

Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee

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PAC March 2017 – Written Submission from Regional Consortia

Background information about regional consortia

Regional consortia were created in 2012 across four regions of Wales. Their role was further clarified in the 'National Model for regional working', April 2014.

Consortia act on behalf of their constituent authorities to deliver aspects of school improvement in each region.

All four consortia:

- provide challenge and support to schools through challenge advisers; (Challenge advisers spend more days in schools which are vulnerable)
- manage and implement the national categorisation model which supports schools to evaluate their own progress and plan for improvement and provides an entitlement of support to all schools;
- broker and fund support for improvement, increasingly funding schools to support other schools, reducing dependency on central support;
- increasingly oversee delivery of Welsh Government priorities in their region funded through Welsh Government grant.

Some consortia also oversee and manage Education grant allocations to schools on behalf of the authorities in their region.

Each Consortia is 'commissioned' by the local authorities in their region to deliver through a three yearly business plan, reviewed annually against the

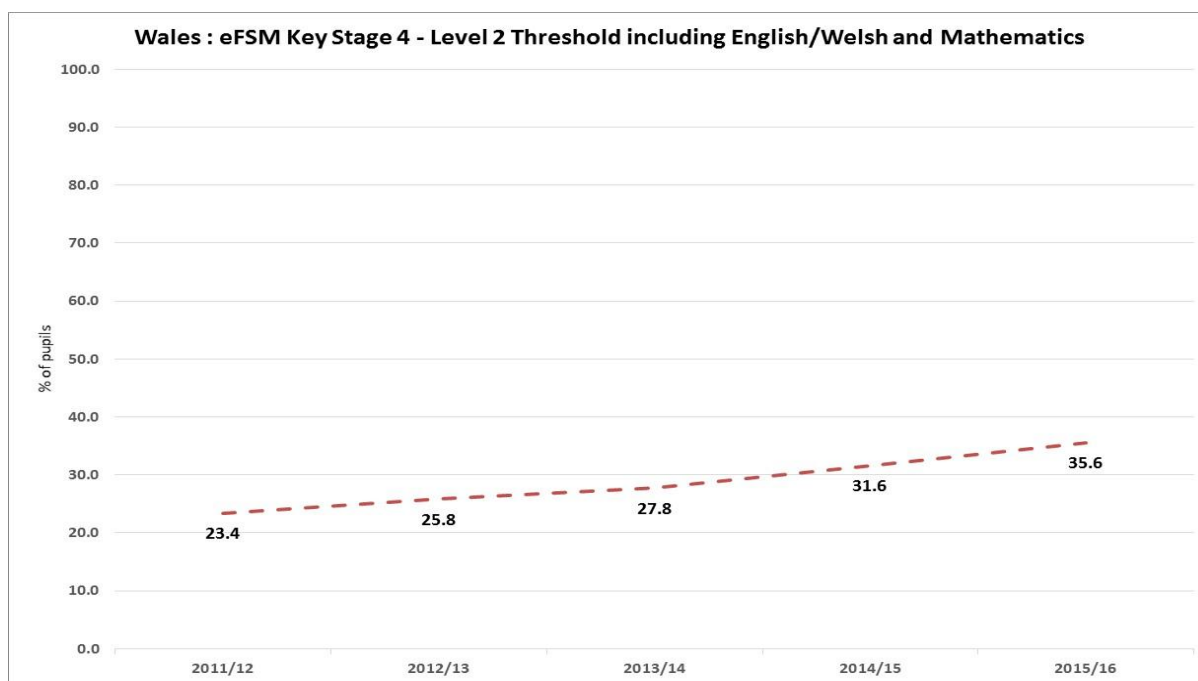
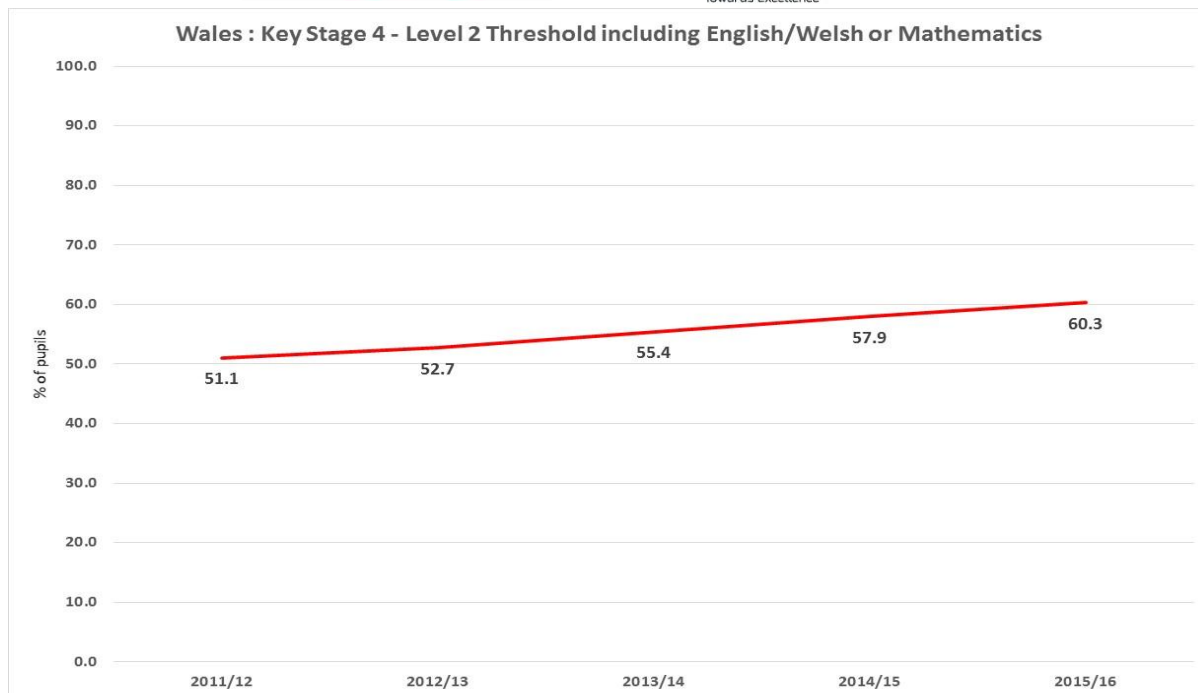
needs of schools in their region. The business plans set out targets, delivery activities, resources and governance arrangements.

Consortia are accountable to the local authorities in their region, are governed by a joint committee of elected Members and are subject to local authority scrutiny in the same way as any other local authority service. Consortia are also held to account by Welsh Government for the delivery of Welsh Government priorities through an annual challenge and review process, led by the Cabinet Secretary.

Impact of regional consortia

Since the advent of regional working, improvement has been seen in outcomes across Wales as a result of increasingly effective joint working with local authorities and use of regional consortia to drive consistent challenge and support.

In addition, all local authorities have been removed from monitoring or statutory categories with many Local authority monitoring Estyn reports noting the impact of consortia on improvement in challenge and support provided to schools.



Further challenges remain as highlighted by the recent PISA outcomes for Wales and HMCI's annual report.

Progress since the reviews by Estyn and WAO in June 2015

Since the initial review by Estyn and WAO in June 2015, consortia have worked increasingly well together on common themes and priorities.

The National Model launched in April 2014, was at a time where standards were not improving fast enough, and differences between eFSM and non-eFSM pupils' outcomes were becoming greater in some areas.

The auditor general made five recommendations and progress against each is set out below.

Subsequent visits from Estyn and WAO have described progress in each consortium, some of which is built upon below. All regions have detailed individual responses to both the WAO and Estyn recommendations, but this is a precis of system level progress.

Recommendation 1: To clarify the nature and operation of the consortia.

In each region, the consortium acts on behalf of the authorities to whom it works. This means that in each region, the model is slightly different. Each consortium agrees with authorities a business plan which sets out its vision, plan, resources, governance and targets against which it is held to account. Each business plan is designed to meet the specific needs of schools in that region.

Estyn have reported that, on the whole, those working in WG, regions, LAs and schools are clearer about roles and responsibilities.

This situation is much clearer but remains different in each region. This has allowed for the consortia to jointly utilise their particular model of service delivery and work very quickly. The form of governance in individual regions has started to matter less, with the sharing of common aims and how to make best use of the differences to work at pace coming to the fore. These variations between the consortia have not necessarily been reduced, but have been better understood as a necessary difference that reflects the needs of the different region. Clarity has also become more effective, especially about the general purpose of the consortia, and their actual output in terms of challenge and support, continuing professional development, capacity building and building a self-improving system.

However, there may be a very few who remain unclear as to the respective roles and responsibilities. In addition, it is now timely to review those roles and the impact they have on supporting and improving schools. A rewrite of National Model for Regional working is underway. This is generally welcomed and is timely. There is a range of opinions on where different roles are best placed, post white paper on Local Government Reform.

Recommendation 2: To address the focus on outcomes through medium term planning,

All regions now have a three-year business plan. Regions are sharing effective practice amongst themselves regarding Business Planning aspects like Value for Money assessment, accountability etc. Business Planning is fitted on a three-year cycle in keeping with the specifics of the recommendation, and there is clarity among the consortia on what strategic objectives these medium-term plans should be addressing. This improvement of Business Planning also keeps in line with a theme in the Estyn inspections of regional consortia.

In fact, the regions have also shared their practice with WG in terms of effective tiered levels of planning and with other regional bodies. This has led to, the regions jointly supporting WG to improve financial planning, timely grant allocation and release as well as a common outcomes framework.

LA Annexes to Business Plans as well as joint scrutiny arrangements are key to the effective governance of any region, and these are examples of where sharing practice has led to improvements and amendments.

However, in a few cases, planning to implement change or to improve a few schools has not been fully successful. Experience and proven strategies are now beginning to yield progress in those areas causing concern.

Recommendation 3: Develop more collaborative relationships for the school improvement system.

There has been significant progress in this area.

Consortia take an active role in working together to develop and improve the national model of categorisation and more recently with Welsh Government to support the use of Successful Futures pioneers to develop areas of learning and experience (AOLE).

Consortia are working in each region with headteachers and governors to develop strategies through which schools can share practice and adopt a collective responsibility for outcomes of all schools within the partnerships. Local Authority Peer Reviews have been undertaken across regional borders, with support from ADEW, and this culture of increasing

collaboration has contributed to a decrease in the amount of LAs in Estyn Special Measures over the last five years.

Behaviours and expectations around the “Challenge and Review” process is much improved, Progress toward the system envisaged in the review, where the partners in the system share progress, challenge and issues in a constructive manner. The new Education Outcomes Framework jointly designed and agreed by regions and WG will now be included in the future arrangements.

Relevant joint work with other colleagues such as HEIs (Higher Education Institutions), Initial Teacher Training (ITET) provider in particular, EWC, Careers Wales and Estyn are developing well and are at early stages. There is genuine commitment to collaboration and an enthusiastic positive sense of progress across a range of providers.

This improvement is by no means over however, and is recognised as part of a longer journey improvement that can be reflected in indicators such as PISA. The reconfiguration of the national change board is designed to engage all partners in an effective joint delivery model led by Welsh Government.

Recommendation 4: To build effective leadership and attract top talent.

As part of a self-improving system, all regions fully accept the need for recruitment of talent into senior leadership. Beyond schools, regions have designed and implemented programmes for those aspiring leaders in local government or regional work. In addition, jointly with ADEW and WLGA, Managing Directors have been part of a programme of development.

Collaborative work is actively undertaken by the school improvement consortia to aid the national issue of recruitment and retention, with good practice and recruitment programmes being shared across regional borders. Also, the consortia are leading a campaign to ensure a singular message regarding recruitment of talent into senior leadership roles, with projects like #DiscoverTeaching receiving support and buy-in from WG, Local Authorities, and HEIs alike.

There is more work to do in this area to respond proactively to the critical morale and workload issues facing the teaching profession. Ensuring a core entitlement to all will now form part of the role of the Leadership Academy. All regions are committed to collaborate and work to deliver a successful system to grow future leaders.

Recommendation 5: To improve the governance and management of the regional school improvement consortia.

The regions have agreed a second annual joint plan. The plan has considered how best to share methods and systems across key priority themes. (Business Planning, value for money, scrutiny, communication, leadership development, curriculum planning, the work of Challenge Advisers, categorisation and the Securing Teacher Assessment Programme (STAP). This recommendation has seen significant work on the part of the regional consortia, collating the approaches of other consortia on Business Planning, Self-Evaluation, Risk Management, and Consultation Processes. There has been sharing of information between consortia on Scrutiny arrangements, in order to deepen the understanding of the model where the consortia are accountable to the authorities, not separate from them. Engagement with key stakeholders has also seen progress, with practice being shared between consortia on different methods of engagement, particularly Elected Members.

Confidence in the governance of regions has grown quickly, as openness, greater engagement and understanding is growing.

Key Strengths

The key achievements of the regions are as follows:

1. Categorisation -Designing, shaping and implementing in partnership with schools. Making ongoing refinements and jointly moderating nationally with support of WG.
2. STAP – The regions were awarded the contract to support the standardisation of teacher assessment nationally, whilst making sure the resources and expertise stayed and was developed in schools.
3. Changes in delivery of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, ensuring that the most effective practice was used and that schools' capacity was key rather than a one size fits all response.
4. Joint Consortia Plan - Formalising and structuring our joint work, and building on the need to better use our combined strengths.
5. Implementation of Successful Futures - Supporting and informing the implementation of SF, and providing additional support to WG as necessary.

6. #DiscoverTeaching - Leading joint recruitment and retention campaign to pull together the work of initial teacher training organisations, regions, Careers Wales, local authorities.
7. Improvement of Financial Formula - Supported WG to provide longer term and swifter grant allocations, and to recognise a fair funding formula.
8. Self-improving system - Regions have enabled a national shift towards a system which is led and informed by schools to a greater extent than previously.
9. Overall, regions have raised standards and made efficiencies. However, due to the very different operating and funding models it is difficult to compare region by region.

Challenges

Whilst supporting the principles behind the proposed changes to the system, careful management is necessary to guide the transition stages.

1. Managing change. The new local government white paper brings questions about the future model and role of the local government tier in education. In each region, discussions continue about how to effectively build on regional working in ways that will bring improved effectiveness and efficiency for improved outcomes of children and young people. – white paper/ new National Model/ Clarity of roles in the middle tier
2. Consistency in quality between regions, LAs and individual schools. The four regions continue to work together to develop collective solutions to common problems, and to share models that are working well in each region.
3. Recruitment and retention of highest quality staff at all levels in system. Recruitment continues to be an issue in all regions, particularly of core school improvement staff, developing effective headteachers to be school improvement advisers as a professional development opportunity is the most common solution.
4. Improving teaching and learning through effective accountability measures/ inspection. Uncertainty about future performance measures and accountability systems in the context of the new curriculum coupled with changing school and local authority inspection regimes has the potential to bring further uncertainty and instability in systems driving teaching and learning in schools.
5. Curriculum and qualification change. Whilst the development of pioneers working is progressing, there remains further work to do to understand and implement the full roll out of the new curriculum in a way that continues to drive improvement for current as well as future children and young people in Wales.

