



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

POLICY AND STRATEGY, DOCUMENT

# The National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry (NSERE): vision document

The aim of the NSERE is that educational policy and practice in Wales should be informed by the best available research evidence and disciplined enquiry undertaken by educational professionals.

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# Contents

**Ministerial Foreword**

**Introduction**

**Aims, objectives, priorities and domains**

**National infrastructure**

**Higher education**

**An evidence-informed education profession**

**Annexes**

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# Ministerial Foreword

In recent years our educational reform programme, including our new school curriculum, has led to the eyes of the world being on Wales. We now have the opportunity to forge a unique path to meet the needs of our learners and to be a nation that others choose to follow. As we move forward on this journey, I am determined that our work will be informed by the most rigorous and robust evidence. There are 2 critically important aspects to this.

Firstly, I want all the policies that we adopt and implement to be informed by high-quality educational research, including the policy evaluations that we commission and the findings of practitioners as they work to improve our education system for the benefit of learners. This is a standpoint that is often espoused by governments; I intend to make it a reality. As policies are brought to me for consideration, I will apply these principles in deciding on their efficacy:

- what is the research evidence on which they are based?
- what are our plans to evaluate these policies as they are implemented?
- how do we intend to involve practitioners in that process?

Secondly, as is often the case in other professions, I want the practice of our leaders, teachers, support staff and local authority (LA) staff to be informed by accessible research evidence and professional enquiry. We believe this will be critical to the successful realisation of our new school curriculum and other aspects of our reform programme.

I want to thank all those throughout our education system for their work in contributing to the development of this vision document. I am also hugely encouraged by the UK and international organisations and academics who have endorsed it. They have noted its ambition and its aspiration to be genuinely world leading and we are happy to confirm that this is indeed the case.

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Three key actions will now follow from the launch of this strategy. Firstly, we will consider how best we can establish the infrastructure to govern and implement the strategy as we take it forward. Secondly, we will work with our university sector to ensure that we can develop research capacity and output specifically focused on the Welsh education system and our reform programme. Finally, and perhaps most ambitiously of all, we will develop an approach that will enable our education profession to become more thoroughly evidence-informed. Scoping work on this project involving schools, LAs and universities has begun already and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of this before we begin what will be a sustained and long-term programme of development.

This vision document represents the start of the journey to ensuring that education policy and practice in Wales are fully evidence-informed. There will be much to do in implementing this strategy; I look forward to working with all parts of our education system and our international partners in bringing it to fruition.

Jeremy Miles MS  
Minister for Education and the Welsh Language

## Introduction

The Welsh Government fully endorses the view put forward by the UK's leading scholarly organisations, that 'educational policy and practice should be informed by the best available research evidence' [\[footnote 1\]](#).

It also recognises that in their report they note 'a severe lack of educational research in Wales' and how this acts as 'a barrier to the use of evidence and insights for practitioners and policymakers' [\[footnote 2\]](#).

In November 2018, the then Minister for Education committed the Welsh Government to:

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- ‘develop career-long professional learning embedded in evidence-based research and effective collaboration
- ‘invest in Wales-specific education research and ensure that it is converted into action for school improvement
- ‘co-create a national education research strategy that provides a coherent and transparent framework for education research in Wales’ [\[footnote 3\]](#)

To realise this commitment and to support its education reform programme including the introduction of the new school, curriculum [\[footnote 4\]](#), the Welsh Government has worked with organisations and individuals within Wales (what we refer to as the Welsh education research ecosystem), across the UK and internationally to develop a National strategy for educational research and enquiry(NSERE).

Underpinning the development process of the NSERE and this vision document is the recognition that both the production of research and enquiry and its consumption by policymakers and practitioners are of equal importance.

Previous reports have identified the need to strengthen educational research capacity and volume in Wales and the barriers that have impeded progress being made [\[footnote 5\]](#).

Informed by these reports and the wider range of evidence it has assembled, the NSERE represents the first Welsh Government strategy for developing and sustaining educational research and enquiry in Wales.

The strategy relates to all age groups, phases and sectors within the Welsh education system. While much of the referencing included refers to 3 to 18 education and educational research within higher education, as part of the establishment of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) alignment between the NSERE and other sectors within the education system will follow [\[footnote 6\]](#).

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Various aspects of the vision set out in this document are already being implemented; others will be taken forward as part of developments in the infrastructure for educational research and enquiry in Wales set out in section 2.

The report by the Royal Society and the British Academy, as well as the Education Minister's commitment, recognise the importance of research for educational practitioners. Evidence suggests that this is an area that needs considerable development in Wales [\[footnote 7\]](#). The developments we propose to undertake will focus on enabling practitioners to be both consumers of high-quality research and producers of professional enquiry that is informed by rigorous research methods. This is the reason why we choose to have both 'research' and 'enquiry' included in our strategy, so that the approach we take in Wales is inclusive and 'close to practice' [\[footnote 8\]](#).

We recognise that 'research' can encompass a spectrum of activities that utilise research methods. We do not subscribe to a view that research is something that can only be done by professional educational researchers and not by educational professionals. We are interested in the concept of a 'continuum' of development whereby educational professionals move from being professional enquirers to becoming teacher researchers. We wish to learn from developments in this area in other professions, especially the health profession [\[footnote 9\]](#).

In developing the NSERE, however, we have heeded the views of some members of the academic educational research community who have argued that the strategy should make a distinction between 'academic research' and 'professional enquiry'. To that end, and not eschewing our belief that 'enquiry' and 'research' are of equal value and interdependent, the following definitions are offered:

- 'Academic research' is a process of investigation leading to new knowledge. It is published so that others can learn from and critique it. To be regarded of high quality it should be significant, original and rigorous. To that end, it

should be peer-reviewed before it is published. This type of research is usually undertaken by academics, those studying for higher degrees and professional researchers working in the government and independent sectors.

- ‘Professional enquiry’ is usually undertaken by practitioners within their workplace as a way of identifying problems, establishing causes, finding solutions, evaluating practice and achieving improvement. If it is to be of value it should utilise action research approaches that are systematic, cyclical and that emphasise the collection of evidence.

The evidence base this vision document draws upon consists of:

- the reports and publications referenced in the document
- formal and informal discussions with a range of organisations within the Welsh and wider educational research ecosystem (listed in Annex A)
- internal discussions within Welsh Government
- discussions with colleagues in the Scottish Government
- discussions with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Atlantic Rim Collaboratory (ARC)
- discussions with academic researchers in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic, Ontario, Finland, New Zealand, the United Arab Emirates and the Netherlands
- international evidence reviews undertaken by interns from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) programme
- work undertaken by secondees from a Welsh higher education institute (HEI) and one of the regional consortia
- enquiry work undertaken by Cohort 3 associates of the National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL)

An initial draft resulting from this work was shared with leaders of organisations within the Welsh education research ecosystem. The responses received were generally strongly supportive of the aims and ambitions set out in the draft and

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made suggestions for strengthening and clarifying the text, many of which have been adopted in this final draft.

The initial draft was also sent for anonymous peer review to 5 distinguished educational researchers, all of whom work outside of Wales but have had recent involvement with the Welsh education reform programme. They include 2 former presidents of the British Educational Research Association (BERA), members of OECD international panels and participants in the ARC. Their responses were overwhelmingly supportive of the draft and its ambition, while adding suggestions for its improvement that largely have been included in this final draft.

It was agreed at the outset of the process of developing the NSERE that it would be presented in 3 formats, comprising:

- a strategic vision (this document) that would set out a policy direction and implementation strategy for the Welsh Government
- an executive summary targeted at leaders within the education system
- a poster that would make available the purpose and intent of the strategy in an accessible format for practitioners

**[footnote 1]** The Royal Society and the British Academy (2018) 'Harnessing Educational Research', London: The Royal Society and the British Academy, 14.

**[footnote 2]** 'Ibid.', 38.

**[footnote 3]** BERA and Welsh Government (2019) 'The Future of Educational Research in Wales', London: BERA and Welsh Government, 10.

**[footnote 4]** Donaldson, G (2015) 'Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales'.

Welsh Government (2021) '**Curriculum for Wales: Implementation Plan**'.

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**[footnote 5]** Furlong, J and White, P (2001) 'Educational Research Capacity in Wales: A Review', Cardiff: UCET Cymru.

Gardner, J (2009) 'Welsh Education Research Network, WERN: Phase 2 Evaluation', Belfast: Queen's University School of Education.

Tabberer, R (2013) 'A Review of Initial Teacher Training in Wales'.

OECD (2014) 'Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective', Paris: OECD.

Power, S and Taylor, C (2017) '**Educational research in higher education in Wales: Findings from a national survey**', Cardiff: WISERD.

Oancea, A et al (2017) 'Evaluation of WISERD Education: Report to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales', Caerphilly: HEFCW.

OECD (2017) 'The Welsh Education Reform Journey', Paris: OECD.

Furlong, J (2015) 'Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers: Options for the future of initial teacher education in Wales'. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

OECD (2020) 'Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales', OECD: Paris.

**[footnote 6]** The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER), subject to legislation, will be established as an independent Welsh Government sponsored body by 2023. It will be responsible for overseeing the post-16 sector in Wales which includes further education, higher education, apprenticeships, sixth forms and Welsh Government-funded research and innovation in the PCET sector '**Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) Principles for Change**'.

**[footnote 7]** Tripney, J et al (2018) 'Promoting Teacher Engagement With Research Evidence'. Cardiff: Wales Centre for Public Policy.

Estyn (2016) 'The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015–2016', Cardiff: Estyn, 20 to 21.

OECD (2020) 'Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales', Paris: OECD.

**[footnote 8]** Wyse, D et al (2018) 'The BERA Close-to-Practice Research Project: Research Report'. London: BERA.

**[footnote 9]** See, for example, the work of [Health and Care Research Wales](#).

## Aims, objectives, priorities and domains

### Aim

The aim of the NSERE is that educational policy and practice in Wales should be informed by the best available research evidence and disciplined enquiry undertaken by educational professionals.

### Objectives

The objectives of the NSERE are to:

- further support the development of evidence-informed policy through engagement with a wide range of research by Welsh Government and other parts of the educational system in Wales [\[footnote 10\]](#)
- further develop high-quality research capacity and volume (that uses a range of methodological approaches) within our HEIs that can help serve the needs of the Welsh education system
- develop an evidence-informed profession in Wales where leaders, teachers, support staff, LA and regional consortia staff and other educational

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professionals use high-quality research evidence and are provided with opportunities to take part in robust professional enquiry

- contribute to and learn from international research and evidence

## Priorities

The priorities of the NSERE will reflect those of the Welsh Government and will include:

- the new school curriculum and assessment arrangements and the pedagogy that will be required to achieve its realisation
- the recovery of our education system from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- leadership in our system and the provision of high-quality professional learning
- equity and inclusion in our system for learners of all backgrounds and abilities, including those with vulnerable characteristics
- Welsh language and bilingual education

## Domains

The NSERE will seek to realise these aims, objectives and priorities through work in 3 interdependent domains that focus upon the development of:

- a national infrastructure to support educational research and enquiry
- research capacity and volume within HEIs
- an evidence-informed profession

The interdependency and connectivity between these domains will be promoted through taking opportunities to bring together researchers, practitioners and policymakers to assist knowledge-sharing and mobilisation.

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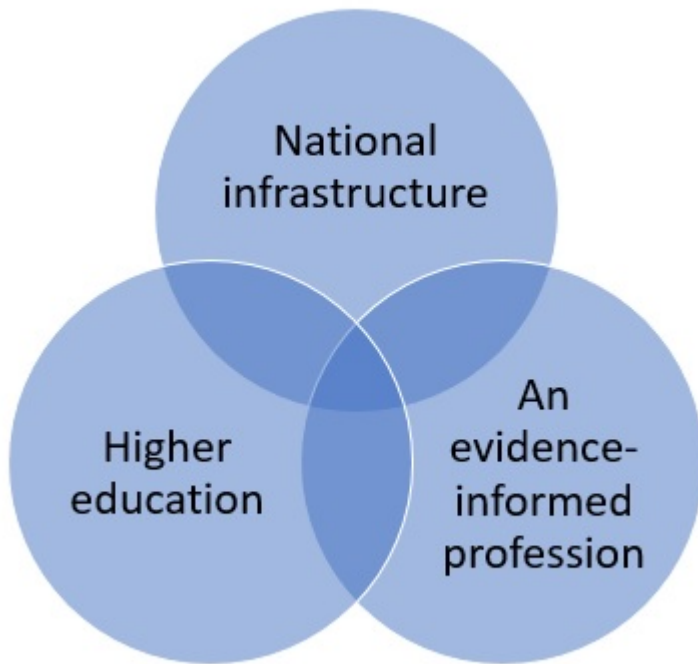


Diagram 1: the NSERE domains and their interdependency.

**[footnote 10]** As the Royal Society and the British Academy point out, while ‘research evidence rarely provides definitive, categorical, answers for decisions about educational policy and practice because of variations in context, individuals and values’, nevertheless ‘where a body of research has built up over time, it can certainly inform decisions’. See The Royal Society and the British Academy (2018) 'Harnessing Educational Research', London: The Royal Society and the British Academy, 25.

## National infrastructure

Reflecting one of the findings and recommendations of the Royal Society and the British Academy report **[footnote 11]**, the Welsh Government will consider options for establishing the national infrastructure required to realise the vision of

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the NSERE.

The functions of this national infrastructure will include:

- the coordination of research-focused policy activity within the Education Directorate working alongside the UK Government Social Research profession, including developing the capacity of officials to effectively use research in policy development work
- alignment of this activity with the work of other areas in Welsh Government including:
  - the Education and Public Services Group
  - Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS)
  - the Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate
  - other policy areas where work is undertaken that has a bearing upon education
- working with KAS to develop a 5-year strategic plan setting out Welsh Government areas of research interest and ensuring awareness of a synergy with the annual implementation plan for education research to be commissioned by Welsh Government
- alignment of its work with other governance-level organisations and inspectorates including the CTER, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Estyn, the Education Workforce Council (EWC), Qualifications Wales, the NAEL and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol
- liaison with Universities Wales, the UK research institutions, education charity organisations, learned societies, BERA and the third sector in Wales
- working with HEIs in Wales to develop research capacity and volume
- working with schools, LAs, regional consortia and HEIs to develop an evidence-informed profession

The national infrastructure would also exercise control over the governance, implementation, reporting, review and updating of the NSERE, through:

- a business plan that sets out monitoring, review and reporting processes

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- establishing an external reference group to include representatives from the educational research ecosystem

It will also work with other organisations in Wales to promote educational research activity, including:

- holding regular seminars and other events
- working with partners to develop a Welsh repository for educational research
- building links with similar organisations across the UK nations and internationally



Diagram 2: Education Research Cymru and the Ecosystem

**[footnote 11]** The Royal Society and the British Academy (2018) 'Harnessing Educational Research', London: The Royal Society and the British Academy, 34.

# Higher education

## Context

The Welsh Government recognises that educational research ‘should be both critical and constructive, challenging existing orthodoxies and providing practitioners and policymakers with tools that enable them to think better about what they do’ and that for this to be realised ‘research should be independent, with outcomes not influenced by funders and policymakers’ [\[footnote 12\]](#).

While recognising that HEIs in Wales will have their own research strategies that encompass a broad range of interests (some of which may not be of direct relevance to the Welsh education system or to Welsh Government education policy), the Welsh Government has a vested interest in ensuring that through the NSERE, capacity and volume exists within the higher education sector in Wales for research to be undertaken to inform its policy objectives and their implementation.

In developing this domain of the NSERE as well as seeking the views of a range of stakeholders, we have undertaken evidence reviews of the approaches taken by other UK and some international education systems to developing research capacity in higher education [\[footnote 13\]](#) and invited our own HEIs to express their ambitions for educational research.

The evidence review reveals, as has previously been identified, that with some exceptions most international education systems ‘exclude universities as contributors to new developments in policy and practice’ [\[footnote 14\]](#). This contrasts with the record of the Welsh Government and its longstanding support for the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD) [\[footnote 15\]](#) (a national research centre that is based on a partnership of 5 universities in Wales), as well as more recently the extensive involvement of all HEIs in its education reform programme and in the development of the NSERE.

The summarised views of HEIs in Wales, as offered through the recently established Wales HEI Education Research Alliance (WHERA), are that the NSERE should:

- build upon existing strengths within the sector, including existing collaborative research structures (see Annex 2)
- ensure that the intent expressed in the accreditation criteria for new initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in Wales (that all staff should become research active) is fully supported, [\[footnote 16\]](#) allowing more of them to be included in future Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercises than has previously been the case [\[footnote 17\]](#)

To further develop high-quality research that is of relevance to the Welsh education system and that fosters additional national, UK and international collaboration, the Welsh Government will work with HEIs and other bodies to develop high-quality education research capacity and volume through:

- strengthening career routes for educational researchers
- promoting further collaborative activity between HEIs
- developing national research centres

## Career routes for educational researchers

Career development for academic researchers is usually undertaken through progression from undergraduate study to a master's programme that includes coverage of research techniques, and then on to doctoral study (through PhD or EdD programmes) and ultimately academic appointments to research or teaching/research posts.

The Welsh Government is supporting the development of a national MA in Education that will enable large numbers of educational practitioners to develop their research and enquiry skills. The master's programme will become available

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from September 2021.

For those who wish to progress from this programme or other master's level qualifications, the Welsh Government supports the ESRC DTP in Wales and opportunities available through the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

To enhance these doctoral-level opportunities, Welsh Government will work with the higher education sector and other bodies to:

- promote greater opportunities for PhD-level study through the ESRC DTP. Currently only one of the 8 Welsh HEIs is endorsed to support the education pathway within the DTP, a much lower proportion than across the UK where 55% of HEIs are part of the supervisory network <sup>[footnote 18]</sup>. Through discussion with the ESRC, and dependent on the outcomes of the 2021 REF assessment, Welsh Government will seek to broaden the supervisory network
- explore the potential for funding other PhD pathways through collaborative supervision, with supervisory teams drawn from a range of HEIs and with each HEI developing specialisms for doctoral study
- provide increased opportunities for funded PhD students in education-related areas to undertake internships within Welsh Government and other parts of the education research ecosystem
- explore the potential for funding an EdD programme as a means of providing educational practitioners with greater choice and availability of appropriate doctoral-level study
- strengthen awareness within HEIs of research career opportunities within Welsh Government, as well as HEIs understanding of the role and function of the Government Social Research profession

To encourage the recruitment to and retention of post-doctoral researchers in the Welsh education system, Welsh Government will explore options to develop an early career education research community based on the successful scheme provided by **Sêr Cymru**. This would enable researchers to undertake post-

doctoral, 'close-to-practice' research fellowships in priority areas of the NSERE and to be a part of a self-supporting community of researchers.

The fellowships would be jointly funded by the Welsh Government and host HEIs, and would be offered for a 3-year period. The potential of these fellowships leading to permanent appointments within the host institutions is also being explored. Subject to Ministerial approval, it is hoped the Early Childhood Education Research Community (ECERC) scheme will commence from September 2022.

## Promoting further collaborative activity between HEIs

Building upon existing forms of collaboration in the higher education sector (see Annex 2), in recent years the Welsh Government has promoted significant additional collaborative activity among Wales' HEIs. This has been premised on the belief that as a small country with a relatively large number of HEIs, research capacity, volume and quality are likely to be enhanced through collaborative activity. Such thinking has also been promoted by Universities Wales, the representative body for HEIs in Wales [\[footnote 19\]](#).

This new collaborative activity has included:

- the development of the national MA in Education
- the development of practitioner resources for health and wellbeing, reflection/professional enquiry and to support Year 13 students in their transition to higher education in 2021
- research and development activity for the design of future pedagogy
- primary research on:
  - the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of the education system
  - the views of learners on changes to assessment arrangements in 2021
  - the Welsh Government programme to support secondary schools in

special measures

Welsh Government has also continued to support WISERD to continue their work on the [Education Data Lab](#) and [Multi-Cohort Study](#).

In 2021 pump-priming funding has been provided to enable all HEIs in Wales to work together in developing the following 4 collaborative research networks linked to the priorities of the Welsh Government:

- Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy
- Leadership and Professional Learning
- Welsh Language and Bilingual Education
- Equity and Inclusion

Each network has representation from education 'departments' within all of the HEIs and the network leader. The remit provided to the networks for their initial work was to identify:

- areas of research interest within the network
- possible joint publications
- the professional development needs of network members
- possible funding opportunities
- the potential to broaden the networks to include researchers from other areas of their universities, existing collaborative networks in Wales (such as those in Annex 2) and from outside of Wales, thereby reflecting one of the findings and recommendations of the Royal Society and the British Academy report that 'interdisciplinary education research will be needed to respond to the big strategic questions in educational research' [\[footnote 20\]](#)

The networks will be submitting scoping reports to Welsh Government in July 2021 setting out the activities that have been undertaken in relation to this remit and the potential for future development.

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To promote further collaborative activity in the sector, Welsh Government will:

- seek further opportunities through the HEI Collaborative Grant to fund high-quality research activity
- work with WHERA to develop educational research capacity and outputs that are relevant to education policy and practice in Wales
- involve HEIs in Wales in the development of an evidence-informed education profession (see section 5)
- look to sustain collaborative networking activity, subject to the progress of the 'Collaborative Research Networks' and the outcomes of the REF assessment in 2021

## National Research Centres

As part of its commitment to developing excellence in areas of research that support the policy objectives of the Welsh education system, Welsh Government will seek to establish a national centre/national centres of excellence for educational research.

The development of the centre/centres will be undertaken following the outcomes of the 2021 REF and will involve joint work between Welsh Government, HEFCW, Universities Wales, WHERA and other interested parties.

This process will explore various options for establishing national research centres, including:

- a single national research centre with hub and spoke activity linked to national priority areas
- an agreed number of centres aligned to national priorities with cross-HEI collaborative networks
- other models
- the funding of the centre/centres to develop research capacity

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The functions of the centre/centres would be to:

- develop research capacity within national priority areas
- ensure that all staff within ITE have the opportunity to become research active
- support the development of education research careers through significant involvement in funded PhD and EdD programmes and the ECERC
- submit proposals for funding to the UK research institutions and other education research funders
- produce collaborative research outputs

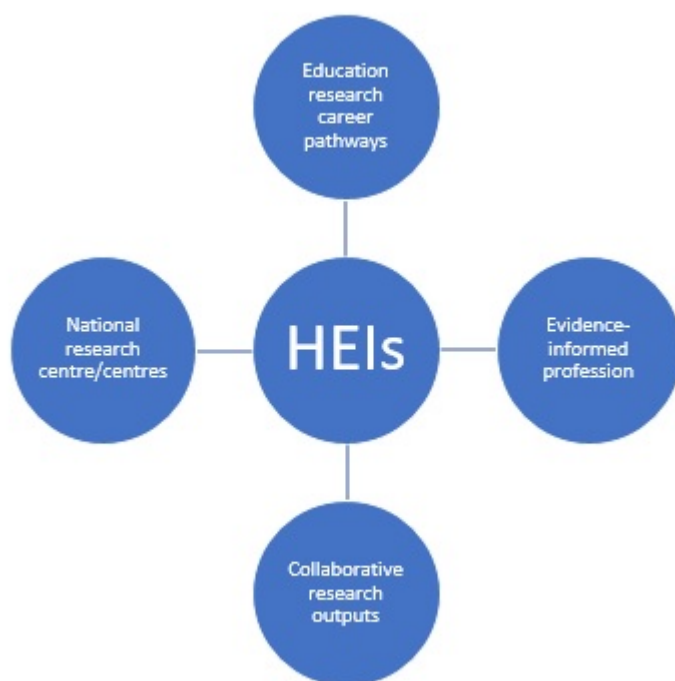


Diagram 3: HEIs and the NSERE

[footnote 12] 'Ibid.', 26.

[footnote 13] Simpson, A (2021) 'Developing Educational Research Capacity and Volume in Higher Education: A review of evidence from selected case-study

countries', Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Goldstone, R (2021) 'The Infrastructure to Support Educational Research in UK and International Education Systems: A review of evidence', Cardiff: Welsh Government.

**[footnote 14]** Furlong, J (2013) 'Education – An Anatomy of the Discipline', Abingdon: Routledge, 191.

**[footnote 15]** **WISERD** is a Welsh Government-supported national research centre that is based on a partnership of 5 universities.

**[footnote 16]** Welsh Government (2018) 'Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales', Cardiff: Welsh Government.

**[footnote 17]** The Royal Society and the British Academy (2018) 'Harnessing Educational Research', London: The Royal Society and the British Academy.

**[footnote 18]** 'Ibid.', 45.

**[footnote 19]** Reid, G (2020) 'Strength in Diversity: Exploring opportunities for collaboration in research and innovation between universities in Wales', Cardiff: Universities Wales.

**[footnote 20]** The Royal Society and the British Academy (2018) 'Harnessing Educational Research', London: The Royal Society and the British Academy, 4.

## **An evidence-informed education profession**

### **Background**

The ambition of the Welsh Government to create an evidence-informed

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education profession in Wales is supported by the Royal Society and the British Academy who point out that ‘High-performing education systems emphasise evidence-informed teacher self- improvement. These systems encourage teachers to use and take part in, educational research’ [\[footnote 21\]](#).

A review of international evidence undertaken as part of the development of the NSERE has identified the following as being key enablers in relation to building evidence-informed education professions:

- the facilitation role required of national and local government
- collaboration between HEIs, schools and networks of schools
- the support of school leaders
- career long professional learning for teachers that begins in ITE [\[footnote 22\]](#)

Some of these features have been identified as already being in place in Wales by Estyn, which has noted that ‘the best schools use evidence-based research’ and that effective ‘leaders support the development of a culture of inquiry and help teachers to develop and apply their research skills’ [\[footnote 23\]](#).

The extent to which practitioners and schools in Wales use research is, however, limited, and as Estyn points out it is often ‘largely down to the interest and enthusiasm of individuals’ [\[footnote 24\]](#). A review commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2018 found that there was ‘uncertainty about capacity in the existing workforce to critically reflect on and engage with the evidence base’ [\[footnote 25\]](#), reflecting similar findings in England where ‘academic research was found to have a relatively small impact on teachers’ decision-making’ [\[footnote 26\]](#).

As highlighted by Estyn and the review by Bristow for the NSERE, and also noted by the Royal Society and the British Academy report [\[footnote 27\]](#), the role of school leadership in promoting a culture where teachers are encouraged to use research and undertake enquiry is critically important. The latter cites a report produced for the UK Department for Education that found that ‘school leaders’ support for engagement with research is the most important driver of

evidence-informed practice' [\[footnote 28\]](#).

The extent to which teachers take part in educational research in Wales in the form of professional enquiry has, however, always been a feature of the post-devolution education system [\[footnote 29\]](#) and has increased in recent years. Programmes funded by the Welsh Government (particularly the **National Professional Enquiry Programme – NPEP**), the regional consortia, the NAEL and others have provided teachers with the opportunity to develop their skills and undertake close-to-practice enquiry.

These opportunities have, however, had limited reach. They are often tied to short-term funding and although NPEP has received longer-term funding, it has only worked intensively with approximately 70 teachers across Wales.

The enthusiasm and productivity of teachers who engage in these professional enquiry programmes is impressive, but there is limited empirical evidence on the impact this work has on the quality of teaching, learner outcomes and school improvement.

Professional enquiry activity has been largely confined to this relatively small group of teachers and has not yet involved other educational professionals including support, LA and regional consortia staff.

While there is undoubtedly, therefore, increased interest within the education profession in Wales in using and becoming involved in education research and enquiry, and promising initial development work has been undertaken, there is much more to do to fully embed this work within the profession.

## **An evidence-informed profession**

Against this background Welsh Government will, therefore, develop a systemic and sustained approach to establishing education as an evidence-informed

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profession in Wales.

The reasons for doing this include:

- supporting the introduction of the new school curriculum
- improving the quality of school self-evaluation
- assisting schools in developing a sustained approach to overcoming the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on educational achievement
- reflecting the findings of Estyn that using research evidence and taking part in professional enquiry is a characteristic of highly effective schools
- building upon the focus on research and enquiry within our ITE and induction programmes
- reflecting its presence as a key element of **Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO)**, the **national approach to professional learning** and the **professional standards for teaching and leadership**
- enabling the views of learners (learner voice) to be fully and systematically represented in the evidence that practitioners collect and use

The links between evidence use, professional enquiry and school improvement will be central to the model we seek to develop as part of our commitment to a self-improving school system. A review of international evidence on self-evaluation for school improvement undertaken as part of the development of the NSERE identified enquiry-based practice and the use of a wide range of qualitative and quantitative evidence as being key enablers of effective practice [\[footnote 30\]](#).

For these reasons, we have included the use of a wide range of evidence and professional enquiry as central features of our new approach to school improvement and accountability [\[footnote 31\]](#).

Enquiry work undertaken as part of the development of the NSERE by a group of headteachers who comprise Cohort 3 of the associates appointed by the NAEL, **considered the work of the Research Schools Network established**

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by the **Education Endowment Foundation** in England as well as developments in other professions in the UK and came to similar conclusions.

The development of an evidence-informed education profession in Wales will build upon and complement work already being undertaken in ITE, the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs), NPEP, other enquiry-based programmes, the SLO project and through the professional standards for teaching and leadership.

It will, however, have its own distinct purposes through:

- being system-wide: involving all schools and all practitioners
- focusing on practitioners using research and taking part in professional enquiry (consumption and production)
- focusing on system and school improvement including systematic evaluation of impact

## **Developing a Model for an Evidence-Informed Profession**

From May 2021 Welsh Government will work with HEIs, LAs, regional consortia and hub schools to design a model for the development of an evidence-informed education profession, reflecting the commitment of the Welsh Government to ‘build the knowledge, expertise and research base of the self-improving system by supporting collaborations within and between schools, regional consortia and higher education institutions and committing to sharing research evidence and effective practice across the system’ [\[footnote 32\]](#).

It is envisaged that the role of the HEIs within this model will be to:

- undertake on behalf of Welsh Government, a strategic leadership role
- provide practitioners with summaries and syntheses of high-quality education research evidence

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- work with hub schools, to develop the use of evidence and participation in professional enquiry by educational practitioners
- on an ongoing basis evaluate the impact of evidence-informed practice on teacher quality, learner outcomes and school improvement

The role of LAs/regional consortia is envisaged to be:

- establishing cluster arrangements so that hub schools are linked to all other schools within their area/region
- offering professional learning opportunities that enable schools to share their evidence-informed and enquiry-based learning
- monitoring the impact of evidence-informed practice on school improvement

The role of hub schools is envisaged to be:

- introducing and refining in their own practice the findings of high-quality research
- sharing their knowledge and experiences with their cluster of schools
- adopting professional enquiry as standard practice throughout their school and ensuring that this is focused on school improvement
- working with others to develop the professional enquiry skills of schools within their cluster
- working with their LA/regional consortia to support professional learning and networking

Following development work in 2021 to 2022 and subject to Ministerial agreement and funding being available, a pilot of this model will be introduced in 2022 to 2023. Based on the outcomes of this pilot, the evidence-informed profession model will be scaled up to involve all schools and all professionals within the Welsh education system.



Diagram 4: components of an evidence-informed profession model

**[footnote 21]** The Royal Society and the British Academy (2018) 'Harnessing Educational Research', London: The Royal Society and the British Academy, 51.

**[footnote 22]** Bristow, E (2021) 'Developing an Evidence-Informed Education Profession: A review of international research evidence', Cardiff: Welsh Government.

**[footnote 23]** Estyn (2016) 'The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015–2016', Cardiff: Estyn, 21.

**[footnote 24]** 'Ibid.'.

**[footnote 25]** Tripney, J et al (2018) 'Promoting Teacher Engagement With Research Evidence', Cardiff: Wales Centre for Public Policy, 4.

**[footnote 26]** Walker, M et al (2019) 'Teachers' engagement with research:

what do we know? A research briefing', London: Education Endowment Foundation.

**[footnote 27]** The Royal Society and the British Academy (2018) 'Harnessing Educational Research', London: The Royal Society and the British Academy, 57.

**[footnote 28]** Coldwell, M. et al (2018) 'Evidence-informed teaching: an evaluation of progress in England', London: Department for Education.

**[footnote 29]** From 2001 to 2007 the General Teaching Council for Wales (the forerunner of the EWC) through finance made available by the Welsh Government was able to offer individual teachers the opportunity to undertake funded professional development activities, including professional enquiry and teacher research scholarships. See Egan, D and James, R (2004) 'An Evaluation for the General Teaching Council for Wales of the Professional Development Pilot Projects 2001–2002', Cardiff: General Teaching Council for Wales.

**[footnote 30]** Goldstone, R (2021) 'Self-Evaluation for School Improvement: An evidence review', Cardiff: Welsh Government.

**[footnote 31]** Welsh Government (2021) 'School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability', Cardiff: Welsh Government.

**[footnote 32]** Welsh Government (2017) 'Education in Wales: Our national mission', Cardiff: Welsh Government, 36.

## Annexes

### Annex A: organisations consulted during the

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## **development of the NSERE vision**

Aberystwyth University

Arts and Humanities Research Council

Bangor University

Cardiff Metropolitan University

Cardiff University

Central South Consortium

Economic and Social Research Council

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP)

Educational Achievement Service (EAS) for south-east Wales

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

Education through Regional Working (ERW)

Education Workforce Council (EWC)

Estyn

Wrexham Glyndwr University

GwE

Health and Care Research Wales

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)

National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL)

Nuffield Foundation

Qualifications Wales

Swansea University

The British Academy

The Royal Society

University of South Wales

University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD)

The Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD)

## **Annex B: existing collaborative research identified by WHERA**

- **WISERD** is a Welsh Government-designated national research centre combining researchers from the Universities of Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, South Wales and Swansea. It provides an extensive and elaborate infrastructure supporting research.
- Active collaborative research groups exist in many universities, such as Cardiff Metropolitan University's Technology in Education research group with Durham and Cambridge Universities, and its Physical-Health Education for Lifelong Learning (PHELL) Research Group with many collaborators including University College Cork, Canberra and Griffith Universities, Australia, and the University of Edinburgh.

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- **IICED**, the International Institute for Creative Entrepreneurial Development is based in UWTSO and is one of the world's foremost institutions in developing creativity-based entrepreneurship education. IICED works with multiple international partners and has directly informed the development of entrepreneurship education in 42 countries, including via the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Welsh Government, EU, UN and World Bank.
- **The Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care**, based at the University of South Wales, has a national reputation for work spanning the health and social care sectors across the lifespan.
- **DECIPHer**, the centre for Development, Evaluation, Complexity and Implementation in Public Health Improvement is a UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC) public health research centre of excellence led by Cardiff in partnership with Bristol and Swansea Universities, with much of its work focused on school learners.
- The **ESRC Wales DTP** and its forerunner includes 20 accredited social science pathways across 6 institutions, of which 5 are in Wales (Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Cardiff Metropolitan, Swansea). An ESRC review shows that it continues to be one of the most successful of the 14 UK DTPs, especially in terms of cross-institutional working and collaborative studentships (also known as CASE studentships), many of which are with the Welsh Government and focused on educational reforms.
- **CASCADE**, the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre, is an interdisciplinary research centre based in Cardiff University with extensive links to public services and charitable organisations. It undertakes research on children and families in need and has particular strengths in research on the education of care-experienced young people.
- **CIEREI**, the Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact, has the primary aim of creating research evidence that positively affects learning and wellbeing for children through schools. Key partners are Bangor University and GwE (the Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for north Wales) and further collaboration includes with the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR)

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at Warwick University.

## **Annex C: the recommendations of the Royal Society and the British Academy report and the NSERE vision**

### **Recommendation 1: connecting supply and demand**

Governments of the 4 UK nations should instigate a process to develop a new organisational structure for educational research, working with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), teaching bodies and other funders. The structure should have at its heart an office for educational research to identify and seek to address mismatches in supply and demand. This office will need to bring together representatives from government, key public and private research funders, teachers and researchers.

This representation may include:

- a programme board that reviews opportunities for educational research opportunities across the UKRI councils
- the chief scientific advisers of the 4 nations' government education departments to explore where there are shared priorities across the UK
- umbrella organisations for teachers (for example the Chartered College of Teaching) to ensure practitioner voices are heard
- learned societies and subject associations, to ensure researchers are fully engaged
- a forum for all funders of educational research, such as charities as well as UKRI, to identify opportunities for coordination on the direction of funding
- employer and skills bodies, for example the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses (FSB) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), to ensure needs for the future workforce are taken into account

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## **NSERE Vision**

The NSERE commits Welsh Government to establishing a national infrastructure to oversee educational research and enquiry. This organisation would be able to represent Wales in responding to this recommendation.

## **Recommendation 2: the geography of the ecosystem**

The new office for educational research should carry out a review of the distribution of educational research capacity across the UK. It should use its coordinating role to facilitate collaborations that enable researchers, practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders to work together. These collaborations may be regional or thematic.

## **NSERE Vision**

Welsh Government would wish to support and contribute to this review.

## **Recommendation 3: improving collaboration**

Interdisciplinary educational research will be needed to respond to the big strategic questions in educational research. UK governments and their agencies (including UKRI and other funders of educational research) as well as HEIs and other research organisations, should invest in interdisciplinary, cross-departmental and cross-institutional collaboration. UKRI's strategic priorities fund creates an opportunity for focused funding of interdisciplinary educational research. Its scope should be informed by evidence from policymakers, teachers and researchers (as set out in recommendation 1).

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## **NSERE Vision**

The NSERE commits the Welsh Government to further supporting the development of interdisciplinary, cross-departmental and cross-institutional collaboration in research. Funding has been released to encourage collaboration between HEIs in Wales in this area.

### **Recommendation 4: secure the base of the pipeline**

UKRI, other funders and HEIs, supported by learned societies, must:

- ensure the training of educational research postgraduate students meets the needs of mature learners – often teachers, with part-time studentships
- enable all educational research postgraduate students to benefit from training in the full range of social science methods
- foster better links between research students and policy and teaching communities

This could be achieved by:

- growing the use of the collaborative studentship infrastructure to encourage and enable government and other relevant bodies, including independent research organisations, to support postgraduate research students in educational research
- reviewing the guidance for DTPs about flexible approaches to funding and supporting mature students
- HEIs and funders requiring all postgraduate research students in education to have a supervisory team that recognises the interdisciplinary nature of educational research

## **NSERE Vision**

The NSERE commits Welsh Government to further supporting the development of education research pathways. Welsh Government wish to participate in UK-level discussions in this area.

## **Recommendation 5: Quality Research (QR) funding of educational research**

Research England and the equivalent bodies in the devolved nations need to ensure that QR funding remains a strong part of the funding portfolio. This funding secures the underlying research infrastructure and enables HEIs to make decisions about what research is important, independent of the immediate priorities of government and funders. HEIs should ensure that they continue to use QR funding to support blue skies research and interdisciplinary activity and to maintain the pipeline of researchers, which are vital to maintaining educational research as a healthy discipline.

## **NSERE Vision**

The Welsh Government through the NSERE fully supports this recommendation.

## **Recommendation 6: support the use of research to inform teaching**

Teachers need more support to use evidence and insights from research to develop their practice and understanding. This could be addressed by:

- the Department for Education and its devolved equivalents making clear their expectation that teachers should be informed by and engaged in research; they can achieve this by recognising the importance of research-

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informed practice within the professional standards for teachers, in the requirements for ITE, the induction period and the professional development framework

- the Chartered College of Teaching in England, the General Teaching Councils for Northern Ireland and Scotland and the EWC in Wales using research about effective knowledge mobilisation practice to identify examples where teachers have used evidence to change practice and working to embed such practice more widely
- the Department for Education and its devolved equivalents building on initiatives like the Research Schools Network and ensuring that all schools and colleges are closely connected to research hub institutions
- Ofsted, and the equivalent inspectorates in the devolved administrations, ensuring that frameworks are in place that encourage school and college leaderships to develop a culture of critical evaluation and research-informed practice

## **NSERE Vision**

The Welsh Government has already progressed these recommendations through its reforms to ITE, its introduction of new professional standards for teaching and leadership and new induction arrangements for NQTs.

The NSERE proposes to introduce a model designed to create an evidence-informed education profession, which is influenced by the example of the Research Schools Network and international evidence.

## **Recommendation 7: facilitating the needs of policymakers**

Practical and cultural barriers, along with political and ideological resistance, inhibit flows of information and ideas between researchers and policymakers. To enable policy professionals to meet the Civil Service standards for analysis and

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use of evidence, these barriers could be reduced by building on existing schemes, including:

- government, UKRI and other bodies increasing the scale and improving the sustainability of placements for researchers within government departments.
- governments seconding policymakers into research teams
- governments, UKRI, universities and other research organisations creating opportunities for researchers to make connections with policymakers and learn how to navigate government and its agencies, for example through research seminars or work shadowing
- the national academies of the UK and other facilitating bodies convening high-level forums to explore solutions to policy challenges

## **NSERE Vision**

Welsh Government fully supports this recommendation and through the NSERE will be taking steps to introduce these measures in Wales.

## **Recommendation 8: support the production and use of evidence synthesis**

Evidence synthesis can provide valuable insights for researchers, teachers and policymakers but is currently underused. Increased production and use of evidence synthesis could be achieved by:

- the new office for educational research, governments and teachers working with the research community to identify research areas requiring synthesis
- governments and their agencies, researchers and teachers adopting common approaches to evidence synthesis that focus on ensuring the findings have practical application in policy and practice
- publishers and educational research bodies, such as the Chartered College

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of Teaching and BERA, providing guidance to authors on evidence synthesis methods

- Research England ensuring evidence synthesis is valued in research accountability frameworks such as the REF

## **NSERE Vision**

We fully support this recommendation and through the evidence-informed profession model in the NSERE are committed to making evidence syntheses available to practitioners.

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