

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

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Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective and Qualified for Life – An Education Improvement Plan for Wales

Evidence from: Welsh Government

In 2011, the Welsh Government embarked on an ambitious reform programme to secure improvements in the education system in Wales. In order to build on the extensive evidence base used already by the Department for Education and Skills, we commissioned the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to undertake a review of our education system, which would also take into account Wales' results in PISA 2012 which were published in December 2013.

[The OECD published its report in April 2014](#), which recognised both strengths and weaknesses in the Welsh education system. The main strengths were identified as:

- a comprehensive school system that emphasised equity and inclusion. Student performance is less dependent on a student's school and socio-economic background than the OECD average;
- schools offer positive learning environments with good student- teacher relations and classrooms conducive to learning;
- assessment and evaluation data is available at different levels of the system to improve policy and practice; and
- strong support among the profession and general public for the policy directions set out under the current reforms.

There were a number of challenges identified by the OECD as follows:

- address all students learning needs, as the OECD found a high number of low performers where schools were not able to respond to their learning needs. The OECD assessed that strategies for differentiated learning and formative assessment was underdeveloped;
- nurturing teaching support staff and school leadership to strengthen recruitment, professional development and career progression for the entire school workforce;
- coherence between evaluation and assessment needs to be brought as Wales has struggled to strike a balance between accountability and improvement; and
- the sector has struggled with the quick pace of reform and the OECD pointed to the need for a long term vision and implementation plan that all stakeholders share.

We have always intended to refresh the *Improving Schools Plan* published in October 2012. [Qualified for Life – an Education Improvement Plan for Wales](#) sets out our vision and aim for education to 2020, underpinned by 4 strategic objectives and associated actions which will ensure we continue our improvement journey. It sets out what we will do

over the course of the next six years which in part responds to the criticism in the OECD's review that we need a longer term vision for Wales.

The document is structured around a clear vision that learners in Wales will enjoy teaching and learning that inspires them to succeed, in an education community that works cooperatively and aspires to be great, where the potential of every child and young person is actively developed. Our vision is supported by a single aim – that every child and young person should benefit from excellent teaching and learning. This aim is in turn supported by four strategic objectives.

The four strategic aims are:

- (i) an excellent professional workforce with strong pedagogy based on an understanding of what works;
- (ii) a curriculum which is engaging and attractive to children and young people and which develops within them an independent ability to apply knowledge and skills;
- (iii) the qualifications young people achieve are nationally and internationally respected and act as a credible passport to their future learning and employment; and
- (iv) leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system, providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools.

Our priorities continue to be raising standards in literacy and numeracy and breaking the link between deprivation and low attainment. There is no watering down of these priorities – they underpin our strategic objectives.

Along with a clear expression of our long term vision for learners' success in Wales, we are setting out a clear plan of action to turn our objectives into reality and to secure sustained improvement across education, and these are set out in a delivery timeline.

It is highly important that we are able to demonstrate that we are making progress. The *Qualified for Life* plan therefore includes an ambition to achieve scores of 500 in each of reading, mathematics and science in the PISA tests 2021. At the same time we will significantly reduce the percentage of learners achieving at or below PISA proficiency level 2. We will measure our progress along the way to 2021 by:

- (i) improvements in learners' standards of literacy and numeracy, including higher order thinking skills and the application of knowledge and skills;
- (ii) reductions in the attainment gap between learners eligible for free school meals and their non-free schools meals peers; and
- (iii) improved confidence in the education system among parents/carers, employers, further and higher education institutions.

We propose each year to publish a "Wales Education Report Card" which will set out a range of performance indicators to evidence progress against the measures above and against our strategic objectives.