



# Review of Secondary School Performance Measures

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## Consultation

Date of issue: 3 April 2007

Action required: Responses by 29 May 2007

# Review of Secondary School Performance Measures

- Audience** Secondary Schools; Chairs of Governors; local education authorities; local authority chief executives; 14-19 Learning Networks; National and local bodies in Wales concerned with education, training and skills in Wales.
- Overview** This consultation is seeking your views on school performance indicators for use in the secondary sector to measure achievement at the end of compulsory education.
- Action required** The consultation period ends on 29 May 2007.  
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- Further information** Enquiries about this document and the consultation process should be directed to Stephen Page at the above address
- Additional copies** Further copies may be obtained from Adam Moorhouse at the above address.
- This document can also be accessed from the Welsh Assembly Government website at **[www.wales.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.wales.gov.uk/consultations)**

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## Summary

This consultation document seeks views on the issues related to the collection, publication and use of secondary school performance information, primarily those indicators used to measure performance at the end of compulsory schooling.

The document sets out the key policy themes associated with this topic aiming to make links between policy and practice, measurement, reporting and target setting. It asks respondents to indicate which of range of indicators they feel have merit for different uses. It also invites suggestions for alternative measures that may be valid for consideration.

This is the first stage of a zero based review. A zero based review seeks to find a solution that actually serves stated objectives by starting from the premise that nothing should be included just because it was included in the past.

Thus this review starts with no preconceived ideas about what might appear on a future summary of secondary school performance. This document is seeking to set the context, bringing forward a number of issues for consideration. Evidence from this part of the review will inform a second document in the summer term which will set out a proposal based on respondent feedback. That document will also outline the implementation process including timescales and necessary changes to related statutory requirements for reporting and targeting placed on schools.

It is envisaged that some new indicators will be piloted in summer 2007 as a result of this review.

## Review Period

The review period will commence on the 3rd April 2007 and will last until 29 May 2007. Responses are invited on the enclosed pro forma either electronically or in hard copy.

Alternatively, respondents can respond in a format of their choice, or download an electronic copy at [www.wales.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.wales.gov.uk/consultations)

Responses to the consultation may be made public. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the author are published along with the response unless you indicate otherwise.

# Introduction

## ***“Education and training are of the first importance for Wales”***

The Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills reaffirmed the Assembly Government’s commitment to that view and to making Wales a place where everyone has the opportunity to learn and to prosper in ‘The Learning Country: Vision into Action’. In setting out the objectives for the continued transformation of education in Wales, the Minister identified the need to tackle poverty of educational opportunity and raise standards in schools. To these ends, we must:-

- make use of well targeted interventions;
- identify strengths and weakness;
- improve both peer support and challenge between schools;
- recognise wider achievement; and
- refocus on school improvement so as to narrow the gap in performance.

We have come a very long way in recent years in terms both of actual performance and in our ability to measure performance in context and make reasoned comparisons and judgements based on evidence.

At the end of compulsory education, 54% of pupils in Wales achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C in 2006 compared to only 46% in 1998; 40% achieved a grade C or above in each of the core subjects<sup>1</sup> compared to only 34% in 1998<sup>2</sup>. Over the same timescale we have moved from paper based, aggregated data collections to electronic, pupil level census and assessment collections. These provide a greater wealth of data on our pupil population. We have also developed tools to assist schools in the process of self evaluation delivered through a National Pupil Database.

As policy develops we find ourselves needing to revisit our measures of outcome attainment, set them against our objectives and ask ourselves what we need to know, what we are measuring and why – only then can we decide if we are measuring the right things for the right reasons.

Targets for outcomes are set, nationally and locally, in terms of specific raw attainment measures. It has become clear that while the ‘traditional’ 5A\*-C and 5A\*-G grade ranges and the Core Subject Indicator are of value, they represent a somewhat narrow focus on performance. The GCSE/GNVQ points score, while casting a broader net, is still not as inclusive as we now need to be; it does not

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<sup>1</sup> As measured by the Core Subject Indicator (CSI)– Grade C or above at GCSE is required in each of English or Welsh First Language, mathematics and science in combination to achieve the CSI.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics taken from SDR 164/2006.

reflect efforts to promote parity of esteem for qualifications in all learning routes. This is particularly relevant in view of the 14-19 agenda and the phasing out of GNVQs.

Concerns have rightly been raised that the GCSE measures in Wales do not reflect wider achievement and the Assembly Government acknowledges that, in line with its commitment to the 14-19 learning pathways agenda, greater parity of esteem must be shown for a wider range of qualifications.

When making her announcement to discontinue publication of Secondary School Performance Information for individual schools, the Minister undertook to work with LEAs and schools to develop value-added and performance measures which better support improvement programmes and help schools put their targets and results in context.

We have made significant progress addressing these issues through developments in both value added and points equivalencies. The Assembly has entered into a three year contract with the Fischer Family Trust to develop contextual value added information. The Minister also agreed our formal move to the wider points system and following two pilot years this data was added to the RE2 summary of secondary school performance for the first time in 2006.

We wrote to secondary schools and Local Education Authorities last summer explaining that we will be conducting a full review of the RE2 Summary of Secondary School Performance to ensure that it appropriately reflects the priorities of schools, LEAs and the Assembly Government. This document aims to provide background and context for consideration of the issues around measurement of school performance in Wales.

This document focuses on measures of performance at the end of compulsory education although the RE2 also includes some indicators of performance in post compulsory education. The Assembly Government recognises the need to consider alternative ways to measure performance across the post 16 sector but also that this is a far wider issue than can be effectively dealt with here. Hence, while some alternative ways to recognise post 16 learning in schools are considered, this document should not be taken to be reviewing indicators for all post 16 learning which will be the subject of future more detailed consideration.

There is no firm proposal included; rather this document is designed to mark the start of a zero based review of performance measurement, gathering views, ideas and feedback on which a firm proposal can be developed.

## **What next?**

The consultation period will run to 29 May 2007. We will consider feedback and publish a proposal in of June 2007. This will also indicate any consequent changes needed to the target setting and reporting requirements placed on schools and changes to the National Pupil Database and public domain reports. It will include timelines for these changes and details of any dual-running proposals.

We envisage that a new style RE2 will be delivered for 2006/07 examinations data. New measures will sit alongside existing ones, either through the production of dual documentation or a combined single document, to ensure continuity of data sets and enable year on year analysis to continue. We will clearly indicate the expected date that any existing indicators will be dropped.

The text in section 1 sets out some of the key policy considerations and highlights issues for consideration. Central to this review is the need to establish a new suite of performance measures for use in the secondary sector in Wales that are fit for purpose in the changing educational environment. Any new suite of measures will need to:-

- give equal value to academic and vocational learning routes;
- be clear in what it measures, why we value the measurement and what conclusions may reasonably be drawn from any indicator;
- meet national policy objectives, aligning with the Minister's stated strategic objectives as set out in 'Vision into Action';
- form a firm basis for open honest debate about school performance;
- support and promote collaboration between schools and other learning providers;
- reflect the needs of learners and the concerns of parents and employers;
- be transparent with clear definitions so that the wider public can understand what an indicator means; and
- promote a contextual approach to considering strengths and weakness without undue reliance on raw statistics as the primary means of assessing a school.

## **The Policy Context**

Consideration of performance measures cannot happen in isolation; there are host of policy issues that we must consider as part of any review if we are to ensure that a revised suite of measures is robust and fit for purpose in the longer term.

The overview below aims to provide a summary of the background and influential factors that must be considered when making decisions about how to measure secondary school performance in Wales.

## **School Performance Tables**

In July 2001 the Minister for Education Lifelong Learning and Skills, Jane Davidson announced that, following consultation, the Welsh Assembly Government would cease publication of individual secondary schools' performance information.

It has never been the Assembly's practice to publish primary schools' performance information.

This decision reflected the Welsh Assembly Government's view that publishing performance information that can be ranked in the form of 'league tables' is not the most effective way of presenting this information to schools and parents, and the wider public domain. The Assembly Government remains committed to this principle.

This is because 'league tables':

- focus on examination results without taking account of the abilities of the pupils when they move from primary to secondary school, and do not reflect the "value-added" by the school to pupils' performance;
- do not show the year-on-year improvement achieved by each school;
- fail to take account of the differing socio-economic factors that prevail throughout Wales;
- do not recognise the possible impact that Special Units or Classes may have on a school's results;
- can be divisive, and demoralising to staff and pupils;
- encourage schools to focus on examination results at the expense of the wider curriculum and other educational experiences for young people;
- contain a limited range of information; and
- encourage parents and others to make unfair and simplistic comparisons between schools.



Information on individual schools has remained in the public domain; available to parents and the wider public in school prospectuses and governors' annual reports.

Following the implementation of Freedom of Information (FoI) Act in January 2005, the Minister gave considerable thought as to how to meet obligations under FoI without reneging on her commitment to schools that there would be no publication of 'league tables' in Wales whilst she is Minister. She was mindful that the time was right to find a longer term solution, balancing the desire for open government and access to information against a desire to ensure that data is used in a responsible manner. A selection of key school performance indicators for all maintained schools in Wales has now been made available via the National Pupil Database. Information on more than one school has to be accessed separately and it is not possible to download data for multiple schools in a manner suited to easy manipulation and ranking.

The Assembly Government believes that this offers the right balance between giving greater ease of access to information that is already in the public domain, and the Minister's ongoing commitment to move the issue forward so that there is a better understanding of how this data should be most appropriately used, avoiding the inappropriate use of data to form value judgements based on statistical indicators alone.

### ***Key issues for consideration***

- ***To what extent, and by whom, are indicators published on RE2, in Governor's Annual Reports, School Prospectus and on the National Pupil Database public reports used to draw comparisons between learning providers?***
- ***Are such comparisons on the basis of statistical indicators helpful in the drive to raise standards?***
- ***To what extent might comparisons promote consideration of performance analysis at the expense of individual learner needs?***

### **Parental Choice**

Whilst the majority of parents in Wales do not necessarily have a wide choice of which secondary school their children should attend, due to location and capacity issues, there remains a high level of interest amongst parents in comparative school performance.

However, statistical data on a school's performance in teacher assessments and external examinations is only one piece of the jigsaw. Parents considering school choices for their children will want to take a rounded view of what a specific school has to offer that goes far beyond simplistic performance data. The governors' annual report or school prospectus offer a far wider and richer source of information about the school, including performance in assessments, covering extra curricular activities, the ethos of the school and details of policy and practice.

That said, it is clear that the performance measures required for inclusion within the schools reports and prospectuses needs to provide appropriate levels of detail, be clearly understood and meaningful. Against these factors we must balance the need to be realistic about competition amongst schools for pupils. It is clear that many schools, to a greater or lesser degree 'compete' for pupils in terms both of numbers and ability. This competition can be divisive and runs contrary to the collaborative working promoted by 14-19 policies.

### ***Key issues for consideration***

- ***To what extent is raw statistical information helpful to parents and young people in making informed choices about education?***
- ***Does setting performance information in context, for example in Governors' Reports and school prospectuses, promote more informed choices?***
- ***What are the most important factors that should influence choice of educational establishment? How can performance and management information support these?***

### **Driving up performance without league table measures**

The Assembly Government is committed to driving up performance across all schools and recognises the important part that management information and data have to play in that process. However, we believe that schools and their LEAs are best placed to review that data, placing it in local context and using it as part of their tool kit to help identify and challenge under-performance, identify and share good practice and ultimately raise standards.

The National Pupil Database in Wales provides a range of comparative and analytical tools for schools and LEAs to use to compare schools' performance against other statistically similar schools according to a wide range of variables. Providing tools for contextual analysis as part of the self evaluation process is designed to be more constructive than the publication of potentially divisive and often over simplistic statistical comparisons.

At a National level there is also a role for management and performance information in terms of highlighting trends and areas of strength and weakness. Most importantly data can help by informing discussion and consideration with school and LEA leaders. But for such debate to be most productive it must be open and honest, based on shared understandings and focused on shared objectives.

### ***Key Issues for consideration***

- ***How can performance analysis best help in the drive to raise standards?***
- ***How can the National Pupil Database be further developed to support the self evaluation process at both school and LEA?***

- ***What is the LEA's role in using data to help drive up standards?***
- ***What is the Assembly's role in using data to help to drive up standards?***

## **14-19 Learning Pathways**

The Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to transforming 14-19 provision recognises the phase's vital role in meeting strategic priorities for better health, better jobs, better skills and safer, stronger communities.

The transformation of 14-19 provision depends on achieving a balance between National and local development and on building collaborative networks that utilise local experience to meet local needs.

Learning Pathways 14-19 should provide enhanced choice and flexibility, securing individually tailored learning pathways that meet learners' needs. They should give richer opportunities and experience that help learners develop the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that they need for life and work. This includes ensuring that there are attractive vocational offers for all abilities and participation in a wide variety of experiences with accreditation of learning wherever possible.

A key element of the Learning Pathway is the 'Core' – learning consisting of the skills, knowledge, understanding, values and experiences that all 14-19 year olds will need, whatever their Learning Pathway.

Central to meeting the challenge of the 14-19 Learning Pathways agenda is the need to establish partnership approaches to delivery of education and training so that young people can access the highest quality provision to suit their individual needs whether in school, further education colleges and work-based learning or a combination of providers.

### ***Key Issues for consideration***

- ***How can performance measures support improvements in partnership and collaborative working between schools, further education establishments and work based learning?***
- ***Where learning is delivered by a range of institutions how can we reflect the different contributions made by partners in performance measures?***
- ***To what extent is competition for pupils between establishments detrimental to the 14-19 collaborative working agenda?***

## **Welsh Baccalaureate**

The Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ) is currently being rolled out at Advanced and Intermediate levels in the post-16 sector and a Foundation level model is being piloted alongside the Intermediate model with 14-19 year olds.

The WBQ is an over-arching qualification comprising two parts: the Core and Options. Students choose their Options from the list of approved external qualifications at the appropriate level, as is normal practice for key stage 4 and post-16 studies.

The Core is the new and innovative part of the WBQ. This is compulsory for all WBQ students and includes four components:

- Key Skills - Communication, Application of Number, Information Technology (sometimes known as the first 3 Key Skills); Problem Solving, Working With Others and Improving Own Learning and Performance (the wider Key Skills).
- Wales, Europe and the World.
- Work-related Education.
- Personal and Social Education.

The last three components, as well as their optional studies, offer opportunities for the students to achieve their Key Skills Qualifications.

To be awarded the WBQ students must achieve the minimum requirements as set out in the table below:

<b>Core Certificate</b>	<b>Options</b>
<b>Foundation Diploma</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four Key Skills qualifications at level 1, which must include one from the 'first three' i.e. Communication, Application of Number and ICT, and evidence of having pursued all six key skills.</li> <li>• Satisfactory working with an employer and community participation reports.</li> <li>• Individual Investigation at level 1.</li> <li>• Specified curriculum requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NVQ Level 1 or equivalent, or a minimum of four grades D-G at GCSE, or their equivalent.</li> </ul>

<b>Intermediate Diploma</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four Key Skills qualifications, two at level 2 and two at level 1, including the first three i.e. Communication, Application of Number and ICT. There must be evidence of having pursued all six key skills.</li> <li>• Satisfactory Working with an Employer and Community Participation reports.</li> <li>• Individual Investigation at level 2.</li> <li>• Specified curriculum requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NVQ level 2 or BTEC First at pass level or four A*-C at GCSE or Intermediate GNVQ or equivalent (e.g. two 'Double Award' GCSE or three GCSE plus two short course GCSE).</li> </ul>
<b>Advanced Diploma</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three Key Skills qualifications at level 3, one of which must be from the first three key skills together with the other three key skills qualifications at level 2.</li> <li>• Satisfactory Working with an Employer and Community Participation reports.</li> <li>• Individual Investigation at level 3.</li> <li>• Specified curriculum requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NVQ Level 3 or BTEC National Certificate at pass level or two grades A-E at GCE Advanced or equivalent (e.g. VCE 12 units).</li> </ul>

The Core Certificate of the WBQ is not currently an approved qualification in its own right<sup>3</sup>. The full WBQ Diploma at each level is an approved qualification and requires achievement of all of the Core requirements and the appropriate Optional qualifications.

Students who do not complete the full requirements for the award of a Welsh Baccalaureate Diploma can nevertheless achieve recognised qualifications, both in their Optional studies and the Key Skills Qualification elements of the Core. Data for these achievements can, of course, be collected as stand alone qualifications. Other successfully completed elements of the WBQ Core, which are not free-standing qualifications in their own right, will be recognised by a credit transcript issued by the WJEC.

In terms of school performance recognition, we are working to establish a process by which a points value can be given to the Core Certificate. This can then be included in calculation of the average wider points score. In order to reflect the potential for pupils to achieve more than the minimum requirements for the Core Certificate, for example by achieving Key Skills Qualifications at a higher level or by completing

<sup>3</sup> The full WBQ Diploma (i.e. Core and Options) has been accredited by the regulatory authorities. The Core on its own is not currently accredited.

more than the minimum number required, it is proposed that any achievement beyond the minimum requirements would attract additional points for the purpose of school performance statistics.

### **Key Issues for consideration:**

- ***Do you agree that the Welsh Bac Core should contribute to the calculation of average wider points score?***
- ***Do you agree that where pupils achieve more than the required minimum of the Core Certificate this additionality should be reflected in the contribution of additional points to the average wider point score?***
- ***Do you agree that the approach outlined above will ensure appropriate recognition of the Welsh Bac in school performance statistics pending further more detailed consideration of the issues associated with recognition of Welsh Bac achievements?***

### **Target Setting**

Schools are required<sup>4</sup> to set targets for pupil performance and publish such in the Governors' annual report<sup>5</sup>. The current suite of indicators for schools in this context is:

- For pupils who will attain the age of 16 years the percentage of pupils, girls and boys to achieve the core subject indicator<sup>6</sup>, the percentage to achieve grade A\* to C in five or more subjects in GCSE qualifications<sup>7</sup>, the percentage to achieve grade A\* to G in five or more subjects in GCSE qualifications, the percentage to leave school without achieving either any grade from A\*-G in GCSE qualifications or passing any Entry Level Qualifications.

This target suite was, in the past, reinforced by requirements for LEAs to set targets within Education Strategic Plans. However the requirements for LEA targets were reduced in line with policy on reduction of targets and performance indicators with the introduction of Single Education Plans.

The Children and Young People's Plan (Wales) Regulations 2007 will, subject to consultation and their being approved by the National Assembly for Wales, require local authorities in Wales to prepare and publish a single plan for services to all children and young people; the first plans will run from 2008 to 2011.

The new CYPPs will bridge the policy and service interfaces across sectors, in particular between health and education as the two key universal services. The

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<sup>4</sup> The Education (School Performance and Unauthorised Absence Targets) (Wales) Regulations 1999 as amended.

<sup>5</sup> The School governors' Annual Reports (Wales) Regulations 2001.

<sup>6</sup> To achieve the CSI for pupils who will attain the age of 16 years pupils must achieve a GCSE at grade C or above in each of English or Welsh first language, mathematics and science in combination.

<sup>7</sup> GCSE qualification is construed so as to include achievement in corresponding awards in equivalent vocational qualifications or GCSE short course qualifications.

Plans recognise that healthy outcomes for children and young people necessitate collaboration with schools and other training providers to help deliver the learning, attitudinal and behavioural changes needed to improve lifestyle choices. They also acknowledge that improvement in learning outcomes is strongly influenced by factors outside the school.

Regulations and guidance for the first round of CYPPs is currently subject to consultation but it is likely that there will be a requirement to set and measure performance against targets for a limited range of key indicators covering:

- performance in the Core Subject Indicator at the end of key stages;
- achievement at GCSE;
- those leaving school without a recognised qualification; and
- the attainment of Key Skills.

***Key Issues for consideration:***

- ***To what extent should we align targets set at school and Local Authority with published indicators?***
- ***Should local targets be a sub-set of published performance measures or should we restrict published performance measures to those for which schools and Local Authorities set targets?***
- ***Similarly, to what extent should requirements to publish performance data in Governors' Reports and School Prospectuses be limited to those indicators for which performance data is published nationally and/or those for which schools are required to set targets?***

## UK Policy

### The Situation in England

Feedback from schools and LEAs and comment in the press often makes reference to the manner in which performance is reported in England. Since devolution education policy in Wales has become increasingly differentiated from that in England. This is reflected in differences in the calculation and publication of performance measures between the two countries which mean that direct comparisons are not always possible.

One key difference is that school performance is published in annual performance tables for primary and secondary schools in England. The publication of these tables in England attracts media attention and can cause some people to assume that the same performance measures and tables are/should be used in Wales. There have been a number of significant changes over recent years to the measures published in England; these changes have not been reflected in Wales and thus the difference between measures in the two countries has increased. There are further changes to performance measure planned in England which colleagues will wish to be apprised of to inform their consideration of the position in Wales.

One key difference on which much attention focuses is the way performance is measured against the indicators '5 or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\*-C/A\*-G'. Whilst these indicators are reported under the same headings on both sides of the border the qualifications which contribute to them are different. In Wales the indicators reflect performance at grade C/G or above at GCSE, Vocational GCSE, GNVQ and NVQ. In England this translates as performance which meets either the Level 2 or 1 threshold (see page 19) and thus reflects performance in any approved qualification.

Performance tables in England for 2006 also included new indicators reflecting the Government's focus on English and mathematics:

The new indicator '5 or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\*-C including English and mathematics', is being published alongside the 'general' '5 or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\*-C' until 2008. It is likely that the general indicator will then be dropped.

Alongside this new GCSE level indicator are two which focus on skills in English and mathematics; Level 2 functional English and mathematics and Level 1 functional English and mathematics.

In Wales we have published performance in the core subjects via our Core Subject Indicator which also includes Science performance.

There is discussion currently in hand in England regarding potential new areas for inclusion in attainment tables in England.

- The Government's *Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004-2014: Next Steps* document, published last March, included a



commitment to include from 2007 'the percentage of pupils who achieve two or more good (A\*-C) GCSEs in science in or alongside school performance tables'.

- The Languages Review Consultation Report said at para 8.7 'New indicators for languages could be included in the performance tables.' The DfES has this issue under current consideration and will return to it in their final report.

Further details of current indicators in England can be found in the document entitled 'Final Decisions on Changes to the Content of the 2006 Achievement and Attainment Tables (Statement of Intent) which can be found at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/performancetables/>

***Key Issues for consideration:***

- ***How important is it to be able to compare performance in Wales with that of the wider UK at school, LEA and National levels?***
- ***If this is important should all measures be comparable or a reduced set of key indicators?***

## The Situation in Scotland

As in Wales there are no published tables of school performance in Scotland with the Scottish Executive also opting to provide performance data via an on line service on a single school basis much like our National Pupil Database.

At the moment, the Scottish Executive does not include any vocational courses in their S4<sup>8</sup> attainment measures; they include only Scottish Qualification Authority National Qualifications, which are Advanced Highers, Highers, Intermediate and Access courses and Standard Grades. Currently statistics are based only on school based attainment and are reported in terms of the percentage of pupils at school/Authority or nationally achieving 5 or more awards at specified level on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework; achievement at level 3, 4 and 5 of the framework is reported.

Increasingly in Scotland as per the rest of the UK, courses are being offered in partnership between schools and colleges and there is an intention to recognise achievement at other establishments in school statistics from 2007.

There is a recognition that there are other pupil achievements not currently included in statistics in Scotland, including vocational qualifications and other achievements, such as ASDAN courses for example. However, the Scottish Executive recognises that simply extending analysis to include other courses is not straightforward or necessarily desirable. These issues are being considered as part of the much wider review of curriculum that is ongoing in Scotland at present. Further information can be found at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE>

The key issue in Scotland is much the same as in Wales, the need to balance the tension between the drive to provide alternative education/qualifications and the lack of reflection of alternative and vocational attainment in performance statistics.

### **Key Issues for consideration:**

- ***Bearing in mind the issues raised for consider action in page above and given the substantial differences between the education and qualifications systems operating in Scotland the rest of the UK on what basis might reasonable comparisons be made, if any?***

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<sup>8</sup> S4 is the final year of compulsory education in Scotland

## The situation in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland no longer publishes tables of school performance. Performance of post-primary schools is currently centred on KS3 Assessment Tests, GCSE (or Equivalent) and A Level but there is no published information on the performance of individual schools.

The Department of Education, Northern Ireland (DENi) is finalising a new school improvement policy which will place a strong emphasis on the importance of schools engaging in self-evaluation and utilising data to identify performance trends and to make comparison with schools sharing similar characteristics, informing in turn school development planning and target setting, objective setting for teachers and CPD priorities.

Schools in Northern Ireland are on a common IT network (C2k) and arrangements are underway to establish a "data warehouse" to which schools and other bodies will send agreed sets of data where it can be combined and analysed. It is seen as essential that data being used in assessing school performance has been produced on a consistent basis.

Colleagues in Northern Ireland are about to initiate a project to identify and describe the key performance and quality indicators to be used by schools, education authorities, Inspectors and DENi. This process will also include:-

- Means of tracking individual pupil achievement as they progress through school i.e. value-added.
- A web-based means of benchmarking schools.
- Arrangements for conducting more in-depth analyses of performance in key areas (e.g. literacy, numeracy and ICT), probably on a sampling basis to identify wider curriculum and CPD issues.

This project will also inform the indicators to be used, but will likely reflect key areas such as:

- Academic Performance measured in Post-Primary Schools by, trends in percentage of pupils achieving at 5 GCSE A\*-C (and also percentage where these include English and maths) and A Level (or equivalences) and how this compares to other schools.
- Breadth and balance of curriculum (number and range of subjects offered).
- Suspensions and expulsions.
- Where appropriate, staying on rates and leaver destinations.
- Staff and pupil attendance.

- Financial management information.
- Quality of the school development plan and, particularly, the targets for improvement.
- Outcomes of Inspection or surveys.

In addition to these Performance Indicators a range of contextual information will be used, such as, for example:

- Enrolment trends.
- The socio-economic profile of pupils in the school (measured by FSME and a deprivation score based on the ward or super output area in which the pupils reside).
- Levels of special need.
- % of pupils for whom English is an additional language.
- Staff and pupil turnover.
- Level of CPD activity.
- Quality of accommodation.

## **Measuring Achievement**

In order to discuss the range of ways in which achievement can be quantified, measured and thus compared we must first be clear about the tools at our disposal. There are frequently confusions between the status of a qualification in terms of 'recognition' or 'approval' and the way in which the attainment of a qualification is 'recognised' in performance measures, or its 'equivalence'.

### **Approval**

*Sometimes referred to as recognition as in 'recognised for use with pupils aged...'*  
Under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 ("the Act"), schools, institutions and employers in Wales may offer to those under 19 years a course leading to an external qualification, funded either by a LEA or through the Lifelong Learning Division of DELLS (formerly National Council-ELWa), only if the qualification has been approved by the National Assembly for Wales under section 99 of the Act. The function of approving qualifications under that section has been delegated to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in the Welsh Assembly Government (the Minister) under section 62 of the Government of Wales Act 1998. Recognition is also used to refer to qualifications approved under this arrangement.

## Equivalence

*Sometimes also referred to as recognition as in 'recognised in the 5A\*-C indicator...'*  
The term equivalence refers to the way in which the 'size' and 'challenge' of learning is recognised. This builds on work undertaken by QCA on behalf of Government in England seeking a way to reflect a wider range of qualifications in school performance tables, QCA was asked to assign figures to qualifications used in England relating them to each other so that they could be counted in school and college performance indicators.

The QCA made recommendations regarding the use of National Qualification Framework (NQF), Level thresholds, equivalence and wider points scores.

## National Qualification Framework (NQF)

The NQF sets out levels at which qualifications can be recognised. The NQF is designed to help learners to make informed decisions about the qualifications they need. It comprises nine levels (Entry level to level 8) against which different qualifications can be compared and clear progression routes identified.

An individual level in the NQF highlights the learning and achievement needed to gain a particular qualification recognised at that level.

The current NQF levels were introduced from September 2004 and qualifications have been accredited against them from this date.

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, was published by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in January 2001. The framework applies to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards (other than honorary degrees and higher doctorates) granted by a university or higher education institute.

The table below shows the NQF levels and their relationship to the Framework for Higher Education Qualification Levels.

<b>National Qualifications Framework (NQF)</b>	<b>Framework for Higher Education Qualifications Levels (FHEQ)</b>
Level 8 e.g. Specialist Awards	D (Doctoral) e.g. Doctorates
Level 7 e.g. Level 7 Diploma in Translation	M (Masters) e.g. Masters degrees, postgraduate certificates and diplomas
Level 6 e.g. Level 6 Diploma in Management	H (Honours) e.g. Bachelors degrees, graduate certificates and diplomas
Level 5 e.g. Level 5 BTEC Higher National Diploma in 3D Design	I (Intermediate) e.g. diplomas of higher education and further education, foundation degrees, higher national diplomas

Level 4 e.g. Level 4 Certificate in Early Years Practice	C (Certificate) e.g. certificates of higher education
Level 3 e.g. Level 3 Certificate in Small Animal Care Level 3 NVQ in Aeronautical Engineering A Levels	
Level 2 e.g. Level 2 Diploma for Beauty Specialists Level 2 NVQ in Agricultural Crop Production GCSEs at grades A* - C	
Level 1 e.g. Level 1 Certificate in Motor Vehicle Studies Level 1 NVQ in Bakery GCSEs at grades D - G	
Entry e.g. Entry Level Certificate in Adult Literacy	

### **Threshold Contribution – ‘Equivalency’**

Thresholds represent a volume, or ‘size’ of qualifications at a specific NQF level. In their work for the DfES the QCA established three thresholds:

Level 1 – a volume of qualifications at Level 1 equivalent to the volume of 5 GCSEs at Grade D-G

Level 2 – a volume of qualifications at Level 2 equivalent to the volume of 5 GCSEs at Grade A\*-C

Level 3 – a volume of qualifications at Level 3 equivalent to the volume of 2 A levels

The NQF Level Contribution works on the basis that each qualification has been assigned a threshold contribution, based on the ‘size’ of learning, represented as a percentage of the total size or volume of learning required to meet the level threshold.

Thus, based on the volumes stated above one GCSE at A\*-C is equal to one fifth of the level 2 threshold or makes a contribution of 20% to the threshold – as the contribution is based on ‘size’ alone there is no difference in contribution between a grade A\* or a grade C. The same GCSE achieved at grades G to D however contributes only to the Level 1 threshold, again representing 20% of the threshold regardless of grade.

This is often also described as the ‘equivalence’ where a qualification is described in relation to the contribution it makes compared to that of a GCSE, for example a qualification described as making 60% contribution to the Level 2 threshold might be described as ‘equivalent to 3 GCSEs’.

Lower level qualifications cannot contribute to higher thresholds but higher level learning can contribute to a lower threshold; i.e. Level 1 learning will not contribute to the Level 2 threshold but Level 2 learning may contribute to the Level 1 threshold.

### ***Issues for consideration***

- **How can we best ensure public understanding of the Level threshold concept?**
- **Would use of Level threshold measures reported as ‘equivalent to 5 GCSEs...’ cause confusion for parents and general public?**

### **Wider Points Scores**

The Wider point score works on the basis that each qualification is given a score value that represents both ‘size’ and ‘challenge’. Challenge is based on the NQF level plus grades available within the qualification. Size is based primarily on guided learning hours. For example a GCSE has a point score range of between 6 and 58 points depending on the grade (G to A\*).

The table below shows, as a guide, an example of qualifications and their threshold contribution. An intermediate GNVQ is shown as worth 80% of the Level 2 threshold and is therefore ‘equivalent’ in terms of size to 4 GCSEs.

Qualification	NQF Level	Threshold contributions		Point score
		Level 2	Level 1	
GCSE - grade B	Level 2	20%	20%	46
Intermediate GNVQ – Merit	Level 2	80%	80%	196
GCSE in vocational subjects - grade D	Level 1	0%	40%	68
Certification in Modern Foreign Languages - Entry level - grade 3	Entry Level	0%	0%	14
NVQ in Performing Engineering Operations – Pass	Level 1	0%	120%	168
National Certificate in Business - Merit	Level 2	80%	80%	196

### ***Issues for consideration***

- **How can we best ensure public understanding of the wider points score?**
- **Would it help make point score comparisons more meaningful if they were represented in terms of 'average per qualification' or if the average number of awards per pupil were recorded alongside?**
- **Does the wider points score model have a value for measuring wider attainment for pupils aged 16 and 17 alongside or instead of traditional AS/A Level indicators?**

### **Value Added**

Value added is a way of measuring the 'additional progress' that pupils have made over and above what they would 'normally' be expected or estimated to achieve given prior attainment.

Value Added = Actual Attainment – Estimated Attainment.

A positive value added score indicates that the school/ LEA has performed better than expected, a negative value added score indicates that the school/ LEA has performed below what was expected. It is widely accepted that this is potentially a fairer way to measure a school's impact as it takes fuller account of the abilities of pupils when they arrive at the school and measures progress made rather than simply raw outcomes.

The Assembly Government currently contracts with the Fischer Family Trust to develop contextual value added information. The contract covers three models based on:

**Model 1: Prior attainment only** – This model takes into account each pupil's prior-attainment (Teacher Assessment) only. All Teacher Assessments contribute to all outputs but are given different weighting. For example, both the Maths KS2 TA and the English KS2 TA (alongside other attainment data) are used to calculate the KS3 maths TA estimate, but the maths KS2 TA would be given a greater weighting than the English KS2 TA.

**Model 2: Prior attainment, gender and month of birth** - as with Model 1 but also takes into account each pupil's gender and month of birth.

**Model 3: Full contextual data** - as with Model 2 but also including a range of school context indicators (% FSM, Mean Level and Distribution of intake and demographic data) to allow for the performance of "similar" schools.

Value Added analysis is based on pupils whose attainment has been matched to previous attainment. Pupils whose results have not been matched, or who did not enter external examinations aged 15 are excluded from the analysis.



Value added scores are also ranked into quartiles. A quartile rank of 1 indicates that the value added performance is in the top 25% of schools/ LEAs in Wales. A quartile rank of 4 indicates that the value added performance is in the bottom 25% of schools/ LEAs in Wales.

Not all value added scores are deemed to be statistically significant. For a score to be statistically significant it is 95% certain, taking into account the number of pupils in the calculation, that the difference is unlikely to arise by chance.

Analysis of Value Added is provided for three progress ranges:

- Key Stage 2 to 3
- Key Stage 3 to 4
- Key Stage 2 to 4

At a recent VA feedback workshop some concern was expressed regarding the level of understanding of Value Added analyses and the perceived duplication of provision as many authorities commissioned their own analyses which included individual pupil estimates which schools found particularly helpful.

A number of areas for further development of the National VA indicators were identified which are now being considered with the contractors, these included:

- The need for extended guidance to support better understanding and appropriate use of the data.
- A requirement to extend analyses to the wider points score to reflect extended provision.
- An identified need for indicators at a subject level and for pupils leaving without a recognised qualification.
- Consideration of the timing of analyses to better support target setting and planning.

The workshop also identified differing views on the accuracy of analyses, many felt that the KS3 to 4 analyses were more accurate but that the KS2 to KS4 analyses were potentially a better reflection of the work of the whole school subject of course to level of pupil mobility.

What is clear is that whilst Value Added has huge potential as a reflection of the work that schools do there is much to do to refine analyses and to ensure that schools, local authorities and the wider public are clear on what messages can be drawn from the data.

### ***Key Issues for consideration***

- ***How can we use existing National Value Added analyses to better reflect school performance beyond measures based purely on outputs?***
- ***Given that there is still work to do to refine National Value Added measures in Wales should we wait before including VA in performance measures?***
- ***How can we ensure that there is shared understanding of Value Added so that appropriate messages are drawn from it?***
- ***If we are to include Value Added measures in the revised indicator suite which models, analyses and indicators should we focus on?***

### **Benchmarking**

Benchmarking works by grouping schools according to their socio-economic context (based on proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals), ranking performance to generate quartiles (or groups each consisting of one quarter of the total number of schools). The performance of any individual school for a particular indicator can then be compared against that of the group performance – a school in the top quartile is performing in the top 25% of similar schools for that measure, one in the bottom quartile is amongst the 25% lowest performing schools.

The use of benchmarking analyses is well established in Wales, nationally and locally, to provide a contextual indication of a school's attainment compared to other similar schools. Benchmark analysis is not generally used in published indicators and such analysis is not required as part of a school's Governors' Annual Report or Prospectus.

Pre populated benchmark tables are provided via the National Pupil Database but are only available to the individual school or their LEA.

### ***Key Issues for consideration***

- ***Is there a more formal role for benchmark analysis in the measurement of school performance?***

### **Measuring Post-16 performance in maintained secondary schools**

This document does not seek to address wholesale the issues around how best to measure and compare performance in post-16 learning across the maintained and non-maintained sector. However, schools with sixth forms have statutory duties in relation to reporting their comparative performance and parents and pupils have an interest in how schools perform beyond the end of compulsory education. Schools, their Local Education Authority and policy makers wish to have performance data on which to compare progress and identify potential strengths and weaknesses in the system.

Currently the RE2 Summary of Secondary School Performance includes a range of indicators based on performance of those pupils who opt to stay on in school beyond the end of compulsory education. These relate to performance of pupils aged 17 at the start of the academic year in A and AS level examinations which represents a fairly narrow focus on achievement and does not reflect the wider range of qualifications now available to young people.

Given the options for measurement outlined above there are additional options for measuring performance at age 17, for example:

The wider points score methodology has been applied to NQF Level 3 qualifications now so that it would be possible to calculate a wider points score for 17 year olds. This could include all qualifications achieved after the end of compulsory education.

The Level 3 threshold represents a volume of learning at Level 3 equal to the volume of two A Levels but where any qualification approved for use with pupils aged 16-18 would 'contribute'.

### ***Key Issues for consideration***

- **What are the key issues relevant to measurement of post-16 performance?**
- **How can we best contextualise the performance of post-16 pupils in the maintained sector, for example in terms of stay on rates?**