

DEVELOPING A PEER ENGAGEMENT MODEL FOR NORTH WALES

The national mission for Wales is both ambitious and innovative and requires stakeholders at all levels to collaborate and cooperate to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence.

The transformational reform required to deliver on these aims provides a challenging environment for all schools. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that leaders and staff in every establishment are encouraged and supported in the work of forging strong and effective partnerships within and across the education system. Developing multi-level and multi-tiered peer-engagement, forged and owned by the schools themselves, will also allow establishments to adopt an integrated approach to the national reform journey. The integrated approach will be effectively supported by the local authorities and GwE.

We firmly believe that peer engagement should be the key driver as schools effectively deliver on the national reform. Our vision is to have outstanding schools that are naturally collaborating and jointly identifying direction for improvement.

This document sets out a potential blueprint for the development of a meaningful peer engagement model for the North Wales region, one that adopts an integrated approach to the reform journey but which also allows for flexibility in how collaboration is defined within the 8 key areas noted below.



#educationreformwales

The regional approach has already adopted a cluster working model to support key transformational reform areas such as curriculum development and ALN. To fully integrate all areas of the reform journey, similar approaches are in the process of being formalised for the other key areas of accountability, digital and Welsh Language.

This paper articulates our approach within the 'accountability' aspect of the reform journey. It details how peer engagement can be used to underpin a rigorous cycle of continuous development and improvement. We believe that peer engagement and support should be an integral part of school improvement in moving to a self-improving system whilst also supporting those schools that are causing concern.

Welsh Government's vision for an evaluation, improvement and accountability system is one that is fair, coherent, proportionate, transparent, and based on shared values for Welsh education. The National Mission commits us to work with Welsh Government and other key stakeholders to establish new evaluation and improvement arrangements at all levels. These arrangements will need to be robust and strong enough to bring about the required improvements and especially so within the

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secondary sector. There is a clear expectation that within these arrangements schools develop not only the required capacity and skills to effectively challenge themselves, but also the ability to work collaboratively and systemically in a school improvement model founded on professional peer review.

On the 22 January 2019 at Venue Cymru, Llandudno, GwE and the six regional local authorities undertook the first steps of a comprehensive consultation process with head teacher representation around the various aspects of the *National Reform Journey*. Over 400 participants were given extended opportunities to discuss how best key stakeholders could support and challenge each other to ensure that we effectively contribute to the national mission. In terms of developing a regional framework for peer-to-peer engagement and support, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions and inquiries. Specifically:

- What should be the underlying principles for an effective model?
- How should peer school groups/clusters be determined? Should we adopt a common approach for all schools, irrespective of their current 'support category'? Or would a differentiated approach offer a more viable option for the short term?
- How do we ensure that the work undertaken within a peer group/cluster engages collaboration throughout the year and is not focussed on an 'annual event'?
- How could GwE most effectively support the process?
- The majority of regional schools are already engaging in cluster and/or peer support models with other schools either within their sector or cross-sector. How do we best align the 'peer engagement and authentication model' with other collaborative ventures currently being undertaken?
- What are the professional learning needs to develop a robust 'peer engagement and authentication model'? What is the most effective way to address these needs?

Numerous common themes and key messages permeated the responses from stakeholders in both primary and secondary sectors. Namely that:

- a peer review approach should be adopted regionally to further drive progress towards a self-improving system;
- the peer-review model should not be developed to deliver a *pseudo-inspection* system;
- all stakeholders should work effectively together to ensure that we create the right conditions for effective peer review;
- we should agree and adopt a regional set of principles and technical language for our model;
- we should agree framework parameters which will allow flexibility for schools to operate a range of models;
- schools should have the freedom and flexibility to choose their peers;
- the model should involve peer engagement at all levels within a school;
- the model should promote trust, honesty, transparency and professional confidence;
- engagement should be a supportive and sustainable process and not a one-off imposition event;
- the model should support a cultural shift towards collegiate responsibility

Steve Munby and Michael Fullen (2016) in their paper '*Inside-out and downside-up*' outline the critical success factors for an effective system-wide school collaboration as follows:

- the purpose of collaboration must be to **improve outcomes**;
- the partnership must be founded on a clearly articulated **shared moral purpose**;
- **transparency, trust and honesty** are crucial;

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- a commitment to and capacity for effective peer review form the engine that drives improvement;
- peer review needs to be carried out within a **long-term relationship** and a commitment to continuously **improving practice and systems through cycles of collaborative enquiry**;
- the partnership must have a plan to move from **collaboration to co-responsibility to a position of shared professional accountability**;
- the **partnership should go beyond school leaders** and engage with students, teachers, families and communities;
- **partnerships welcome scrutiny and support from other partnerships** as their contribution to a connected local, regional and national system.

During the Autumn Term 2019, GwE SLT requested Steve Munby to undertake a review of the effectiveness of its current practice. Whilst his report identified many positives, Munby also emphasised that the direction of travel for regional school improvement should include an enhanced focus on:

- moving from top-down change to more empowering approaches to build long-term sustainability;
- ensuring a strong, clear and compelling narrative of moving towards lateral leadership and collective responsibility and where implementation is differentiated based on the particular needs of schools and clusters of schools;
- preparing to live with a messy, mixed-economy approach where some clusters may be leading the way and others may be far behind but still making progress;
- promoting collaboration in context of the '*voluntary but inevitable*' approach;
- providing support but not over-managing or over-controlling developments;
- promoting brokerage of school-to-school support to expose teachers and leaders to great practice and thus avoiding insularity and the recycling of mediocre practice;
- ensuring that Supporting Improvement Advisers are equipped to effectively undertake facilitation and coaching roles and can quality assure work of schools to avoid criticism that peer engagement is '*too cosy*';
- developing a peer review strategy that schools value and want to participate in and involve schools in shaping it;
- integrating peer review into the work of clusters, so that peer review is part of how trust is built up over time within a cluster and is a way of working rather than a one-off process; and
- identifying the skills needed from system leaders [Munby emphasised that these skills are different from the skills required in '*institutional leadership*'] and develop a programme of support and development for future system leaders

Munby encouraged the region to look outward and to welcome challenge from those outside North Wales in terms of effective peer engagement and signposted GwE to good practice elsewhere. GwE also believe that a peer engagement model should closely complement the dimensions identified within the OECD publication '*What Makes a School a Learning Organisation*' as well as mirroring the principles and favoured regional approach articulated by Head teachers in the aforementioned Head teacher consultation meeting at Venue Cymru.

Peer engagement should underpin a rigorous cycle of continuous improvement and include:

- **Self-review:** effective peer review should start with how well the school knows itself and be led by the school being reviewed. The national self-evaluation toolkit developed by Estyn/OECD and the profession should play a key role in this aspect. Self-evaluation should focus on the learner, their achievements, progress and experiences in school and focus on learning and teaching, leadership, the development of a learning organisation culture, well-

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being of pupils and staff, equity and inclusion. In moving forward, the self-evaluation should also focus on the four purposes of the new curriculum and evaluate the progress the school is making towards realising the new curriculum. The self-evaluation processes should allow the school to identify areas of strengths and priorities for improvement. It should also identify aspects of their improvement journey that require peer support to aid improvement.

- **Peer-review:** the most effective peer reviews have an agreed focus. The purpose of the collaboration must be to improve outcomes and any agreed focus should be based on strong evidence of what's needed to improve and what outcomes would be most benefit to the school. Peer reviewers working as a team or trio work best where they can triangulate evidence and jointly analyse their findings. They are not there to pass judgement but to seek evidence and agree findings to be shared with the school. It is imperative that the peer review process does not become a *pseudo-inspection* system. The partnership must be founded on a clearly articulated shared moral purpose with transparency, trust and honesty crucial and integral to the process. The peer review should also provide professional development opportunities and include leaders at all levels.
- **School-to-school support:** if peer review is going to be a vehicle for ongoing improvement in school systems, then it must go further than the review itself and involve school to school or cluster support. Where the outcomes are owned by the staff, the long-term and sustainable impact will be greater. This helps to further build capacity and increased resilience within a self-improving system. The partnerships built should therefore go beyond school leaders and engage with students, teachers, families and communities.

GwE and the six regional local authorities want to work in partnership with schools to establish a regional peer engagement model which fully reflects the principles and values that have been identified by Head teachers and also learn from good practice nationally and beyond. Supporting Improvement Advisers would facilitate and fully support schools in developing their peer engagement models. As Munby and Fullen (2016) have eluded, a commitment to and capacity for effective peer review form the engine that drives improvement.

Welsh Government have proposed that school's self-evaluations will undergo a process of external authentication. This is to ensure that the self-evaluation is a true and authentic reflection of the institution's strengths and priorities for improvement and match that to an appropriate level of support. Any peer engagement model should support this process. We firmly believe that the authentication process should be done 'with' schools and that peer engagement is an integral part of that process. It is therefore imperative that an authentication process is not seen as a 'pseudo-inspection' that develops into an 'event' that is 'top down' and seeing to be done to the school.

We have therefore invited expressions of interest from groups of schools to participate in a peer engagement pilot programme.

We are looking to support a variety of cluster models such as those working across small rural schools, large urban schools, cross-sector, cross-authority or other innovative models. We plan to deliver a relevant and comprehensive training programme for consortia, LA and school based staff so that all stakeholders have increased maturity and capacity to take ownership of the peer engagement model which fully reflects the principles and values identified by Head teachers.

We firmly believe that such a pilot programme would ensure that the North Wales region is shaping and framing an effective peer-engagement framework and model. By taking ownership over developments we can ensure that our peer engagement model genuinely reflects local need, whilst fully supporting the national direction to develop a culture based on openness, trust and collegiality across the system. Peer engagement need to be a rigorous and robust process and as Munby and

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Fullen (2016) alluded, all partnerships welcome scrutiny and support from other partnerships as their contribution to a connected local, regional and national system.

Peer Engagement Model

