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Formative evaluation of Curriculum for Wales: survey of learners and their parents/carers

Executive Summary

1. Background and methodology

The Welsh Government commissioned Arad Research to lead a formative evaluation of Curriculum for Wales (CfW), working alongside Cardiff Metropolitan University, Bangor University, the Open University in Wales, the University of Stirling, the University of Auckland and AlphaPlus Consultancy. All formative evaluation reports published to date can be accessed on the [CfW formative evaluation web page](#).

This report presents the findings of a survey of parents and carers and their children (referred to in the report as “learners”) led by Arad Research, AlphaPlus Consultancy and the University of Auckland. The survey was carried out between September and December 2024. A total of 1094 parents/carers and 757 learners aged 4-14 completed the survey.

The learners (and their parents and carers) surveyed were between Reception and Year 9, as these were the year groups being taught under CfW at the time of the survey fieldwork. The survey examined learners’ views on specific aspects of CfW

and their wider experiences of their learning at school (or another setting).^[Footnote 1] It also examined parents' and carers' views on CfW and their child's education more broadly. Throughout this report, for reasons of space and readability the term "parents" is used to describe all respondents with parental responsibility (i.e. both parents and carers).

Methodology

The survey questionnaire was informed by the theory of change for the curriculum and assessment reforms as presented in the [scoping study](#) and tested with a sample of parents/carers and learners. The questionnaire was designed to be completed by a parent accompanied by their child. Year 7 to 9 could complete the questions independently if they wished.

A quota sampling approach was used, with targets (quotas) set for learners and their parents with different characteristics. The main approach used to promote the survey was targeted advertising aimed at parents on social media platforms. Survey responses were monitored, and adverts amended to target under-represented groups of respondents while the survey was live. The survey received 757 responses from learners; 58% of these were in primary schools, 41% in secondary schools. Two-thirds (66%) were in English-medium schools and a third (33%) in Welsh-medium schools. The survey received 1094 responses from parents.

The data presented in the findings sections of this report has been weighted (i.e. adjusted so that the profile of the sample is more representative of the population). Sub-sample analysis was conducted to check whether there were differences in responses between different respondent groups (e.g. primary and secondary school learners).

[1] 'Schools' is used throughout this report to refer to different educational settings including mainstream primary and secondary schools, all-through schools, special schools and other EOTAS settings, including PRUs.

Methodological limitations

Key limitations are:

- There is a risk of selection bias - parents/carers opting to participate may have been those that were more engaged or, alternatively, those motivated to highlight concerns
- Respondents below Reception age were not included in the survey because, even with parental help, it was felt that most children that age would find it too difficult to answer reliably
- The use of social media to promote the survey means that there was a higher risk of receiving responses from individuals who fell outside the target audience, compared to using a closed list of respondents. Mitigation measures were taken in the questionnaire design and in the subsequent data cleaning
- The sample achieved was not fully representative of the population with, for example, learners who were eligible for Free School Meals and Black, Asian and minority ethnic learners, and their parents, under-represented compared to the survey population

2. Main findings

Themes to which learners responded most positively

Learners' enjoyment of school and what they were learning about: The majority of learners^{[Footnote]²} agreed that teachers helped them understand when they were getting better at learning (67%), that they really enjoyed going to school (66%) and enjoyed what they were learning at school (63%).

Progress towards the four purposes (different variants of the questions were asked for different age groups):

² Based on descriptors used for reporting on percentages. The thresholds are 85% - vast majority; 59-84% - majority; 42-58% - around half; 15-41% - minority; below 15% - small minority

- **Ethical and informed:** The majority of learners agreed that their learning at school was helping them to understanding and care about people and the world (Reception to Year 6 learners - 76% agreed), and to be more aware of what is going on in the world (Year 3 to 6 learners - 69% agreed). However, a minority of learners (Year 7 to 9 learners - 38%) agreed that their learning was helping them become ethical and informed.
- **Healthy and confident:** The majority of learners agreed that their learning at school was helping them to be healthier (Reception to Year 2 learners - 74% agreed) or to become healthy and confident (Years 3 to 9 learners - 64% agreed).
- **Enterprising and creative:** The majority of learners agreed that their learning at school was helping them to think of new ideas (Reception to Year 6 learners - 71%), be more creative (64%) and find ways to solve problems (Years 3 to 9 learners only – 61%).
- **Ambitious and capable:** The majority of learners agreed that their learning at school was helping them to: believe in myself and what I can do (Reception to Year 2 learners - 61% agreed), be the best I can be (59% agreed). Around half of Year 3 to 9 learners (49%) agreed that their learning at school was helping them to become ambitious.

Learners' satisfaction with their school: The majority of learners agreed that teachers and staff take good care of children (72% agreed), were always ready to help (64% agreed) and were easy to talk to (63% agreed).

Wellbeing: When asked about aspects of their own wellbeing, the vast majority of learners reported that they felt they were good at some things (89% agreed) that they thought lots of people cared about them (87% agreed), and that there were many things they could be proud of (81% agreed). The majority of learners agreed that they had been getting on well with people (77% agreed), that good things would happen in their life (74% agreed) and that they had been in a good mood (73% agreed).

Themes to which learners responded less positively

Feeling listened to and getting all the help they need at school: Around half of learners agreed that teachers and staff really listen to children (53% agreed) and that they get all the help they need at school (51% agreed).

School is fair for everyone and being themselves at school: Around half of learners agreed that school was fair for everyone (47%), and that they felt they could be themselves at school (58% - this was asked of Years 3 to 9 only).

Seeing connections between subjects: A minority of learners (31%) agreed that they could see the connections between the different subjects they were learning about at school, with around half (45%) disagreeing (this was asked of Years 7 to 9 only).

Learners' involvement in curriculum design: When asked questions relating to their involvement in aspects of curriculum design, around half of learners agreed that teachers listened to them (58% agreed), and they could tell teachers if they liked what they were learning about (50% agreed). A minority of learners indicated they were asked what they would like to learn (41% agreed) and how they would like to learn (33% agreed), with around half of learners disagreeing (only Years 3 to 9 learners were asked these questions about what and how they would like to learn).

Learners' use of Welsh: Around half of learners (50%) indicated that they felt confident using Welsh, while a minority (40%) reported that they used Welsh outside of the classroom.

Trends within learners' responses

Non-disabled learners generally expressed more positive views than disabled learners across most topics including their overall views on school, their satisfaction with aspects of teaching and learning and their wellbeing. Their responses also indicated that they felt more involved in aspects of curriculum design with, for example, higher percentages of non-disabled learners compared with disabled learners reporting that teachers listened to them and that they could tell teachers if they liked what they were learning about or not. Non-disabled learners were also more likely than disabled learners to perceive that their learning at school was helping them make progress towards the four purposes. "Disabled learner"

refers to any learner whose parents answered 'Yes' in response to the survey question that asked whether they believed their child had learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for their child to learn.

Learners in primary schools expressed more positive views than those in secondary schools against a range of topics including some of their overall views on school, their satisfaction with aspects of teaching and learning and their wellbeing. Their responses also indicated that they felt more involved in aspects of curriculum design with, for example, higher percentages of primary, compared with secondary, learners reporting that teachers listened to them and that they could tell teachers if they liked what they were learning about or not. Primary learners were also more likely than those in secondary schools to perceive that their learning at school was helping them to make progress towards the four purposes.

Learners with a home language of Welsh were more likely than those with other home languages to have positive views on some topics, in particular their involvement in curriculum design and how their learning at school was helping them progress towards some aspects of the four purposes, that they were more confident using Welsh and used Welsh outside the classroom.

Themes to which parents responded most positively

Awareness of CfW: Parents indicated they had some overall awareness that schools now prepared their own curriculum (72% indicated awareness) and its focus on the four purposes (72%). Among those that indicated awareness, 54% reported that this was due to information shared by their child's school; 41% reported receiving information on CfW online (e.g. Welsh Government website and Hwb, news website, school website) or through the media (20%). 13% reported their child and 14% reported fellow parents as a source of information.

Knowledge of CfW: The majority of parents reported they knew that CfW was focused on knowledge and skills (62% agreed), providing a broad and balanced education (60% agreed) and providing real-life experiences (59% agreed).

Opportunity to hear about how to support their child's learning: 66% indicated some to a great deal of opportunity, 33% indicated little to no opportunity.

Parents' involvement in curriculum discussions: The majority of parents agreed that their child's school involved them in discussions about curriculum in ways that made them feel motivated to support the education their child was receiving (61% agreed). Around half of parents felt that these discussions made them feel confident in their child's education (58% agreed) and a minority of parents felt that such discussions made them feel listened to (41% agreed).

Satisfaction with teachers and staff at their child's school: The majority of parents agreed that teachers and school staff took good care of their child (75% agreed), were helpful (73% agreed) and were trustworthy (71% agreed). A majority also indicated that they could reach their child's teachers easily (70% agreed) and that teachers and staff listened to them if they had a concern (68% agreed).

Confidence in the standard of their child's education: The majority of parents (64%) reported they were either somewhat or completely confident in the standard of their child's education while a minority (36%) had little to no confidence.

Themes to which parents responded less positively

Parents' involvement in curriculum design: Around half of parents indicated they had an opportunity to share their ideas about how their child learns at school (42% indicated some to a great deal of opportunity, 55% indicated little to no opportunity). A minority reported having had an opportunity to contribute their experiences or expertise (41% - some to a great deal of opportunity, 55% - little to no opportunity), share ideas about what their child learns at school (40% - some to a great deal of opportunity, 56% - little to no opportunity), to give feedback on the school curriculum (38% - some to a great deal of opportunity, 59% - little to no opportunity).

Parents' perceptions of progress towards curriculum aspirations: Around half of parents indicated that they were confident that the curriculum, teaching and learning at their child's school was helping their child to become healthy and confident (55% agreed), ethical and informed (55% agreed), enterprising and creative (53% agreed) and ambitious and capable (48% agreed). Around half of parents also agreed that their child's teachers understood their child's background, ability and individual needs (56% agreed), that their education supported their wellbeing (54% agreed) and that they provided the right support to enable their child to make progress (53% agreed).

agreed), were meeting their child's needs (43% agreed) and helping them reach their full potential (42% agreed).

Parents' confidence in the school curriculum: around half of parents were confident that the school curriculum was preparing their child for their next steps in education (52% agreed), but only a minority were confident that the school curriculum was preparing their child for work or life more generally (40% agreed). Around half of respondents (51%) were either somewhat or very supportive of CfW overall and a minority (25%) were either not supportive or somewhat unsupportive of CfW.

Parents' satisfaction with their child's school: Around half of parents indicated that they were satisfied with their child's school (58% agreed), that they that they were kept well-informed by the school (57% agreed) and that their child received extra help if needed (49% agreed). Around half of parents reported being satisfied with the information they received on their child's overall progress (55% satisfied), progress in numeracy (56% satisfied) and progress in literacy (parents of Reception to Year 6 learners - 54% satisfied). Only parents of secondary school learners were asked the extent to which they were satisfied with the information received about their child's progress in Welsh (36% satisfied) and English (38% satisfied). Around half of parents agreed that they were satisfied with how they received information about their child's progress (53% agreed) and how often (47% agreed).

Further information, most beneficial elements and concerns

When asked to comment on what one thing they would like to know more about CfW, a minority of parents commented that they would like to know more about what their child was being taught at school, how their child's school curriculum was planned, how decisions were made about it, how CfW was being tailored to meet the needs of their child and how their child's progression would be measured.

When asked to comment on the most beneficial aspects of the school's curriculum, a minority of parents said the focus on health and wellbeing, the cross-curricular skills, a greater variety of learning experiences or other specific aspects of CfW (for example, the four purposes, making connections between subjects and the focus on diversity and the Welsh context). A minority didn't think any aspects of the curriculum would benefit learners but raised concerns about CfW.

When asked what worried parents most about the school's curriculum, a minority commented that the curriculum and education was not tailored sufficiently to meet their child's individual needs. Others expressed concerns about what was being taught and how their child was taught, that CfW was too vague and open to interpretation or that schools lacked the resources to implement the curriculum effectively. A minority said they lacked awareness, knowledge or understanding of CfW while others were concerned about the quality of their child's education, including concerns about their child's ALN and the support available to help them learn. Other parents expressed concerns about assessment, qualifications and transition from compulsory education to post-16 learning.

Trends within parents' responses

In a similar vein to learners, parents of primary school children and parents of non-disabled children were consistently more positive than those of secondary learners and disabled children respectively across most survey questions. This included their views on opportunities to be involved in curriculum design, perceptions of their child's progress towards curriculum aspirations and overall satisfaction with their child's school.

Parents of learners with Individual Development Plans (IDPs) expressed more positive views than those of learners without IDPs about opportunities for involvement in some aspects of curriculum design, perceptions of progress towards curriculum aspirations and confidence in their child's education.

Parents of learners in Welsh-medium schools had more positive views than those in English-medium schools on some aspects of the curriculum and their child's education. This included reporting greater levels of awareness and knowledge of CfW, more opportunities for involvement in aspects of curriculum design, higher levels of satisfaction and overall confidence in their child's education, as well as being more likely to be supportive of CfW.

Parents of learners whose home language was Welsh tended to have more positive views than those whose home language was English only, specifically in relation to perceptions of progress towards the four purposes, satisfaction with school and satisfaction with the information received about their child's progress.

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Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/formative-evaluation-curriculum-wales-survey-learners-and-their-parents-and-carers>

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

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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