OECD Initial Teacher Preparation study

Promising practices

Towards a research-informed, evidence-based reform agenda in initial teacher education in Wales

Country category: Wales
Teacher education pathway category(ies): Equipping; Quality; Supporting
Stakeholder category(ies): teacher; teacher educator
Date of publication: January 2019
This case study describes a “Promising practice” drawn from an OECD international workshop on Initial Teacher Preparation in Wales from 15 to 17 March 2018.

The OECD Review Team – Hannah von Ahlefeld (OECD), Kirsti Klette (University of Oslo), Kjetil Helgeland (OECD), Danielle Toon (Learning First), Emily Rainey (University of Michigan), Ee Ling Low (Nanyang Technological University Singapore) and Edmund Misson (AITSL) and Nóra Révai (OECD) – identified a number of “Promising practices” in Wales. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgement of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org.

Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d’exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.
Promising practice 2.
Towards a research-informed, evidence-based reform agenda in initial teacher education in Wales

Context

Many scholars argue that the use of research evidence is essential to improving teaching practices (Brown, 2015[1]; Hattie, 2012[2]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[3]). Increasing the use of research-based skills and knowledge in ITE is recognised as a way to raise the quality of teaching and learning, both in ITE itself and in schools, thereby improving student outcomes (British Educational Research Association, 2018[4]).

In 2011 Wales embarked on a large-scale school improvement reform and introduced a range of policies to improve the quality and equity of its school system including a large-scale curriculum reform, a reform of initial teacher education and the revision of its education strategy (OECD, 2017[5]). The Welsh Government has welcomed various reviews during its reform programme to identify where progress has been made and where further attention is needed.

A 2015 review of initial teacher education in Wales identified the lack of research into education in Wales, and the research capacity of practitioners and academics, as significant issues (Furlong, 2015[6]). In 2017, the National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee concluded that more education research in Wales is required (National Assembly for Wales Commission, 2017[7]).

The research-informed, evidence-based reform agenda in Wales

Identification of areas for improvement

In 2018 the OECD assessed the extent to which schools in Wales have developed as learning organisations as part of its reform agenda (OECD, 2018[8]). The review found that the use of research to inform practice in schools is an area for improvement, with close to a third of respondents (32%) to the Schools as Learning Organisations survey not agreeing or responding neutrally to the statement “staff use research evidence to improve their practice” in their school.

In relation to ITP policies to better develop professional capital as part of the reform agenda, the review recommended that the Welsh system needed to base selection into ITE on a mix of criteria and methods; promote collaborations between schools and teacher education institutions; strengthen inductions and promote mentoring and coaching, observations and peer review.

Implementation of policies to support a research-informed, evidence-based reform agenda

Wales has implemented policies to improve the use of research in schools, set out a wider agenda to develop schools as learning organisations, and launched reforms to increase the use of research in ITE by (OECD, 2017[5]; OECD, 2018[8]). Specific initiatives include:

- Introducing new professional teaching and leadership standards (Learning Wales, 2018[9]) which include an explicit focus on the role of research and critical reflection on teachers’ preparation and ongoing professional learning;
Revising the accreditation guidelines for providers of ITE to include, amongst other things, a stronger focus on the use of research within ITE programmes and in partnerships between higher education institutions and schools;

Establishing the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) Education, a one million pound investment to undertake research in order to sustain and enhance the quality of learning and the standards of teaching and teacher education in Wales.

The extension of research to teacher education complements the concept of a research-rich school and college environment to teacher education providers. The policies focus on:

1. The need to build up research capacity in education faculties in Higher Education and specifically amongst teacher educators;
2. The need to integrate research theory and practice within ITE programmes including through students engaging in systematic enquiry.

The Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact

The Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact (CIEREI) is a strategic collaboration between university researchers at Bangor University, schools at a regional level, and the regional consortium for North Wales (GwE). It represents a good example of a research-based partnership between higher education institutions and schools. Among other things, this partnership is aiming at building a research community to support initial teacher education programmes and the continuous professional development of teachers, and improving the use of educational research in existing centres and schools (OECD, 2018[8]). Further, the CIEREI supports the Welsh Government in the strategic education plan Education in Wales: Our National Mission.

Bangor University works with GwE to evaluate the quality of their school improvement programmes in the consortium. CIEREI, for example, has evaluated two online training programmes for teachers on early reading and comprehension. During the process, researchers worked closely with schools to identify barriers to the implementation of the programme and ensure that schools were helped to overcome those limitations. At the end of the process, CIEREI was able to deliver evaluation reports for each school and used the findings to support GwE in the development of its regional action plan (OECD, 2018[8]).

Why is it a strength?

The OECD Review Team in its visit to Wales from 15-17 March 2018 concluded that the following aspects of the research agenda constitute a strength:

- A coherent reform agenda and engagement with stakeholders. A number of policies across the reform programme are aligned and coherent in their focus on the creation and use of research. The Welsh Government and its advisors are working hard in consultation with stakeholders to reform ITE and establish research as one of its pillars through, for example, the accreditation standards. A 2017 OECD rapid review of the overall Welsh education reforms found that the Welsh approach to school improvement had moved from a piecemeal and short-term policy orientation towards one that is guided by long-term vision and build upon co-construction with key stakeholders (OECD, 2017[5]).

- Recognition of the importance of research. Many stakeholders were talking about the importance of research, there was a consistent focus on practice-based research across multiple stakeholders, and that there was an eagerness on the part of some schools to participate in research.
How could it be improved?

The OECD Review Team in its visit to Wales from 15-17 March 2018 noted the need for:

- *A well-defined, co-constructed and well-communicated strategic research plan.* Many higher education institutions and schools in Wales are highly focussed on conducting multiple action research projects and not considering the need to conduct other types of research in order to build a robust and accepted body of knowledge across the profession. A national education research strategy or plan that is co-constructed with academics and practitioners may assist in the development and use of a field-wide body of evidence about effective teaching and teacher education practices in Welsh schools and teacher education institutions.

- *Building up research capacity in education faculties and schools.* Many Welsh teacher educators and teachers do not have a lot of academic research skills and very few mention other types of research, other than action research (Furlong, 2015[6]). Further, Wales should continue to invest in building its research and assessment capacity at all levels of the system (OECD, 2017[5]).

For more information


