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Formative Evaluation of the Pioneer Schools Model: Paper on Strand 1 and early Strand 2 activity

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Title: Formative Evaluation of the Pioneer Schools Model:
Paper on Strand 1 and early Strand 2 activity

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
AoLE	Areas of Learning and Experience
CSC	Central South Consortium (Regional Education Consortium)
EAS	Education Achievement Service (Regional Education Consortium)
ERW	Education through Regional Working (Regional Education Consortium)
GWE	North Wales School Effectiveness and Improvement Service

1. Background

- 1.1 ‘Successful Futures’ recommended that an independent evaluation of the approach to developing the new curriculum for Wales should be conducted.
- 1.2 The Pioneer Schools model is an innovative approach that involves collaboration between national and regional partners and schools. The evaluation, which is ongoing, places an emphasis on providing real-time feedback to Welsh Government on how the Pioneer Schools Model is working in practice. It aims to understand how the model is being delivered and to capture any learning that can inform subsequent stages of delivery.

Scope and content of this paper

- 1.3 This paper is in three parts. Part A focuses on Pioneer Schools’ experiences of Strand 1 activity. Part B presents a summary of research with an additional 20 schools in June and July 2017, focusing on Strand 2 activity. Part C outlines remaining research tasks and timetable. The evidence base for this paper is summarised below:

Table 1: Summary of evidence base for paper

Part A	
Focus:	Curriculum and Professional Learning Pioneer activity between January 2016 and February 2017
Timing:	Fieldwork February–April 2017
Sample:	32 interviews: 19 Curriculum and 13 Professional Learning Pioneers
Part B	
Focus:	Strand 2 activity: Curriculum Pioneers who became Pioneers later in January 2017
Timing:	Fieldwork June–July 2017
Sample:	Interviews with 20 Curriculum Pioneers

- 1.4 For Curriculum Pioneers, Strand 1 was focused on the strategic design of the new curriculum. Four groups of Pioneers worked with a range of experts on the following topics:
- Assessment and Progression
 - Cross-curriculum Responsibilities
 - Enrichment and Experiences

- Welsh Dimension, International Perspective and the Wider Skills

1.5 For Strand 2, they worked in groups for each Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) to develop the high-level scope of each area, i.e.:

- A clear statement about how the AoLE promotes the four purposes;
- A description of the scope and boundaries for the AoLE including its central concerns, how it is distinct from other areas and why it is important for the education of each child and young person;
- A decision about how best to present the various component subjects and/or strands within the AoLE; and
- A commentary on the presumed levels of specificity throughout the AoLE and reasoning behind this.

1.6 Professional Learning Pioneers were tasked with leading the development of a digital professional learning approach and worked with the OECD to pilot the ‘Schools as Learning Organisations’ tool. In addition, all worked with regional consortia to develop and deliver professional learning provision.

1.7 To date, the evaluation has provided feedback that has informed the ongoing development of the Pioneer Model and supporting guidance, including ‘Realising a Curriculum for Wales, Curriculum Development Core Brief’ (September 2017). The evaluation will continue until March 2018, combining a range of research methods and providing regular feedback to Welsh Government and other stakeholders.

2. PART A: Focusing on Strand 1 Pioneer activity (February – April 2017 Fieldwork)

Sample of schools interviewed during this phase of the evaluation

2.1 Interviews were carried out with representatives of 32 Pioneer Schools between February and April 2017, targeting senior leaders who were most closely involved in Strand 1 activity. The majority of these interviews were carried out by telephone, with a small number of interviews conducted during school visits. Schools were randomly selected from across the Pioneer network, with the sample controlled to ensure a split by region and to ensure that Welsh-medium and special schools were represented. The 32 schools included 19 Curriculum Pioneers and 13 Professional Learning Pioneers. There was a broadly even distribution across the four regional consortia areas, as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Sample of schools involved in Strand 1 activity

Consortium	Curriculum Pioneers	Professional Learning Pioneers	Total
EAS	4	3	7
CSC	4	4	8
GwE	5	4	9
ERW	6	2	8
Total	19	13	32

2.2 Within this sample there were three special schools and nine Welsh-medium schools.

Themes explored during interviews

2.3 The following topics were explored and provide the structure for this paper:

- **Role and remit:** Clarity of roles, responsibilities and planned activity.
- **Strand 1 working group activity and early Professional Learning activity:** an overview of involvement and work of groups, effectiveness of facilitation.

- **In-school activity:** Pioneer work at school-level, and with partner schools.
- **Communication and coordination:** How effectively was the work of the wider Pioneer network communicated?
- **Quality assurance arrangements**
- **Resources and accountability:** sufficiency of resourcing to undertake Pioneer work and monitoring arrangements.
- **Early Strand 2 activity:** clarity of roles, responsibilities and planned activity. Sufficiency of support to inform current activity.

Summary findings

Pioneer Schools: Role and remit during Strand 1

2.4 The majority of Curriculum and Professional Learning Pioneers were positive about, and remain committed to, the Pioneer Schools vision and approach set out in *Successful Futures*. Interviews with strategic leads in Pioneer Schools revealed mixed views regarding the value and clarity of Strand 1 discussions and overall Pioneer activity.

- Head teachers and senior leaders reported that taking time to consider the theory and philosophy that underpins *Successful Futures* **was informative and enlightening**.
- For Curriculum Pioneers, working group activity afforded them the ‘space and time’ to reflect on the core purposes of the curriculum. Tapping into wider international research, and drawing on the support of experts, these Pioneers noted that they were encouraged **to think innovatively and develop a pioneering mentality**.

2.5 A number of Pioneers, however, reported being unclear about their overall roles and responsibilities in contributing to the vision of *Successful Futures*, particularly during their early involvement. Reflecting on the initial 12 months’ activity, strategic leads in schools commonly expressed concerns about:

- **A lack of clearly mapped milestones or schedule of activity.** Although school representatives understood and appreciated that Strand 1 activity involved periods of reflective learning, some felt frustrated at the lack of tangible outcomes during their early involvement.
- Unclear expectations regarding the levels of **prescription or flexibility** under which Pioneers were expected to be working.

- Linked to the point above, and reflecting on their roles as Pioneers, a number of schools called for greater **strategic direction at national level**, to guide their planned activity, and **better coordination of activity at the regional level** to ensure Pioneers' innovations are in sync with one another. However it should be noted that Pioneers recognised that they had seen improvements over time with regard to programme management and the support provided by regional consortia as delivery has progressed.

In summary:

- Pioneers have a good understanding of the overall vision of Successful Futures and the Pioneer School model.
- There were mixed views on the value of some early Strand 1 discussions, with some valuing the 'theoretical' discussions and others feeling frustrated by the process.
- There was some lack of clarity about roles and structure at the outset of the Pioneer School model. The Welsh Government could have set out clearer timescales and milestones which may have helped manage expectations better.

Working group activity

- 2.6 Curriculum Pioneers were positive about the opportunities for networking, researching good practice and understanding the international dimension presented by the Strand 1 working groups. Pioneers emphasised that working with experts provided insight into the latest thinking and approaches to curriculum planning and practice from further afield. This gave Pioneer School strategic leads the reassurance that they were heading in the right direction and the confidence to carry new ideas back to their schools and to innovate.
- 2.7 Pioneers were positive about the quality of facilitation in the Strand 1 groups, though the lack of Welsh medium facilitation in a minority of cases was criticised by some strategic leads in Welsh-medium schools.
- 2.8 Pioneers reported that they were not always sure how the outcomes of the research carried out by working groups would be acted upon or used to inform ongoing activity. Reflecting on working group activity, some Curriculum Pioneers were

unclear how discussions would be taken forward to support the 'practicalities' of developing a new curriculum.

- 2.9 Professional Learning Pioneers reported being unclear about early planned activity, noting that initial discussions were unfocused, and felt that there was a lack of continuity and clarity of purpose to initial (then titled New Deal) activity.
- 2.10 A minority of Pioneers felt that contributions were unequal with some schools contributing noticeably more than others to Strand 1 working groups. This links to wider points under monitoring and accountability (see 'Resources and Accountability' below at paragraph 2.21).

In summary:

- Overall Pioneers valued the opportunities presented by Strand 1 working groups, particularly the networking and research elements.
- Schools valued the role of external experts during Strand 1 activity and are keen that Welsh Government and regional consortia ensure there are continued opportunities for them to engage with experts at appropriate times throughout the Pioneer process.
- Some Pioneers were unclear how discussions, decisions or research findings to emerge from Strand 1 could or should be used to inform wider Pioneer activity in schools. This contributed to a perception among some school leaders that early Pioneer activity was somewhat fragmented and un-coordinated.

School-level activity during Strand 1

- 2.11 Pioneers reported being unclear about what was expected in terms of school-level activity, including the type of tasks they were expected to undertake between working group meetings. There was a broad view that clearer guidance could have been issued setting out examples of the type of new approaches or projects to be developed. During Strand 1, many Curriculum Pioneers were unsure how their school-level work related to both working group activity and to the development of the new curriculum more generally. This echoes comments by both Curriculum and Professional Learning Pioneers who noted that they were unaware of activity at the

national or regional level during Strand 1 to collate, evaluate and share information about school-level activity.

2.12 Pioneers provided examples of a range of school-level activities that sought to reflect the principles of Successful Futures. **Curriculum Pioneers**, for example, have:

- Adopted whole-school approaches: senior management teams have in some schools introduced new approaches to curriculum planning, engaging with learners and parents in designing and appraising these methods.
- Moved towards re-structuring the curriculum based on the six areas of learning and experience; consulting with members of school senior leadership teams, wider staff and learners on Strand 1 group discussion points (see Example 1).

Example 1: Re-evaluating curriculum delivery (Primary School)

Following Strand 1 discussions and early Strand 2 activity, the school has been keen to explore new approaches to working in AoLEs, including identifying links across curriculum areas. During the current school term, the school will explore a crossover of units of work, making sure all AoLEs are covered. For six weeks of the summer term a single year group will trial a topic focused on their local area, blending elements from all six AoLEs. Internal critical review is built into the activity: during the delivery of the work practitioners and learners will provide feedback on the different approach to senior leaders in the school, reflecting on strengths and challenges and learning and the feasibility of this approach across the whole school. Teachers will also consider the potential application of the project in different types of school in different locations. At the end of term, pupils will present their completed project work and their views on this way of working to parents.

2.13 **Professional Learning Pioneers** are researching and considering the implications of implementing new professional teaching standards in their schools. This includes familiarising themselves with the professional teaching standards through a range of activity, including:

- Presenting and discussing the standards in internal staff meetings;
- Exploring professional development opportunities for staff across the school in line with the professional teaching standards;
- Research at school level into how the standards could be implemented and how they might translate into classroom delivery;
- Linking professional teaching standards to lesson observation and self-evaluation.

Example 2: Linking professional learning activity and curriculum planning (Secondary School)

One Professional Learning Pioneer has held inset training days during 2016 and 2017 focusing on Successful Futures. During these training days, guest speakers were invited, including head teachers from other Pioneer Schools. Teachers spent time discussing the principles of Successful Futures, what this could mean in terms of professional teaching standards and the shift towards organising a curriculum based on AOLEs. The school has also hosted four after-school training sessions focusing on more specific aspects such as developing resources for delivering Pioneer School activity. Some of these sessions have been held jointly with another local Pioneer School.

The school is focusing on planning three days of curriculum activity structured around the AOLEs, to be delivered to Years 7-9 during the summer term of 2017. The school has established internal working groups to focus on Pioneer School activity. All staff have been assigned to an AOLE group for planning the lessons, activities and resources for these pilot days. Staff will evaluate this activity during an after-school staff training session and through a pupil survey. The next step will be to build these days to become whole weeks of curriculum delivery structured around the AOLEs.

- 2.14 Many Pioneers are working collaboratively with other Pioneers and with Partner (non-Pioneer) schools to share school-level developments and learning. Sometimes, this collaboration takes the form of sharing good practice to facilitate improvement and, occasionally, it takes the form of undertaking research and developing new approaches jointly. During Strand 1 activity, Pioneers felt there was a lack of clarity about how much collaboration and engagement with other schools was expected of them. As time has passed, there has been an increase in the

number and frequency of regional events that bring Pioneers and Partner schools together.

- 2.15 Pioneers were asked to reflect on the risks associated with being involved in the Pioneer School network. Most did not express significant concerns regarding the risks associated with being Pioneers and taking innovative approaches, although a small number expressed slight concerns about the importance of sustaining pupil progress and outcomes while carrying out experimental development activity.

In summary:

- Pioneer schools have demonstrated initiative in trialling new approaches. They have invested resources and time and are committed to supporting a successful model.
- Clarification of expectations regarding school-level activity is needed, including recommendations about how schools should focus their work. This was particularly the case during Strand 1 activity but is equally important during successive phases of activity.
- In a similar vein, there is a need to clarify the level and nature of collaborative working expected between Pioneers and Partner schools. Welsh Government, working with regional consortia, should set out clear guidance to schools to support this.
- Pioneers are making progress in cascading information across the school in relation to:
 - i. Specific in-school Pioneer activity; and
 - ii. The curriculum reform process more generally, via staff meetings and training sessions.

Communication and coordination

- 2.16 Interviews explored how effectively the work of the Pioneer network was communicated during Strand 1. As noted above there were recurring comments about the need for better communication about delivery schedules and milestones associated with the curriculum reform process to help schools plan their use of resources over the year.

- 2.17 Curriculum Pioneers had some awareness of the work of other Strand 1 working groups within their respective areas and schools reported that they were encouraged during national engagement events to share information and any relevant documentation using Hwb. However, Pioneers felt that during Strand 1 they were unclear how to use this information to support their own pioneer activity. Initial reports from Strand 2 activity indicate that there is a greater focus on bringing together Pioneers and Partner schools at a regional level on a more frequent basis to share good practice and discuss curriculum reform activity. Pioneers agreed that the successful implementation of the model requires regional consortia playing a clear coordinating role. This role, it was suggested, should include highlighting interesting examples of innovative activity in schools within their regions, quality assuring and communicating this learning to Welsh Government and other stakeholders.
- 2.18 Pioneers report good levels of awareness of the DCF development and implementation in schools, as a result of presentations at national level and an increased focus at a regional level.

In summary:

- As the model develops there is a need to consider how best to collate, appraise and harness school-level activity and innovation. It was suggested that regional consortia are best placed to lead on this and there are indications that they are already taking a great coordinating role.
- The scale of the Pioneer Model means that there are challenges in ensuring effective communication between all participants and at different levels. Drawing on the experiences of schools during Strand 1, it is apparent that more effective communication is needed in the first place between schools, clusters and working groups (horizontal communication); also there is a need for more regular communication about strategic plans between Welsh Government, consortia and schools (vertical communication, both upwards and downwards between different tiers).

Quality assurance arrangements

- 2.19 Pioneers raised questions about whether the Pioneer Model has adequate 'checks and balances' to ensure a) that activity taking place is of good quality and b) that the innovative work being carried out is faithful to the vision and priorities set out in Successful Futures. Apart from the peer review process through Hwb, some schools noted there is little objective quality assurance built into the model.
- 2.20 Estyn provides a degree of quality control through their extensive involvement in strategic planning groups, links with LAs and Consortia and other working groups. However, many schools were of the view that relatively little consideration is given to the quality of pioneer activity and outcomes for schools during Strand 1. Schools reported that they have insufficient awareness of whether the innovative work they are producing is of good quality or not.

In summary:

- Schools should be encouraged to review the quality of all aspects of their Pioneer activity. There may be opportunities, through local/cluster-based activity, to work with Partner schools to review or test the rigour, value and wider applicability of Pioneer activity tested.
- Pioneers could be required to report back on any self-evaluation / peer evaluation carried out following activities in the monitoring forms submitted to regional consortia (*see resources and accountability below*).

Resources and accountability

- 2.21 There were variations during Strand 1 in the reporting and monitoring requirements for Pioneers in different regions. Some Pioneers were required by their regional consortium to present a very basic record of their expenditure and time spent on Pioneer activity; other Pioneers were asked to provide a more detailed record. In some cases, Pioneers have provided reports and evaluations of projects and activities undertaken, although this was not a specific requirement by either the Welsh Government or consortia. There was a broad consensus that there was room to improve monitoring arrangements and strengthen the accountability framework built into the model

- 2.22 Mixed views were expressed by schools on the level of resourcing to support Pioneer activity. The main issue is that Pioneer work has not been distributed evenly during the school year. Funding allows the release of a staff member for two days per week. Schools largely reported that this was sufficient during the earlier phases of activity during Strand 1. Indeed, some reported that they initially had difficulty in filling their two days. As time has moved on, schools report that they are spending more than two days per week on the curriculum reform activity, with many practitioners reporting that they are undertaking some pioneer work in their own time.
- 2.23 A small number of Pioneers working in clusters noted that the level of resources received (divided between multiple schools) is insufficient for them to contribute as much as they could.
- 2.24 Pioneers note that, even with resources available, it is difficult to release good teaching staff from the classroom on a regular basis. Some schools involve multiple teachers in the programme, allowing them to attend meetings and conferences.

In summary:

- During Strand 1, the monitoring arrangements in place for Pioneers varied from region to region and these arrangements did not always enable a link between the provision of resources, the activities and outputs / outcomes.
- There is a need to address this, ensuring that more robust monitoring information is collected by regional consortia during Strand 2 and subsequent phases.

3. PART B: Focusing on early Strand 2 Pioneer activity (June – July 2017 Fieldwork)

Sample of schools interviewed during this phase of the evaluation

- 3.1 A total of 26 schools joined the Pioneer network as Curriculum Pioneers in January 2017. All 26 were approached and invited to take part in telephone interviews to explore their experiences of the Model. Twenty interviews were carried out with AoLE leads in June and July 2017. As can be seen from the table below, there was a variation in the numbers of new Pioneers across the consortium areas, as is reflected in the numbers of schools interviewed in each area.

Table 3: Sample of Curriculum Pioneers involved in Strand 2 interviews (June-July 2017)

Consortium	Curriculum Pioneers who joined in January 2017	Curriculum Pioneers interviewed in June and July 2017
EAS	1	0
CSC	3	3
GwE	14	11
ERW	8	6
Total	26	20

Summary findings

Pioneer Schools: Role and remit during Strand 2

- 3.2 Pioneers typically assigned responsibility for leading on Strand 2 activity to a different member of staff than those individuals involved in Strand 1. Those representing schools on AoLE groups tend to be either Assistant Heads (nine schools) or Heads of Department (seven schools), as well as a small number of head teachers, deputy heads and teachers. Two schools divided the Pioneer lead role between two or three members of staff in order to share the workload and knowledge.

- 3.3 Almost all Pioneers reported that they were not fully aware of their responsibilities or objectives when they first agreed to become a Pioneer School. Many had little knowledge about the Pioneer Model before joining, or were only given a broad overview of the work. Many noted that it took a number of AoLE meetings for them to familiarise themselves with the work, to understand fully what they would be producing and to appreciate the commitment required.
- 3.4 All reported that their responsibilities and objectives became clearer as they started attending AoLE meetings. Almost all noted that a timeline and milestones for Strand 2 activity were communicated to them. By the time interviews were conducted (June/July 2017) Pioneers reported feeling confident that they understood the aims and objectives of their AoLE group and that the end product there were working towards was defined.

In summary:

- Pioneer Schools' representation on AoLE groups is varied, ranging from head teachers to heads of department to class teachers. It may be valuable to consider which role/position in schools is most suitable for membership of AoLE groups or whether schools are best placed to choose who should be represented and lead on AoLE activity.
- Although almost all Pioneers are now clear about their roles and responsibilities, many engaged in Pioneer activity without being clear about their responsibilities. Schools should be fully informed about the required commitment / expectations from the beginning of their engagement as a Pioneer School.

Working group activity

- 3.5 All Pioneers reported similar activities undertaken in AoLE groups, including:
- Carrying out research into examples of alternative curriculum arrangements internationally;
 - Working collaboratively as a whole AoLE and as sub-groups to design the scope and boundaries of the AoLE;
 - Considering how the four core purposes align with the AoLE;
 - Hearing from guest speakers;

- Sharing good practice; and
- Assigning and feeding back on 'homework' tasks.

- 3.6 Many Pioneers reported that guest speakers had been valuable, particularly in providing a theoretical underpinning to their own work, although some felt that this slowed progress (see below). Pioneers made suggestions to improve the approach to engaging with guest speakers, including inviting speakers with a strong 'practical education background' and ensuring a good balance of Welsh and international expertise. A number of Pioneers made specific reference to the CAMAU project, which is being used to help map out progression steps and assessment strategies as part of the implementation of the curriculum reform. While Pioneers were supportive of the CAMAU project, they suggested that it had been introduced too early in the process and that this work would have been more beneficial once the scope of the AoLE had been defined.
- 3.7 Pioneers expressed differing views about the pace of the work undertaken. Most Pioneers reported that progress to date had been good overall. Others were frustrated at the slower pace of discussions and developments, with time being spent ensuring AoLE members were familiar with Strand 2 theory and activity.
- 3.8 Pioneers reported that one AoLE had experienced a high turnover in its membership. This lack of consistency in the composition of the AoLE, coupled with a lack of suitable representation from different sectors and subject areas, was reported to have hampered progress.

In summary:

- Consistent AoLE membership is vital to ensure the AoLE can make good progress without having to repeat discussions and actions from previous meetings.
- Good representation from different sectors and subjects on the AoLE groups is vital to ensure that the AoLE design is comprehensive.
- There is scope to ensure Pioneers are clear from the start that elements of the design process may necessarily be fairly slow.

Working group facilitation

- 3.9 Almost all Pioneers reported that the facilitation of AoLE meetings had been good. Many acknowledged that AoLE groups comprise a wide variety of sectors, interests and levels of expertise and that facilitators generally manage discussions between Pioneers very well. Chairs / facilitators ensure that everyone at the meetings was provided with equal opportunity to contribute to discussions and to the development of the AoLE report. Almost all Pioneers reported that tasks and milestones have been clearly set by facilitators.
- 3.10 A few Pioneers suggested ways to improve facilitation, for instance allowing Pioneers to contribute to setting the agenda and ensuring Pioneers can provide feedback on their work during meetings. Pioneers from one AoLE reported that facilitation and decision-making in their AoLE had been challenging, with discussions often 'going in circles' and a lack of clarity about how the AoLE would progress. They reported that the composition of the group and the lack of clear minutes/decision records early on contributed to this challenge.

In summary:

- Clear decision-making procedures should be in place from the start of each Strand, particularly in order to respond to challenging circumstances such as the high turnover of Pioneer experienced by one AoLE in particular.
- Systems should be in place to ensure that learning through in-school Pioneer activity is fed back to inform AoLE discussions.

School-level activity during Strand 2

- 3.11 All Pioneers have been undertaking 'homework' tasks in between AoLE meetings. Homework tasks usually comprise research/reading and short reports to share findings. In most cases, Pioneers reported that they are provided with clear tasks to complete, although a few noted that more specific and timely instructions would be helpful. A few schools reported that most of their time as a Pioneer has been spent on AoLE-related activity.

- 3.12 All Pioneers have engaged with colleagues in their schools to some extent. However, the level of interaction with colleagues, and the way in which this engagement has taken place varies. Reported activity includes:
- Giving presentations to staff and/or governors to keep them informed of developments;
 - Asking relevant staff to provide feedback and suggestions on AoLE work;
 - Working collaboratively with relevant staff on AoLE work, including homework tasks (in one case, setting up a Pioneer Working Group);
 - In some cases, starting to ask staff to embed key curriculum principles in teaching practice; and
 - In a few cases, asking pupils to provide feedback on some elements of AoLE work e.g. through Learner Voice.
- 3.13 Around half the schools interviewed reported that they had already trialled new approaches to curriculum delivery. The type of work already undertaken varies and includes: trialling cross-curricular activity days; trialling a new assessment framework; supporting staff to start embedding the four core purposes into their teaching practice; and trialling a 'core knowledge' curriculum to embed Successful Futures principles.
- 3.14 Around half of the schools interviewed also reported that they had set up elements of the curriculum to be delivered differently from September 2017 onwards. The type of plans already in place include:
- reviewing leadership and teaching roles to match the new curriculum structure;
 - starting to align elements of the curriculum with the new AoLE structure;
 - embedding key principles and Pioneer activity into school improvement / development plans;
 - trialling a series of AoLE activities;
 - trialling elements of the new curriculum with pupils in certain key stages.
- 3.15 Only a small number of schools did not provide any examples of specific changes they had made, or plan to make, to the curriculum in their own schools.

3.16 A majority of Pioneers reported that they had either limited engagement with partner schools, or no engagement so far. Those with limited engagement tend to provide some information to partner schools at appropriate occasions. Some of these Pioneers reported that they intend to engage further with partner schools during Strand 3. A couple of Pioneers noted that they have not yet progressed far enough in the curriculum redesign to start sharing information or learning with other schools. A minority had engaged with partner schools, mostly through existing cluster networks. These schools had discussed the curriculum developments with cluster schools and / or trialled some new approaches with cluster schools (for instance, involving them in AoLE activity days).

In summary:

- As is to be expected at this stage of the curriculum development process, there is a variation in the school-level activity to develop and test new curriculum structures and arrangements. Some schools have taken a proactive approach and reported that they were planning to trial new approaches from September 2017.
- Pioneers should be provided with broad guidelines on evaluating the approaches they trial, in order to feed into on-going curriculum development. Regional consortia have a central role to play in overseeing and coordinating this.
- There is scope to support Pioneers to engage more effectively with partner schools as the curriculum redesign process progresses.

Support provided to Pioneer Schools during early Strand 2 activity

3.17 Most Pioneers feel sufficiently supported as a Pioneer School; some specified that this is because they are able to progress independently with the required work. Pioneers expressed mixed views about the support they have received from their respective consortia. Some Pioneers noted that they valued regional Pioneer meetings organised by their consortium: these meetings bring Pioneers together to share their experiences and discuss how the work of different AoLEs is progressing.

- 3.18 A few Pioneers made suggestions about the type of additional support that they would find useful, including support from their consortium: support to disseminate and share good practice among Pioneer and partner schools; school visits from consortia representatives; and ensuring consortia are available for discussions when needed. A minority of Pioneers reported being unaware of support from their consortium, or were of the view that insufficient support was being provided.
- 3.19 Some Pioneers noted that their involvement as Pioneer Schools would have been easier to manage if AoLE meetings were timetabled regularly and further in advance. Some also noted that becoming Pioneer Schools in the middle of an academic year made it a little challenging to release staff, as teaching timetables had already been set.

In summary:

- Mixed views in relation to support from consortia may reflect different approaches taken by the regions to supporting the model. There is a continued need to clarify and communicate the role of consortia.
- There is a need to ensure that Pioneers are provided with meeting schedules in advance. Preferably, there is a need to ensure that new Pioneers join before the start of a new academic year, in order to facilitate timetabling.

Key learning points to inform future work

- 3.20 Pioneers also provide suggestions on key learning points from Strand 2 activity to inform the on-going work of the Pioneer Schools.
- 3.21 Some Pioneers emphasised that clarity is now needed about how the Pioneer Schools model will come together as a whole e.g. how the AoLEs will be consistent, how the professional learning strand will feed into the new curriculum.
- 3.22 A few Pioneers noted their concern that the timescales for the new curriculum are tight and so the process must be kept on track¹. They noted that these timescales also need to be clear e.g. when and how they will be fully transitioning to the new curriculum.

¹ The timescales referred to were those published in 'Curriculum for Wales: Curriculum for Life.' These have since been revised and the updated timescales can be found in 'Education in Wales - Our National Mission, Action Plan 2017-2021'.

3.23 A few Pioneers noted the importance of raising awareness of the curriculum changes amongst partner schools and the need for a robust system to ensure that this is done in a consistent manner. It was suggested that the Welsh Government should provide guidance on how could/should be done, clarifying the roles of Pioneers in supporting this dissemination activity.

4. Part C: Remaining research activities as part of the formative evaluation

4.1 The following phases of research are planned:

- Case studies with Pioneer Schools, Partner schools in the same cluster and regional consortia to explore AoLE development in greater depth. [November 2017 to January 2018].
- Themes to be explored during this case study research will include:
 - The effectiveness of the Pioneer model
 - School-level activity
 - Collaboration and partnerships
 - Personal development of practitioners involved in pioneer activity
 - Learning points and areas for improvement
- A survey of all Pioneers, covering similar themes to those outlined above. This survey will be launched at a national Pioneer network event in January 2018.
- Final formative evaluation report in March 2018.