local Authority School Improvement strategies and the frameworks that Estyn used should be aligned with the SEF, they should remain independent.

4.29. *The quality of improvement activity*: In the course of discussions around the different roles of the respective school improvement partners, a number of interviewees raised concerns about the skills and experience of some Associates or Improvement Facilitators, LA Link Advisers and Estyn Inspectors. For example:

- The skills of Associates and Improvement Facilitators were reported to be variable. Some were seen as excellent, others less so;
- Local Authority school improvement services which were praised, but were reported to vary in the amount and range of support provided and to struggle to recruit secondary Head Teachers, which meant that some were perceived to lack the experience to really understand, support and challenge some secondary schools; and
- Although the skills and experience of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training (HMIs) were praised, the skills and experience of some registered inspectors were questioned.

4.30. The judgments reflected the different dimensions of quality, including not only the skills and experiences of those performing the role, but also the

demands placed upon professionals' time and therefore their capacity to perform their roles and provide a quality service. For example, many interviewees highlighted the requirements placed upon school Advisory services which meant that in some Local Authority areas they had to focus the most time and resources upon struggling schools. In this context the work of Associates and Improvement Facilitators was seen as adding value.

4.31. As the pilots progressed, a number of Consortia Coordinators became increasingly concerned about the difficulties they experienced in assessing the quality of Associates' or Improvement Facilitators' work. They did not identify specific concerns, beyond the poor quality of many of the logs, which made it difficult to identify what work was being done and feedback from a few schools, which raised questions about the consistency of the work. As a consequence, they suggested more rigorous quality assurance systems were needed. It was also felt that if someone had a dual role as coordinator and an Associate this would hamper quality assurance because they would lack an objective overview.

4.32. *The response of pilot schools:* Associates and Improvement Facilitators and pilot schools themselves all reported that initially many pilot schools did not have a comprehensive understanding of the key ideas underpinning the SEF and the School Effectiveness Profile. This was reported to reflect both the weaknesses in the way the SEF had been communicated and the different motivations of schools for joining the pilot. Three broad groups of pilot schools were identified:

- schools whose Head Teachers had been involved in developing the strategy and felt that they should be involved, and consequently had a good understanding of the SEF;

- schools that volunteered because they were interested in the pilot and consequently had some understanding of what it offered; and

- schools which the LA had "encouraged" to join because they believed that they would benefit from additional support and who often had little understanding of the SEF.

4.33. Despite the differences in their knowledge and understanding of the SEF before joining the pilot, and the differences in their motivation for joining, Associates and Improvement Facilitators reported that almost all Head Teachers had welcomed their support. In some cases they were welcomed from the outset while in others they reported that Head Teachers had initially been sceptical and it had taken at least one meeting to establish the role and its value to the school. This assessment was supported by our visits to SEF pilot schools. Associates and Improvement Facilitators attributed their welcome to their "credibility", given their knowledge and experience of schools. This assessment was supported by our visits to schools.

4.34. Nevertheless, there have been problems. In several of the regions a number of schools have expressed a desire to drop out of the pilot, although in most cases following discussion with the schools and their Associates or Improvement Facilitators, they have chosen to continue. There was some cynicism about why some schools had joined the pilot and some schools were reported to be reluctant to fully participate in networks.

4.35. It was reported that the elements that schools most commonly chose to focus upon were curriculum and teaching and leadership. One interviewee suggested that this was because "schools know teaching and learning, the curriculum, that's their comfort zone, that's the easiest approach…that applies to schools and Associate head teachers." Others,

however, reflected that since these are such key areas for the work of a school they are the most important starting points for reviewing effectiveness.

4.36.   The main barriers that were identified were the challenges posed by working with very successful schools; the time needed to set up meetings and, in particular, joint meetings between a number of schools in a network; delays in receiving data packs that could help schools to review areas of effectiveness and the difficulties of identifying and verifying good practice.

4.37.   The SEF focuses around how schools use evidence from their own performance to drive their effectiveness. The aim had been to provide Associates and Improvement Facilitators with comprehensive data packs for each of the schools they worked with to enable them to support the school to use this evidence to stimulate change. In practice, the data packs were not available until work was well underway and played little role in shaping the focus for the work.

4.38.   ***The School Effectiveness Profile (SEP)***: Almost all Associates and Improvement Facilitators and pilot schools reported using the SEP.[16] The SEP is based on the core elements of the SEF and is a tool to help schools to make judgements on both their position and their progress in building effectiveness. It was developed as a tool to stimulate discussion, raise awareness and promote ownership of improvements across a school. It was envisaged that the process undertaken in using the SEP would be as valuable as the assessment arrived at. However, the pilot illustrated a range of ways in which it was used and, in some cases, had been adapted. These variations ranged from it being completed by the

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[16] Some schools were reluctant to use the SEP because they had already completed a self-evaluation in the summer of 2008.

pilot school's Head Teacher alone, to efforts to engage the whole school in completing the SEP. There were also hybrids, where for example, a Head Teacher initially completed the SEP and then took it to the Senior Management team to validate their assessment. In some cases Associates were adapting or summarising the SEP and in the swamwac region, an on-line summary form was prepared for schools, which started to be accessed by non-pilot schools. In some schools the SEP was used to identify priorities whilst in others it was used to confirm and explore existing priorities.

4.39. All of those who were using the SEP reported that completing it was time-consuming. Some felt that judgments about the levels that a school were at remained somewhat subjective with, for example, differences in interpretation. This may have contributed to situations where schools were judged to have over-stated their position on the SEP. Other problems that were reported included the complexity and ambiguity of the language, particularly in the Welsh language versions; the lack of descriptors for schools that fall below the 'expected' level; the unwieldiness of the paper based SEP; and the apparent lack of progression across the different levels. For example, one Consortia Coordinator reported how he had presented Associates with level descriptors from the SEP and asked them to place them in order from "expected" to "transforming", a task they had found very challenging. It was also suggested that greater alignment with Estyn self-assessment frameworks was needed.[17] In response, the Assembly Government reviewed the SEP in the summer of 2009.

4.40. Despite their reservations, Associates and Improvement Facilitators usually judged the SEP and the process of completing it as useful. It was reported to have helped structure discussions with pilot schools and the

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[17] Equally, some acknowledged the work that had been undertaken to map the SEP against Estyn's Common inspection framework, citing this as a strength of the SEP.

support they provided. It was also reported to provide a different focus to more data or evidence driven evaluation and inspection processes. However, Associates, Improvement Facilitators and pilot schools were united in the judgment that it was unlikely that schools would have used the SEP without the support and encouragement of Associates and Improvement Facilitators[18].

4.41. ***The management of the pilot by the WAG:*** In addition to the weakness in communication, outlined in section three, and tri-level working which we discuss in section five, both Associates and Improvement Facilitators reported that the timescale for the pilot was very tight. As a consequence, any delays were reported to cause knock on problems. In some cases resources, most notably schools' data packs and Welsh Language version of the SEP had come in too late. Equally, the school data packs, once received, were welcomed as useful documents.

4.42. ***Expectations of impact:*** Associates, Improvement Facilitators and schools typically identified a range of expected 'quick wins', such as changes in ways learners were assessed and work marked, the increased level of involvement of teaching staff in driving changes, the introduction of systems of performance management and the ways that schools engaged parents through events such as celebration evenings. They also identified more complex, longer term changes, in areas such as the development of teaching and learning strategies within the Foundation Phase; the development of the curriculum offer for 14-19 year olds; and developing children and young people's participation; changes which they expected to have an impact over the medium term (typically 12 to 24 months, although sometimes up to three to five years). A number stressed though that it was important to bear in mind that pilot schools were almost all volunteers and

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[18] However, swamwac has subsequently been approached by non-pilot schools asking for copies of the SEP, which they do via their website

that, by implication, the same pace of change could not be assumed if the programme was rolled out to all schools in Wales.

4.43. Some Associates and Improvement Facilitators were more positive and had greater confidence than others about the pace and extent of change that could be expected. This reflected a range of factors, including the temperament of Associates and Improvement Facilitators and the issues that were to be addressed but was ultimately viewed as being dependent on the capacity and approach of the pilot school and its leadership.

4.44. In assessing the pace and extent of change, Associates and Improvement Facilitators identified a range of enablers and barriers. Barriers included time, money, the continuing sense of competition between schools recruiting learners from the same area, the amount of change in education policy leading to a concern amongst some in the early stages of the pilot that the SEF was "another initiative" that might have been replaced in 2 years time, nervousness amongst some pilot school head teachers about being exposed and an incomplete understanding of the holistic nature of the SEF (that is, a piecemeal approach that focused on problem solving rather than cultural change). Enablers included an open-minded attitude, being non-judgmental, the opportunities and willingness of many to share ideas and good practice, the SEF's status as national programme and the commitment of pilot school Head Teachers.

4.45. The legacy of the SEF impact upon pilot schools is uncertain (we consider the wider impact of the SEF pilots in section six) although there was evidence that many of the new approaches adopted in pilot schools and successfully developed through the SEF would continue when the pilot ends. Several of the Networks have plans to meet in the Autumn term and, within some pilot schools, staff talked about achieving some level of cultural change, especially where groups of staff had worked together on

an issue taking responsibility for developing their own areas of work. However, as we outline below, it is less certain that the process of learning and innovation fostered by the SEF will continue.

4.46. Those school leaders and teachers involved in the SEF pilots were clearly enthused by the collaborative opportunities, most notably the formation of networks of schools, that the pilot fostered and most expressed a desire to sustain these after the lifetime of the pilot.   Nevertheless, given the range of calls upon school teachers' and leaders' time there is a risk that if the support offered by Associates or Improvement Facilitators is withdrawn, as novelty of the SEF wears off and other new initiatives emerged, school leaders and teachers might find it difficult to sustain the same level of commitment.

4.47. Some school leaders were clearly enthused by the SEF and had embraced tools, such as the SEP, introduced through the pilots, integrating them into their school and planning and review processes, and were likely to continue using them after the pilot. However, others were at different stages of readiness to change and the role of Associates or Improvement Facilitators in encouraging and supporting them became correspondingly more important. If this support was withdrawn, it is not clear if these schools would continue SEF developments.

4.48. Finally, while some Associates or Improvement Facilitators were keen to continue working with pilot schools, without the generous funding offered by the pilot programme, they may struggle to maintain their commitment and to persuade others, such as their colleagues and Governors of the value of the role, when compared to other calls upon their time.

4.49. Our assessment of the likely legacy of the pilots assumes, for the sake of analysis, a complete end to the pilots. If, as is planned, the SEF continues,

and the SEF and SEP and new Estyn common inspection framework are aligned, it is much more likely that schools will continue to collaborate and use the tools. As noted, some, but by no means all, Associates and Improvement Facilitators we interviewed were keen to continue their role through being part of a Professional Learning Community. Whether they would still be as willing to do so if the role changed as the SEF developed is less certain.

5. TRI-LEVEL REFORM

5.1.   As outlined in section three, tri-level working and systems thinking are integral part of the SEF Vision. Tri-level working is a process where policy is "designed and implemented collaboratively and coherently through all levels of the system: nationally, locally and at the level of the individual learning setting" (p. 5, WAG, 2008a). Systems thinking is a key component of tri-level reform. It "requires the focus at all levels, and throughout all the organisations that work to improve outcomes for children and young" (p. 6, WAG, 2008a). It encourages a sense of collective responsibility[19], and requires organisations to think not only about the impact of their work upon children and young people, but also about their impact upon other organisations working with and supporting children and young people in their area.

5.2.   There are examples of tri-level working and systems thinking in the pilot. As outlined in section three, the development of the SEF vision, the progress made in the pilots to align Assembly Government policies and

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[19] This is sometimes described as "population accountability", which relates to the outcomes for entire group, such as children and young people in a particular local authority, and acknowledges that no single organisation is responsible for these outcomes, as distinct from "performance accountability", which relates to the quality and quantity of individual services and the impact they have upon individuals (Freidman, 2005)

the new Estyn Inspection Framework with the SEF are good examples of the type of collaborative working needed for tri-level working systems thinking. In some respects the swamwac model, in which the Assembly Government outlined a vision, which was then developed and operationalised by Local Authorities working together as a consortium and implemented by schools, was consistent with the description some interviewees' gave of the principles of tri-level working. Nevertheless, as we outline below, in practice the pilot did not operate in a tri-level way.

5.3.   Overall, despite the examples of good practice, the pilots fell far short of true tri-level working and systems thinking. Within the Assembly Government, as outlined in section three, the 'baton changes' meant that it took time to establish SEF's central role with the Assembly Government as the overarching policy that, as envisaged by the 'red book', would "draw together the range of programmes which address the challenges facing schools in achieving the national purpose [for schools]". Some interviewees highlighted examples of the development and implementation of education policies during the lifetime of the pilots that they felt ran counter to the ethos of tri-level and systems thinking reform. These were either because, like the forthcoming Learning and Skills Measure for 14-19 education and training, they were perceived to be being developed and implemented in a top down manner or because, like the Pedagogy Initiative, they were reported to have been developed in parallel with the SEF. It was also reported that, initially, some policy leads within DCELLs saw the SEF a vehicle for helping deliver their policy, rather than as an overarching framework for policy and that alignment of policies outside of DCELLs with the SEF was limited.

5.4.   Looking specifically at the Associate and Improvement Facilitator models that were piloted, neither worked in a truly tri-level way. The Associate led model involved the Assembly Government engaging directly with schools

through the work of Associates; and although Local Authorities were informed of the work of Associates, there was only limited input from them via the Programme Board and, more latterly, the increasing involvement of Consortia Coordinators. The Improvement Facilitator model involves Local Authorities engaging directly with schools through Improvement Facilitators and Local Authority Link Advisers; and although the Assembly Government were informed of the work of Improvement Facilitators, there was only limited input from them. Crucially, tri-level working is a process not an event, and the Assembly Government's role does not end with the creation of a vision. This was a weakness of the pilots as it undermined ownership and created the risk of duplication of effort or even competition between different levels.

5.5.   The SEF pilots have supported the further development of Regional Consortia, which is an integral part of both tri-level working and systems thinking. The pilots have also helped strengthen existing structures, such as the ADEW Quality Assurance group, which was re-launched in July 2009. However, because the four Regional Consortia were at different stages of development when the SEF pilots began, the impact of the pilots upon them has differed.

5.6.   In South West and Mid Wales, the swamwac Consortium was already well-established. The six local education authorities in the Consortium, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Powys and the City and County of Swansea, began working together in 2000. In 2006, the Consortium secured funding from the Welsh Assembly Government Making the Connections Improvement Fund. This led to the development of an action plan and governance structure (swamwac, 2007). Swamwac has a small administrative base and manages the development of a Consortium level element on a large number of programmes, including workforce development, advisory services and

programmes like the 14-19 Learning Pathways and Foundation Phase. Swamwac members were actively involved in planning and monitoring the progress of the pilot programme and the Consortium has been able to start using the SEF to inform strategic developments across its work.

5.7. In Central and South Wales, the Consortium drew upon ESIS to manage the SEF pilot project. ESIS is an Education and School Improvement Service established in 1996 to serve the Local Education Authorities of Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Consortium also includes the Vale of Glamorgan, which is not part of ESIS and this has caused some confusion, as ESIS is sometimes equated with the Consortium. The SEF Regional Coordinator was already employed by ESIS as an adviser and attended Consortium meetings to provide updates. The Consortium did not take an active role in developing, as opposed to implementing, the SEF pilots. The Coordinator has taken the model and tools provided by the Assembly Government, and has piloted them, recruiting Associates and pilot schools, initiating meetings between Associates, visiting pilot schools and establishing conferences and events to help disseminate the lessons from the pilot and raise awareness of the SEF amongst non pilot schools and the advisory service.

5.8. There have been consortium developments in both North West (Gwynedd, Ynys Môn and Conwy) and North East (Denbighshire, Flint and Wrexham) over a number of years which, in the last few years work has been done on developing a joint North Wales Consortium. There is a small administrative base and a full-time coordinator, but the Consortium is described as being very much in its developmental phase. The nature and extent of joint working varies between Local Authorities. The strongest link is seen in CYNNAL, a company established in 1996 by Gwynedd and Ynys Môn County Councils to provide support services for schools within the two authorities.

5.9. In South East Wales, which brings together the Local Education Authorities of Cardiff, Newport, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent, there was no pre-existing joint advisory structure, like ESIS or CYNNAL, and collaboration between Local Authorities on school improvement activity is still in the early stages of development and is currently focused primarily upon the development of CPD online for the Consortium. The SEF Regional Coordinator attends Consortia meetings and provides updates. As in the North and Central South, the Coordinator has taken the model and tools provided by the Assembly Government, and has piloted them, managing budgets, recruiting Associates and pilot schools, initiating meetings between Associates and monitoring the quality of Associates' work through scrutiny of their logs. The Coordinator has also supported small changes to the model, such as the inclusion of non-pilot schools in networks. One local authority, Torfaen, chose not to participate in the pilot programme.

5.10. Overall, the consortia structures did not prove particularly effective for embedding tri-level working. As outlined in section four, the swamwac consortium exercised considerable autonomy in developing its model and the involvement of the Assembly Government was limited. In contrast, in the other three regions, the Regional Coordinators viewed the Associate role and the supporting tools and materials, developed by the Assembly Government, as a model to be trialled and tested. Therefore their role was largely restricted to the managing the implementation of this model, rather than developing it. They provided updates to the consortia members, who felt limited ownership and who consequently had limited involvement in shaping or developing the model in their region. Moreover, within each consortium, collaboration between Associates or Improvement Facilitators and Local Authority School Improvement Officers was patchy and most engagement with schools was through the Consortia Coordinators and the

Associates themselves. Even where Coordinators took direct steps to involve School Improvement Officers, such as holding awareness raising seminars, there was a patchy and sometimes guarded response.

5.11. As outlined in section four, the networks of schools have encouraged and facilitated collaboration and are reported to be helping to share ideas and expertise and develop capacity. However, these new networks are not yet integrated into policy making structures. Moreover, unlike other existing partnership structures such as Children and Young People's Partnerships and 14-19 Networks, their focus to date has tended to be upon improving outcomes for each school's own pupils, rather than, for example, fostering a collective responsibility for improving outcomes for all children and young people in a particular area. There was also little evidence that the SEF had promoted collaboration between schools and other non-school agencies.

5.12. Within schools the SEF pilots have often helped strengthen existing networks and create new networks between senior management teams, teachers and, in some cases, support staff and pupils. In contrast to the networks that have developed *between* schools, these are reported to have focused upon the development and implementation of policy and to have been more successful in strengthening a sense of collective responsibility for outcomes for children and young people within the school.

5.13. A number of Interviewees concluded, and we agree, that the failure to engage all three levels was not inherent in the structures of the two models that were piloted, but reflected the way in which they had been developed, with one led by the Assembly Government, the other by a Local Authority Consortium. Collaborative and consultative structures, including an external Reference Group and Steering Group were

established to facilitate tri-level working and representatives from primary, secondary, special schools and Local Authorities were all seconded to the Assembly Government SEF team. Whilst they brought important expertise, experiences and insights, they could not be considered representative of the full spectrum of views within each of these sectors. Moreover, the changes in the leadership and management of the SEF pilots meant that the relationships between Welsh Assembly Government officials and those, such as the Regional Coordinators charged with implementation, were not always maintained. As a consequence, communication was weakened and people did not always feel involved.

5.14. It was reported that it would take time to establish what one interviewee termed the "mature relationships" needed to make a tri-level approach work. For example, they cautioned that fostering the three-way trust (between the WAG, Local Authorities and Associates or Improvement Facilitators and schools) needed would not be easy and highlighted the need for dialogue, transparency and commitment in making these relationships work. Progress has been made during the lifetime of the pilots and, as outlined in section three, the restructuring of the SEF team in early 2009 was reported to have improved communication considerably.

5.15. Further work will be needed to embed tri-level working and systems thinking. There is a need not only for communication and dialogue, but also leadership at all levels. It will require "systems leaders", people who lead not only their own organisation or area of work, but who actively engage with others within and beyond their own organisation or area of work in tri-level working and systems thinking. It will need to empower those they work with to work in a tri-level way and to work with and across the system, promoting distributed leadership (Hopkins, 2007); as Michael Fullan puts it, "deep and sustained change depends on many of us, not just the very few" (p.2. Fullan, 2001b). This leadership will have to

challenge barriers such as the continuing sense of competition between schools and between Local Authorities, which we consider further below. It will also need to build capacity, relationships and trust throughout the system.   For example, we found that whilst interviewees at each of the three levels were committed to the principle of tri-level reform, their comments indicated that, in practice, they often lacked faith in the capacity of some of their prospective partners in the other levels, hampering efforts to work in collaborative way.

6. THE IMPACT OF THE PILOTS

6.1.   **Achievement of the aims and objective of the pilot**: The pilots were intended to trial the SEF approach in order to inform a proposed roll out of the programme. The 'red book', describes their purpose in terms of "Researching, Refining and Implementing the Framework" (p. 23, WAG, 2008a), and outlines a range of activities, although it does not outline specific aims and objectives for the pilots.

6.2.   The consensus amongst the stakeholders we interviewed was that the pilots had enabled one strand of the SEF's vision, the elements of an effective school, the themes and the school effectiveness profile to be trialled using two distinctive models of implementation. As outlined in sections three, four and five, important lessons have been learnt from the pilot on each of these components of the SEF. The Assembly Government has committed itself to reviewing the pilots and using the knowledge generated by them to refine the model and enable the SEF to be rolled out.

6.3.   However, there was also consensus amongst the stakeholders we interviewed that the pilots had not enabled the second strand of the SEF

vision, tri-level reform and systems thinking, to be fully trialled, because they had not been fully implemented by the pilots.

6.4. **The contribution of the pilots to the Assembly Government goals:** the Learning County: Vision into Action outlines the Assembly Governments' strategic vision for the education system. It is structured around seven themes (see boxed text) with outcomes and objectives for each.

The Learning Country: Vision into Action themes

- Strong foundations Early Years and Inclusion
- Schools and Learning
- 14-19 Learning Pathways and Beyond
- Supporting Practitioners
- Beyond Compulsory Education: Skills, Further Education and Lifelong Learning
- The Future of Higher Education
- Quality Education Services and Equal Opportunity for Children, Young People and Adults (WAG, 2007).

6.5. Although two of the seven themes, The Future of Higher Education and post compulsory education, lie beyond the SEFs scope[20], the SEF pilots had the potential to contribute to the remaining five. Of these five themes, the most relevant were:

- "schools and learning", which includes the objective, "Tackle poverty of educational opportunity and raise standards in schools" p. 10, WAG, 2007);

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[20] The Quality and Effectiveness Framework (WAG, 2009) covers post-16 education and learning.

- "supporting practitioners", which includes the objective, "Develop the skills and knowledge of our learning workforce" (p. 19, ibid.); and

- "Quality Education Services and Equal Opportunity for Children, Young People and Adults", which includes the objective "Improve services and protection for children and young people" (p. 29,ibid.).

6.6. As outlined in section three, the SEF pilots aimed to have a central role in raising standards, and although it is still too early to measure the impact of the pilots, the early indications are encouraging and the SEF pilots have helped develop key elements of the schools and learning theme, including "Refocus on school improvement so as to narrow the gap in performance" and "Improve peer support and challenge between schools to enhance performance in schools facing the most significant difficulties", although the focus is broader, encompassing all schools, than that envisaged in the *Learning Country: Vision into Action* (p. 10, ibid).

6.7. As outlined in section three, the SEF pilots aimed to promote collaboration and build capacity and are judged to have helped develop key elements of the supporting practitioners theme, including "Encourag[ing] local authorities to increase their collaborative working"; and through its links to the pedagogy strategy.

6.8. As outlined in section three, by placing well-being at its heart, and promoting systems thinking, the SEF aims to place the needs of children and young people at the centre of the education system and include a strong focus upon working with others. However, to date, most of the focus of work under the pilots has been in and between schools, rather than between schools and other agencies.

6.9. **Differences in impact upon different types of schools:** The interviews with Associates and Improvement Facilitators and visits to schools support

the conclusion that the impact of the SEF has been different in different schools. Those schools where the leadership was ready and willing to change got the most out of the SEF pilots. Factors linked to the motivation and capacity to change included the recognition that there was scope for further improvement and a commitment to improvement; high expectations of both teaching and learning; the openness to new ideas; willingness to be self-critical and the strength of schools' self-evaluation, and therefore their understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. These factors were reported to be more important than the school's context, such as whether the school was serving a disadvantaged area.

6.10. The school effectiveness literature suggests that other key factors that create the capacity and willingness to change include the presence of a strong "moral purpose" and a focus upon the basics (i.e. teaching and learning), that orientates or aligns all activity around the goal of raising the bar and narrowing the gap. In support of this schools have strong leadership and a clear narrative of change, they focus upon the system, rather than individual components, they promote collective ownership and distributed leadership, use data intelligently, collaborate with others in networks and professional learning communities, and build the capacity for change within and beyond their school (Hopkins, 2007; see also Harris, 2008 McKinsey, 2007; and the edited collection by Stoll & Louis, 2007).

6.11. Interviewees' conclusion about the impact of the SEF is consistent with research into school effectiveness, which suggests "all schools are at different stages in their improvement [or effectiveness] cycle". For example Professor David Hopkins places schools on a continuum running from "Failing schools"; through "low attaining schools"; "Underperforming schools"; "Succeeding schools with internal variation"; succeeding, self-improving schools" to "leading schools". He concludes that given differences in their capacity and readiness to change and ultimately lead

change in other schools, different strategies, with a different balance and focus upon "prescription", "capacity" building and "professionalism" are needed for each phase ("segmentation") (p. 13-14, Hopkins, 2005).

6.12. Given the differences in schools' needs, as outlined in section four, the School Effectiveness approach, based upon the "specification" of elements and themes, the support from Associates and Improvement Facilitators and the facilitation of networks of schools, complements, but should not replace other types of school effectiveness work. There is still, for example, a need for approaches with a greater emphasis upon "prescription" rather than capacity building. There is also a need for flexibility, for Associates and Improvement Facilitators to be empowered and to have the necessary skills and knowledge to take on different roles in different schools. These could include the roles of critical friend, coach and mentor. It may also mean that the support provided by Associates or Improvement Facilitators is not appropriate to every school. Some may not have the capacity or be ready to benefit, whilst others may be leading schools, whose Head Teachers become Associates or Improvement Facilitators. For example, as noted in paragraph 4.35, some Associates and Improvement Facilitators found it extremely challenging and even intimidating to work with very successful schools. This does not mean that these schools do not have the potential for further improvement, but it may mean that the Associate or Improvement Facilitator role is not appropriate or it may mean that it is only appropriate for Associates or Improvement Facilitators with particular skills and experience to work with these schools.

6.13. **Implications for School funding:** Interviewees did not report that the SEF pilots had helped address issues related to funding, such as the closure of small rural schools. Although a number of interviewees were concerned about the cost of rolling out the pilot models, and in particular

the daily rate paid to Head Teachers, working as Associates or Improvement Facilitators. There was also some discussions about the potential economies of scale that regional working could bring.

7. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

7.1. In light of our initial literature review and initial consultation with key stakeholders, we proposed that the evaluation framework should focus upon three broad areas:

- Changes in the effectiveness of pilot schools;
- Changes in the educational performance of children and young people in SEF pilot schools; and
- Changes in the well being of children and young people in SEF pilot schools.

7.2. We have consulted Associates and Improvement Facilitators on these proposals through a presentation and workshops at a national training conference for Associates and Improvement Facilitators in Llandudno and consulted a sample of pilot schools through our visits to schools. This process revealed a fairly broad consensus for focusing upon these three areas, but as we outline below, less agreement on exactly how change should be measured.

7.3. **Measuring effectiveness**: In order to measure changes in the effectiveness of SEF pilot schools we proposed that the school effectiveness profile (SEP) be used. We proposed its use in order to minimise the additional burden upon schools, as the development of an alternative tool would mean that schools would use both the SEP and another tool in order to measure changes within the school. We acknowledged that there were some potential challenges though. For example:

- The SEP was developed as a self-assessment and planning tool, rather than as a tool specifically designed to measure change, and was

accompanied by relatively little guidance. As a consequence, the scale of progression between the different levels[21] was not consistent and schools have used it in different ways;

- The debate about whether there is always progression as you move up through the levels of each element of the SEP, for example, some interviewees questioned whether the descriptions of a "transforming" level were always higher than the descriptions of a "deepening" level;

- The problem posed by schools which might start the process below the 'expected' level on some elements; and

- the scope for 'non-linear' progression, so that, for example, a Head Teacher might start by judging that the school was already at a relatively high level (e.g. "deepening" or "transformed"), but as they involved other staff members in the process, might reassess their judgment about the level that the school was actually at, leading them to move back on the SEP to a lower level (e.g. "expected" or "developing"). On the face of it, this would suggest that the school had regressed, but it would actually represent progress, as the school was better able to judge its strengths and weaknesses.

7.4. Our consultations found that there was little enthusiasm for the development of another framework for measurement in addition to the SEP, Estyn Common Inspection Framework and Local Authority support and challenge frameworks, but there was some unease about using the SEP to measure changes in effectiveness, for the reasons outlined above. Therefore, we recommend that Estyn's revised Common Inspection Framework (CIF) (Estyn 2010), which will be aligned with the SEF, will be used measure changes in the quality of outcomes, provision and leadership which are, in turn, the key indicators of changes in the effectiveness of schools. We propose that schools use the CIF as the basis of their annual self-evaluations and Local Authority Link Officer

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[21] I.e. moving from "expected" through "developing", "deepening", to "transformed".

reviews be used to provide a picture of changes in effectiveness at a school level on an annual basis. This would be complemented by Estyn's inspections of schools, which would provide an independent measure of changes in effectiveness across all schools in Wales over the course of an inspection cycle.

7.5.   There is a range of reasons for using the new Estyn CIF. Using self-evaluation processes based on the CIF to measure change, would allow schools to focus on using the SEP as a tool for development. It would, in effect, address concerns about the development and use of another new framework to measure effectiveness because schools will be required to use the new inspection framework. It would also send a powerful signal about the alignment of the SEF and the Estyn Inspection Framework.

7.6.   **Measuring learning outcomes:** In order to measure changes in children and young people's educational performance in SEF pilot schools we initially proposed that changes in the attainment of pupils in SEF pilot schools be measured. We concluded that it was reasonable to look at school level data on children and young people's attainment because the SEF was aiming to transform the whole school. Nevertheless, we acknowledged that there were some potential weaknesses with this approach. For example:

- Although school level data would be readily available (through the National Pupil Database) and would enable comparisons to be made between SEF Pilot and non-pilot schools with similar characteristics, and between some groups of pupils within those schools, such as girls and boys and pupils eligible for free school meals[22] in both pilot and non-pilot schools, it would not enable comparisons to be made between the

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[22] Whilst imperfect, eligibility for Free Schools Meals (FSM) remains the best and the most widely used proxy indicator of disadvantage at a pupil level (Bramley & Watkins, 2007).

attainment of other groups of pupils within schools, such as looked after children[23]; and

- School level effects are often small, making measurement of them difficult, given the range of other factors that impact upon pupil attainment (Gorard & Cook, 2007).

7.7.   Our consultations suggest that there is some unease about using schools' attainment data, because it is considered a very crude measure of school effectiveness that does not include any consideration of the 'value added' by the school or the backgrounds of individual pupils.   Most respondents agreed that there was a need to look at pupil performance, measured in terms of Teacher Assessments at Key Stages 1 -3 and attainment in examinations at Key Stage 4, but suggested that achievement[24] would be a better measure of effectiveness than attainment.   A small number of schools questioned the value of using any measure of pupil performance.

7.8.   We concluded that the evaluation framework must include a measure of learning outcomes, which lie at the heart of the SEF, but understand the concerns about the use of attainment data, and therefore recommend that a measure that captures aspects of pupils' achievement, such as value added scores, should be used as the basis for measuring changes in pupil performance. This would enable changes in learning outcomes to be monitored on an annual basis and would be complemented by Estyn's judgments on the achievement of pupils, which would be provided through the six year school inspection cycle.

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[23] The Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) includes data on individual pupils' characteristics, such as eligibility for FSMs, and can therefore, for example, be used to compare results for pupils eligible for FSMs in different schools.   However, not all pupil characteristics that may be of interest are included in the PLASC and recording of some, such as children in care, is poor, meaning that the data is not considered sufficiently robust to be used for this type of analysis.

7.9. **Measuring Well-being:** In order to measure changes in children and young people's well-being in SEF pilot schools, a scoping paper (Holtom, 2009) outlining some of the literature and key issues was prepared and circulated for comment. This proposed that the evaluation framework focus upon two aspects of well-being:

- Do children and young people experience a subjective sense of well-being (the classic question is do you feel satisfied with your life?); and
- are the conditions in place to enable children and young people to experience well-being? The 'conditions' would be based upon the seven core aims for children and young people (see boxed text on p. 22), which make up the statutory definition of children and young people's well-being (WAG, 2004).

7.10. Because data on some of these measures of children's and young people's well-being are available at a national or local authority level, but are rarely available at a school level, we proposed that survey work at a school level be undertaken in order to provide this data. An initial survey could be used to establish a baseline in non-pilot schools, which could then be updated on, for example, an annual basis. If the SEF was rolled out to all schools, and the same survey was undertaken by all schools, aggregation of the results from individual schools could be used to generate a measure of well-being at a local Authority and national level.

7.11. As with the other measures we proposed, we acknowledged that there were some potential problems. For example, changes in children and young people's well-being cannot be attributed solely to schools. Equally we reasoned that schools make an important contribution to children and young people's well-being and are likely to have an interest in the well-

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[24] By 'achievement' we mean an assessment of pupils' "success in attaining agreed learning goals"; "their progress in learning" and "the development of their personal, social and learning skills" (Estyn, n.d.).

being of children or young people in their school. If the well-being of children is falling, even if the school is not the cause of this, the school may want to work with those partners who can address the problem. At a practical level, many schools are already using tools such as PASS[25] surveys that measure aspects of children and young people's well-being. Schools may therefore be reluctant to use a new tool. The problem is that because schools use different tools and measures, it is not possible to compare well-being in different schools or to use it to generate a snapshot of well-being at a Local authority or National level.

7.12. Our consultations suggest that there is considerable support for measuring well-being. Many schools value the SEF's recognition that schools' contribution extends far beyond the acquisition of qualifications and that measuring their impact upon pupil well-being was one measure of their wider contribution to society and their community. Moreover, as noted, a number of schools are already measuring well-being.

7.13. Our recommendation is that changes in children and young people's well-being should be systematically measured using a common definition and approach. Because discussions are continuing within the Assembly Government about the development of a common definition and approach to measurement of well-being, we recommend that development of this strand of the framework be suspended until a common measure has been agreed and that, if possible, this measure should then be used for the SEF.

7.14. Unlike learning outcomes and effectiveness, because schools are only one of a large number of influences upon well-being, we do not recommend that well-being should be used as a performance measure. For example, whilst schools may provide all the conditions necessary for a

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[25] Pupil Attitudes to School and Self

child or young person to experience well-being, children or young people must still have the freedom to make choices that can negatively impact upon their well-being.

7.15. **Developing the evaluation framework**: because, as outlined in section six, the pilots only focused upon trialling one strand of the school effectiveness framework, that this the new roles of Associates and Improvement Facilitators, the elements of an effective school and the school effectiveness profile (SEP), as outlined above, the evaluation framework focuses upon the impact of these innovations upon children and young people and schools. As the other elements of the SEF, such as tri-level working and systems thinking, are developed, the evaluation framework will need to be developed and broadened to encompass these aspects of the SEF.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1. We found widespread support for the vision and principles of the SEF amongst pilot schools, Associates and Improvement Facilitators and key stakeholders drawn from the Assembly Government, WLGA, ADEW, Estyn, Academic and Voluntary sectors. Despite progress the education sector, working with its partners, continues to face significant challenges in raising the bar, narrowing the gap, and improving the well-being of learners (Estyn, 2008). For example:

- Although the educational attainment of disadvantaged children has improved since the mid 1990s, this has been matched by similar gains in the educational attainment of their less disadvantaged peers and the trend of rising educational attainment appears to have stalled around 2000 (Kenway, 2007);
- The outcome of the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2006) confirms the progress, but also highlights the long "tail" of underachievement in Wales (Bradshaw, et al, 2007); and
- UNICEF recently ranked the UK as the poorest of 21 industrialised counties in terms of children's subjective well-being[26](Unicef, 2007).

8.2. In principle, therefore, there was seen to be a clear need for a programme like the SEF and the pilots have helped identify a series of key lessons including:

8.3. **Lesson 1. The strength of the SEF vision:** There was consensus amongst those that we spoke to that there is a need for something to

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[26] Data for England was used to generate the UK assessment. Data on some measures is available for Wales, and while suggesting that Wales performs somewhat better than England on some measures, it still paints a depressingly poor picture of children and young people's well-being in Wales.

complement the work of Estyn and Local Authority school improvement services. It was reported that the evidence of what makes a school effective was not being applied systematically in Wales' schools and there was broad support for the vision of tri-level reform and for the six "Elements" and the five "Core Themes" of the School Effectiveness Framework (commonly referred to as 'the pizza'). There was also consensus that the roles of Associates and Improvement Facilitators "added value", and complemented the work of existing school improvement partners. Associates, Improvement Facilitators and pilot schools were nearly all enthusiastic about the SEF and optimistic about its impact.

8.4. The SEF vision itself is sophisticated, which means it is challenging to communicate. Crucially, though, we found that the more involved people were in the SEF process, the greater their understanding of it (as would be expected) and more importantly, the greater their support for the SEF vision (which could not be taken for granted).

8.5. **Lesson 2. The skills and knowledge that Associates and Improvement Facilitators need to be effective**: Both schools and SEF Regional Coordinators agreed that the capacity of Associates and Improvement Facilitators to perform their distinctive role effectively varied. Some were described as excellent, others less so. In part this reflected the different needs of schools, so that schools might reach quite different judgments about the quality of the same Associate or Improvement Facilitator as they may have the approach, skills and knowledge needed by one school, but not by the other. This highlights the importance of carefully matching Associates or Improvement Facilitators and schools. However, it was clear that it could not be assumed that a serving Head Teacher or Adviser would necessarily have the skills needed to function as an effective Associate or Improvement Facilitator. Schools did report that

they valued the experience that serving Head Teachers or Advisers with recent headship experience could bring, and this tended to make it easier for those Associates and Improvement Facilitators who had this experience to establish a relationship with Head Teachers in pilot schools. The 'peer to peer' relationship was seen as allowing for a more open sharing of problems in some settings but this openness was not unique to the Head Teacher partnership and the 'critical friend' model adopted suggests that those with the right skills but who lack experience of Headships could take the role.

8.6. **Lesson 3. The importance of not equating the SEF with the role and work of Associates or Improvement Facilitators**. As outlined in section six, the SEF pilots only trialled one strand of the SEF vision. The new roles of Associates and Improvement Facilitators were in many ways the highest profile element of the pilots and, in some people's minds, became synonymous with the SEF. Whilst, as outlined in section four, the new roles are important and valued, they are only part of the SEF vision. Moreover, as we outline in section six, the impact of Associates and Improvement Facilitators depends more upon the school's capacity and willingness to exploit their support than it does upon Associates' and Improvement Facilitators' skills and resources. Therefore, as we outline below, whilst the support offered by Associates and Improvement Facilitators may not be appropriate for every school, this does not mean that every school cannot be part of and benefit from the SEF.

8.7. Crucially, the full SEF vision, incorporating not only the new roles of Associates or Improvement Facilitators, but new conceptual frameworks and ways of working and thinking, is a universal programme which will need to offer differentiated support for different schools. For example, if, as the pilots suggest, effective Associates and Improvement Facilitators are a scarce resource because the pool of applicants with the requisite

skills and experience is likely to be limited, and it is an costly role to fund, there is a strong case for targeting their support on those schools most willing and able to benefit from it. This does not, however, mean that only those schools that benefit from the support of an Associate or Improvement Facilitators can be part of the SEF programme. For example, "leading schools" can become systems leaders, providing Associates or Improvement Facilitators; can be active members of PLCs; and can use the SEP to help assess their strengths and weaknesses, even if they themselves do not benefit from the support of an Associate or Improvement Facilitator. At the other end of the spectrum, "failing" schools may need greater "prescription", but may also benefit from participation in PLCs and those working with such schools may still use the tools, such as the SEP in their efforts to help the school become more effective, even if Associates or Improvement Facilitators are not involved (cf. Hopkins, 2007).

8.8.　**Lesson 4. The need to use data as a means for enabling not only accountability but also development and the creation of knowledge and understanding**[27]: The pilot schools' we visited valued the emphasis that Associates and Improvement Facilitators placed upon dialogue and discussion, contrasting it positively with what was felt to be the more "data driven" approach of Local Authority Link advisers. However, there was a strong view from some of the key stakeholders that ultimately intelligent and effective collection and use of data is vital in driving school effectiveness (see also Hopkins, 2007, on this). The need to have data that can identify patterns and highlight problems was seen as key and some Associates and Improvement Facilitators voiced concerns about the lack of data and evidence about pilot schools and their consequent reliance upon Head Teachers' professional judgments. Pilot schools'

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27 Chelminsky (1995) describes the three purposes of evaluation as "accountability", "development" and the creation of "knowledge".

capacity for self-evaluation, including the intelligent use of data, was a critical factor in determining the impact that Associates and Improvement Facilitators could have.

8.9. **Lesson 5. The value and potential of professional learning communities**: Pilot schools have valued the new networks that have developed and many are keen to sustain them after the pilot ends. To date, most have focused upon sharing good practice. Some have gone deeper, not only looking for solutions that can be borrowed from other schools or departments within schools (a model of emulation), to co-create knowledge about challenges, the drivers of change and the potential barriers. The next step will be to extend the membership of the networks to embrace the knowledge and expertise of other stakeholders both within and beyond the school, such as pupils, support staff, governors, parents and representatives of other organisations and agencies (Hopkins, 2007, see also the edited collection by Stoll & Louis, 2007). Working across county boundaries is a key strength of these learning community networks but also creates a challenge in rural areas where colleagues may have to travel large distances to meet up, and where types of settings are widely spread out, such as Welsh Medium schools in South Wales and Special Schools.

8.10. **Lesson 6. The importance of tri-level working and systems thinking**: The impact of the work of Associates or Improvement Facilitators, the establishment and consolidation of networks and professional learning communities and the specification of the elements of an effective school, and the development of tools, such as the school effectiveness profile, will be severely limited if they are not underpinned by tri-level working and systems thinking. For example, it is vital that the role of Associate or Improvement Facilitator is developed alongside that of other school

improvement partners, such as Estyn Inspectors and Local Authority Link Advisers. The pilots identified a number of potential barriers that have to be addressed to ensure effective tri-level working including establishing tri-level communication structures that allow for collaboration and a commitment to systems leadership, which we consider further below.

8.11. **Lesson 8. The critical role of dialogue, to build understanding and relationships and enable true collaboration:** Given the sophistication and complexity of the SEF and the changes it demands in the way actors at each of three levels, the Assembly Government, Local Authorities and schools, think and behave, continuous, purposeful dialogue that includes all the key players in any given situation is critical. This should encompass both formal events such as steering and reference groups and more informal processes, in which ideas are shared and discussed on an on-going basis. This is about more than ensuring that everyone is informed. It involves listening, joint decision making and forging effective relationships. It is critical that at each level people feel part of the SEF process, that they understand it and their role in it and that they feel a contributor to its success.

8.12. **Lesson 7. The importance of leadership at all three levels, the Assembly Government, Local Authorities and schools, in order to drive reform:** The SEF demands change throughout the system. It will not be possible for actors at one level, such as the Assembly Government, to directly engage with all the relevant stakeholders within their own level, let alone the other two levels. It is likely therefore, that their dialogue will be with other 'leaders' within each of the three levels. It is vital that these leaders become "systems leaders" who take responsibility for changing not only their own thinking and behaviour, but who also collaborate with others in the system to build their capacity and influence their thinking and behaviour. To paraphrase Michael Fullan, the type of radical change

envisaged by the SEF will depend on the efforts of the many, not just the few (Fullan, 2001b).

8.13. **Lesson 8. The time and resources needed to develop a major programme of reform, like the SEF, in a tri-level way:** The ambition of the SEF is considerable, and the pilots have highlighted the time and resources that will be need to make it work. Building work around open and inclusive dialogue; constructing and embedding a shared vision across partners who do not always see themselves as collaborators; shifting thinking from the school and the Local Authorities to their impacts on the pupil are all cultural changes that will take time. The range *and depth* of commitment to change will develop over time but for this to happen all stakeholders have to be willing to take some risks and, potentially, give up some control.

8.14. **Lesson 9. The capacity building needed to ensure consistency:** A major challenge for the SEF will be in the extent to which it can contribute to tackling differences in the quality of children and young people's educational experience in and between schools and Local Authorities. For example, the pilot demonstrated the need for management of the work of Associate or Improvement Facilitator to ensure quality and consistency and the WAG has indicated that this should be provided through the four Consortia groups. However, there are significant differences between the four consortia regions in terms of their capacity and readiness to provide an infrastructure for the development of the SEF. Therefore, a strategy for developing their capacity is needed.

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ANNEX: AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The **aim** of the evaluation is to "Develop and implement an evaluation programme to assess the impact and effectiveness of the national school effectiveness framework pilot projects and make recommendations on the practicability of extending the school effectiveness framework to all schools in Wales".

The **objectives** of the evaluation are to:

1. Develop an appropriate evaluation programme and methodology to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the national school effectiveness framework pilot projects. The programme will need to consider and pay due regard to the different nature of the pilots included in the evaluation in terms of design, implementation, delivery and impact and provide timely outputs to influence next stages of implementation and roll out.

2. Assist the project working group in developing a set of effective performance measures/indicators, including proxy indicators, to measure the immediate and longer term outcomes and impact of the pilot projects. These performance measures will need to capture qualitative information, e.g. wellbeing, as well as attainment.

3. Determine the range of information that should be collected to establish appropriate baselines so that changes can be tracked on an ongoing basis.

4. Advise schools, LEAs and the Welsh Assembly Government on appropriate and effective monitoring and self- evaluation procedures and systems to capture information to track the progress of the pilots against these baselines.

5. Identify the key strengths of the pilots and any constraints/issues that may have impeded their effectiveness.

6. Review the overall management and implementation of the pilots and establish models of good practice that can be used to inform future policy.

7. Review the training and development opportunities that have been provided to the associates.

8. Consider the effectiveness of the role played by the Welsh Assembly Government and the LEAs in supporting the national school effectiveness pilots.

9. Assess the extent to which the overall aims and objectives of the pilot projects have been met.

10. Determine the contribution of the pilots to improvements in children's learning and wellbeing, including the identification of the factors which promote or inhibit progress.

11. Determine the impact of the pilots on the organisation and ethos of the schools.

12. Identify the contribution the pilots have made to achieving the goals of *The Learning Country: Vision into Action* and WAG's wider social inclusion agenda.

13. Undertake an in depth analysis of the 'value-added' dimension – where schools in areas of high levels of deprivation achieve beyond what might be predicted – and vice-versa.

14. Provide guidance as to the ongoing development and improvement of the national school effectiveness framework drawing on best practice/ lessons learnt from the initiative and, where appropriate, other similar initiatives and within the context of international evidence on school effectiveness.