



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Formative evaluation of
the pioneer schools model:
summary of findings in
relation to the development
of the Digital Competence
Framework

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Successful Futures recommended that independent evaluation of the approach to developing the new curriculum for Wales should be conducted. This has now begun, and is initially focusing on the change structure.

The first phase of evaluation will provide real-time feedback on how the pioneer schools model is working during the curriculum design and development phase. The subsidiarity approach being taken is both innovative and different to recent models to reviewing the Welsh curriculum, so it's important to understand how the model is working and whether anything needs to change before it is realised fully.

This short document summarises key messages arising from this formative evaluation of the pioneer schools model. It focuses on the development of the Digital Competence Framework (DCF), and presents the findings of interviews with digital pioneer schools, external experts and stakeholder organisations during October and November 2016. The evaluation is continuing until December 2017 and further short reports will be published within this period.

1. The pioneer model and the development of the DCF

A curriculum for Wales: a curriculum for life, the Welsh Government's plan for the new curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales, notes that the pioneer schools model gives 'schools and practitioners more responsibility for determining what is taught'. The Pioneer Network seeks to ensure that as many schools and practitioners as possible are part of the design and development process. This was the approach taken to the design of the DCF. Thirteen digital pioneer schools (or partnerships of schools) from across Wales, were tasked with designing and developing the DCF.

Schools were supportive of the pioneer schools model. They felt that the model:

- meant that their expertise and professional knowledge were being valued
- provided good opportunities for schools to collaborate and learn from each other. It allowed practitioners from different sectors and with a range of specialisms to design a new framework for digital learning, based on professional dialogue and joint working.

2. Developing the DCF: success factors

Some schools reported being uncertain about their role at the beginning of the process, noting that, at first, they didn't fully grasp what was being asked of them as part of the new way of working. There was a general feeling that clearer strategic direction was needed during initial network meetings, specifically around how to use time in school between meetings. Schools and stakeholders agreed that the process of developing the DCF improved as time passed.

The factors that helped crystallise pioneers' understanding of their role and remit were:

- having a specific product or output to work towards. This concentrated minds and provided a common goal for all involved
- working on topics/workstreams in smaller strand groups to help develop and populate the DCF
- digital pioneers valuing the two-day network meetings (as opposed to the initial one-day meetings). This way of working was more immersive, providing opportunities for pioneers to discuss the content and substance of the framework in more detail.

The Digital Pioneer Network included a balanced representation of primary, secondary, Welsh-medium and special schools. The schools were all involved from the beginning and ensured that the needs of learners and practitioners from all sectors were taken into consideration.

3. Role of partner organisations in the co-creation of the DCF

Digital pioneers worked alongside colleagues from the Welsh Government, academic experts, education consortia and Estyn as part of the development of the DCF.

External experts and partner organisations played an important role in the development of the DCF.

- There was appropriate and valued input from academic experts via the Quality Assurance group, chaired by Professor Tom Crick.
- Consortia had – and continue to have – an important role in coordinating pioneer schools at a regional level. They can support delivery, providing expert advice and input. They can also promote awareness of pioneer schools' work among partner schools.
- Estyn's involvement in the development of the DCF was also seen as being important. The inspectorate has committed to being supportive of innovative practice in its approach to inspecting schools involved in the programme.

4. In-school activity to test and refine the DCF

Digital pioneers carried out work in their schools to test and refine ideas which were subsequently fed into the design of the DCF. This included piloting new ideas and approaches to using technology with small groups of learners to help identify good practice. Digital pioneers also provided training and information-sharing sessions to staff in their own schools and in partner schools. In some cases, digital pioneers reported feeling unclear about what activities they were expected to carry out in

school during the two days per week for which they were funded. This was particularly the case early in the process before the content of the DCF was developed and agreed. It was suggested that this led to variations in the work carried out by digital pioneers.

Some of the priorities identified for the ongoing use of the DCF include:

- involving larger numbers of staff so that the pioneer activity is school-wide and not limited to isolated members of staff in pioneer schools
- identifying resources and exemplification materials that can support the use of the DCF, particularly resources that can be shared via Hwb
- defining the professional learning needs for practitioners and school leaders to be able to use the DCF, both among pioneer schools across the wider network and partner schools throughout Wales.

5. Grant and monitoring arrangements

The grant provided to digital pioneers by the Welsh Government ensured that sufficient capacity was made available to support the development of the DCF. Schools noted that more input was needed towards the latter part of the school year when the DCF was being populated and some suggested that the grant arrangements could have reflected this. Schools reported that, during the development of the DCF, there was little monitoring by consortia of school-level activity linked to the funding received.

Looking ahead to the ongoing work of digital pioneers and the wider Pioneer Network:

- there was consensus around the need for pioneer schools to be required to keep a concise record of school-level activity and, furthermore, reflect on the value and benefit of various activities developed or tested in school
- drawing on this school-level monitoring information, consortia should also monitor the quality of pioneer activity, ensuring that there are mechanisms in place both to capture effective and innovative practice and to share these with relevant groups and with schools more widely.

6. Learning points

Schools and stakeholders cited a number of recurring learning points that merit further consideration. These are issues that may be of relevance both to the continued use of the DCF and in the context of Strand 2 activity, i.e. development of

the high-level structure of the Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs), across the wider Pioneer Network.

Issues identified as being key to the success of the pioneer model were:

- **leadership** – ensuring suitably experienced and qualified facilitators with specialist knowledge of relevant subject area. Also, ensuring consistency in facilitation is important
- **ensuring schools are clear about the expectations on them** – this should be linked to a timeline of activity over the current academic year, specifying checkpoints to review whether milestones/achievements have been met
- **providing a clear role for consortia to be closely involved** – helping to support schools and enabling the use of the DCF. While recognising the different operational models of consortia, there is a need to ensure that there are common aims or guidelines for regional working to support pioneer activity
- **accountability and quality assurance** – ensuring that there is a monitoring system in place that builds greater accountability into the model. Ensuring that the quality of pioneer activity is monitored. Equally, ensuring practitioners ‘are given the freedom to innovate’ and that inspection arrangements take into account the experimental work being carried out by schools linked to the pioneer programme
- **a systematic approach to engaging with partner schools** – engagement with partner schools through DCF activity was perceived to have been ad hoc; there is a need to be more systematic in how digital pioneers, supported by consortia, engage with schools in their clusters and wider regions. Good practice in engaging with partner schools should be identified and shared
- **communicating progress and ensuring that developments are tangible** – having the DCF as a ‘product’ helped give shape and structure to digital pioneers’ activity.