

Preparedness for roll-out of national school reforms from the perspectives of school staff

Findings from the School Health Research Network 2020 School Environment Questionnaire

Background

Previous research has shown that key facilitators for successfully implementing change within education systems include positive culture, adequate training, and teacher and pupil motivation.¹ Barriers to implementation include heavy workloads, budget cuts, and lack of resources or support. Perceived educational impacts of curriculum reform both for schools and society (i.e. stakeholder 'buy-in') has also been shown to mediate successful implementation.² Informed by the 2015 Donaldson review, Wales is preparing for national roll-out of the new Curriculum for Wales in 2022, which includes systemic changes to educator training and development, and an overhaul of schools' assessment and evaluation processes.^{3,4} These reforms represent a radical departure from the previous National Curriculum and intend to deliver a modern education fit for contemporary society through the raising of school standards, reducing the attainment gap between different groups of learners and ensuring an education that is a source of national pride and public confidence.^{5,6,7}

In addition to one of four overarching purposes to create 'healthy, confident individuals', Health and Well-being is afforded an unprecedented level of importance and status in the Curriculum for Wales as one of six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) alongside: Expressive Arts; Humanities; Languages, Literacy and Communication; Mathematics and Numeracy; and Science and Technology. This report provides data on schools' perceived levels of preparedness to deliver the Curriculum for Wales from the perspectives of school staff. It has a specific focus on preparations around the delivery of health and well-being education and explores schools' preparedness by free school meal (FSM) entitlement and language medium. Data were collected between January and March 2020. All findings should therefore be interpreted as providing a snapshot of levels of preparedness a few years prior to national roll-out. Collected pre-COVID-19, data also provide a useful baseline to inform future work around COVID-19 impacts on schools' implementation of the Curriculum for Wales when adequate follow-up data are available.

¹ Waller, G., Finch, T., Giles, E.L., Newbury-Birch, D. Exploring the factors affecting the implementation of tobacco and substance use interventions within a secondary school setting: a systematic review. *Implementation Sci.* 2017; 12, 130.

² Pietarian J, Pyhalto K & Soini T. Large-scale curriculum reform in Finland – exploring the interrelation between implementation strategy, the function of the reform, and curriculum coherence. *The Curriculum Journal.* 2017; 28:22-40.

³ Donaldson G. *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales.* 2015. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/successful-futures.pdf>

⁴ Welsh Government Curriculum for Wales Guidance. 2020. <https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/b44ad45b-ff78-430a-9423-36feb86aaf7e/curriculum-for-wales-guidance.pdf>

⁵ <https://gov.wales/curriculum-wales-overview>

⁶ Estyn. *Healthy and Happy – School impact on pupils' health and wellbeing.* 2019. https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2020-07/Healthy%2520and%2520Happy%2520report%2520En_0.pdf

⁷ Estyn. *Preparing for the Curriculum for Wales – case studies and cameos from secondary, all-age and special schools.* 2020. <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2022-01/Preparing%20for%20the%20Curriculum%20for%20Wales%20en.pdf>

The School Health Research Network

The Wales-wide School Health Research Network (SHRN) was established in 2013 and is a partnership between Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Cancer Research UK, the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD), and Cardiff University.⁸ School membership currently includes all maintained secondary and middle schools in Wales. The Network is led by the Centre for Development, Evaluation, Complexity and Implementation in Public Health Improvement (DECIPHer) at Cardiff University.⁹

The School Environment Questionnaire (SEQ)

The SEQ is completed by a member of senior school staff on behalf of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). It collects data on school-level policies and practices that aim to improve health and educational outcomes of schools in Wales. It is administered to SHRN schools alongside the biennial Student Health and Wellbeing Survey. Together, these surveys form a school health data infrastructure for Wales that enables robust monitoring of adolescent health behaviours, and aid understanding of the role of the school environment in shaping these behaviours. To ensure both surveys are policy and practice relevant, key stakeholders, including Welsh Government and Public Health Wales, are regularly consulted on survey content and structure.

Schools with more than one physical site (with no student cross-over between sites) are asked to complete one questionnaire per site. In 2020, 213 school sites (hereafter 'schools' for ease of interpretation) were asked to complete the SEQ, representing all maintained secondary/middle schools in Wales and some independent schools. Of these, 167 schools (78%) from all 22 local authorities in Wales, including 5 independent schools, completed the SEQ. The participating maintained schools were representative of all maintained schools in Wales with respect to size and level of FSM entitlement.¹⁰ This included 19 Welsh language (83%), 118 English language (78%), and 25 bilingual (76%) schools.

This report includes data for maintained schools only (n=162). Schools were asked about: i) the extent to which staff felt prepared to deliver each of the six AoLEs; ii) the types of activities being undertaken in preparation to deliver the Health and Well-being AoLE; iii) the extent of involvement of staff (i.e., SLT, other teaching staff, and pastoral and support staff) and other stakeholder groups (i.e., students, families, and the wider community); and iv) the potential challenges in delivering curriculum reform within their school. See Appendix (Table A1) for details of how these measures have been defined for use in the current report. Breakdowns are provided by school FSM entitlement and language medium. School FSM entitlement was

⁸ <http://www.shrn.org.uk/>

⁹ <https://decipher.uk.net/>

¹⁰ SHRN (2021). Report on the 2019/20 School Environment Questionnaire for the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes. School Health Research Network, Cardiff University.

assessed as the proportion of pupils within a school eligible to receive free meals. Schools were classified as either low-FSM (n=59 schools), medium-FSM (n=55), or high-FSM (n=48).¹¹ Due to item non-response, sample base sizes vary (Table A2).

Findings

Staff preparedness to deliver the six AoLEs

At the time data were collected in January-March 2020, 1 in 3 schools (33%) reported a high level of preparedness to deliver the new AoLEs. Schools were more confident in their ability to deliver the Humanities (39% reporting high preparedness), Mathematics and Numeracy (38%), and Expressive Arts (34%), compared with Languages, Literacy and Communication (LLC) (31%), Science and Technology (30%), and Health and Well-being (28%). Breakdowns by school FSM entitlement showed that low-FSM schools felt more prepared to deliver the AoLEs than medium-FSM or high-FSM schools (Table 1a). This was particularly evident regarding delivery of the Health and Well-being AoLE, where 2 in 5 (39%) low-FSM schools reported high preparedness compared to 1 in 5 (19%) high-FSM schools. When considering school language (Table 1b), a greater proportion of Welsh medium schools reported high preparedness to deliver the AoLEs relative to English medium schools (44% vs. 33%). Bilingual schools felt the least prepared with only 1 in 4 (25%) indicating high preparedness. Across the AoLEs, the largest disparities between Welsh and English schools in reporting of high preparedness were found for LLC (50% vs. 30%), Mathematics and Numeracy (50% vs. 36%), and Health and Well-being (43% vs. 28%).

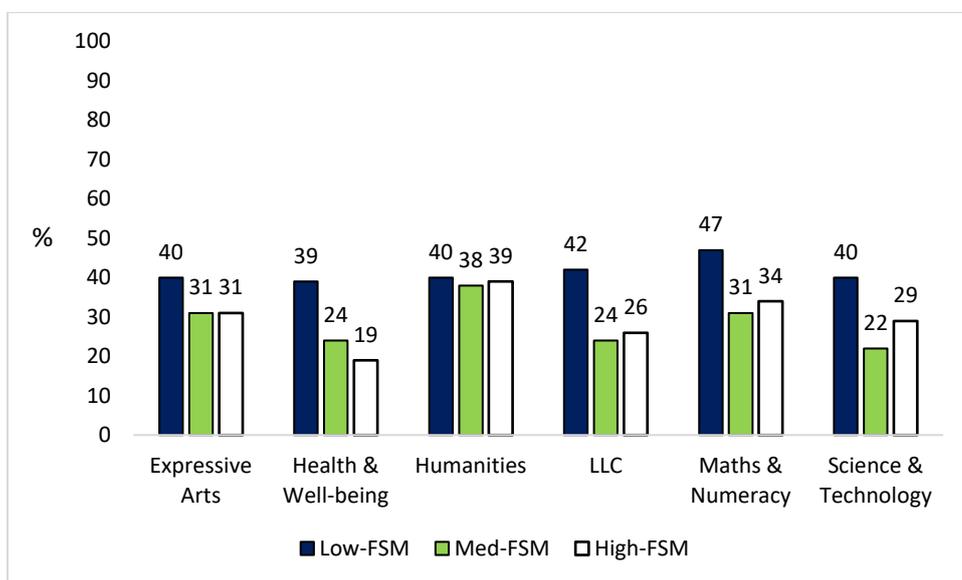


Figure 1a % of schools reporting high preparedness to deliver the six AoLEs by school FSM entitlement

¹¹ School FSM was calculated from school census data available at: <https://statswales.gov.wales>. Threshold values for FSM categories were as follows: low (<13%), medium (13-20%), high (>20%)

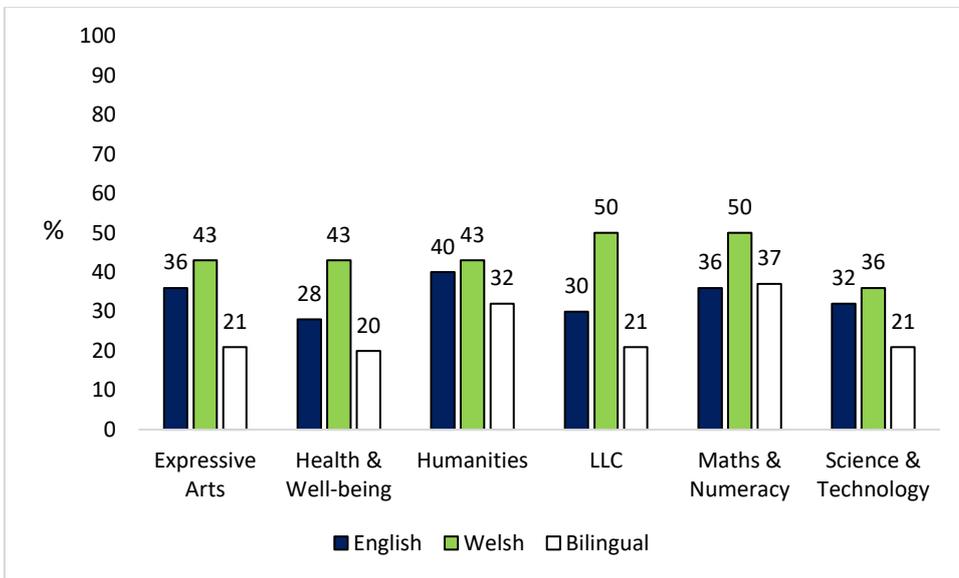


Figure 1b: % of schools reporting high preparedness to deliver the six AoLEs by school language medium

Staff and stakeholder involvement in preparations to deliver the Health and Well-being AoLE

Around 4 in 5 schools (78%) reported their SLT as being highly involved in preparations to deliver the Health and Well-being AoLE. A high level of involvement among other teaching staff, pastoral and support staff, and students, was also reported by 68%, 47% and 27% of schools respectively. Comparatively, involvement of families (3%) and the wider community (5%) in delivery planning around health and well-being was less commonly reported. Breakdowns by school FSM entitlement showed that a lower proportion of high-FSM schools involved pastoral and support staff (31%) compared to low-FSM (56%) and medium-FSM (49%) schools (Figure 2a). In contrast, a greater proportion of high-FSM schools reported high student involvement (35%) compared to low-FSM (30%) and medium-FSM (16%) schools. Exploring staff and stakeholder involvement in delivery planning by school language medium showed a greater proportion of Welsh schools reported high involvement of families (18%) compared to English (1%) and bilingual (0%) schools. Compared to English and Welsh schools, bilingual schools tended to report higher levels of community involvement in delivery planning around health and well-being but lower student involvement.

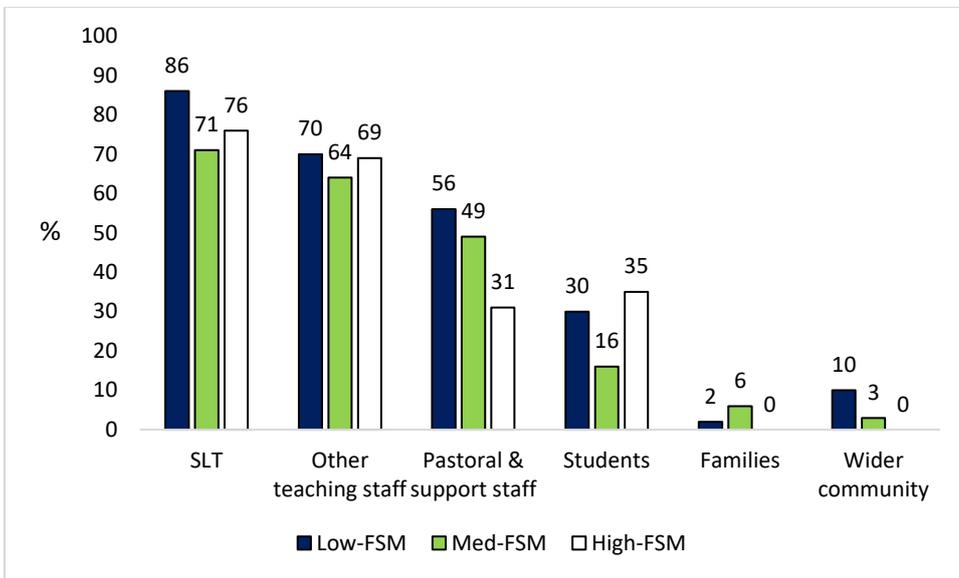


Figure 2a: % of schools reporting high involvement in preparations to deliver the Health and Well-being AoLE among school staff/stakeholders by school FSM entitlement

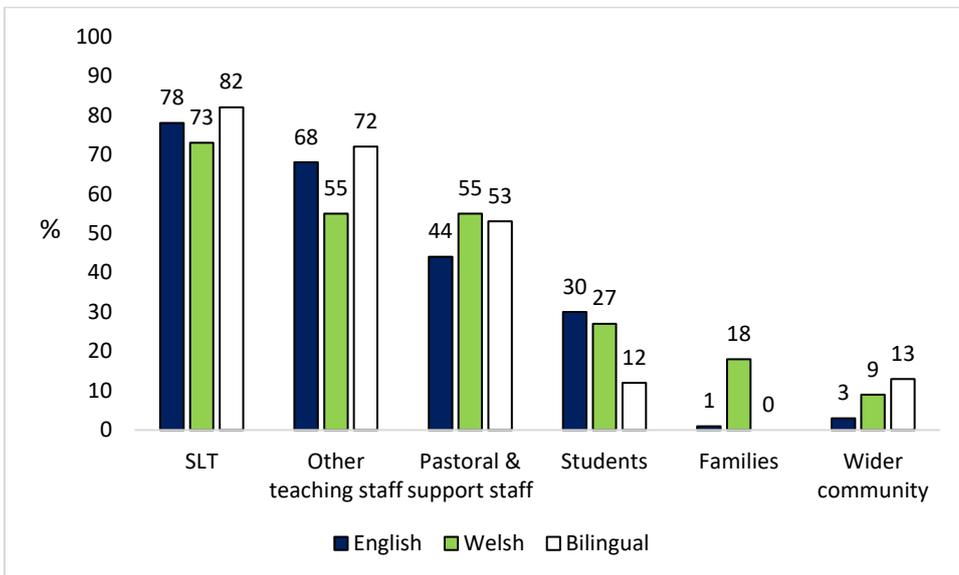


Figure 2b % of schools reporting high involvement in preparations to deliver the Health and Well-being AoLE among school staff/stakeholders by school language medium

Activities undertaken by schools to prepare for the Health and Well-being AoLE

Schools were asked what activities they were undertaking to prepare to deliver the Health and Well-being AoLE. At the time of completing the survey, 3 in 4 (74%) schools were planning cross-curricular teaching of health and well-being and 1 in 2 (52%) were trialling it. Seven in 10 (72%) schools were training staff, 2 in 5 (44%) were consulting students, 2 in 5 (44%) were adopting new health and well-being interventions, and 1 in 10 (10%) were doing nothing or waiting for guidance. Around 1 in 10 (11%) schools also reported undertaking 'other' activities to prepare for the Health and Well-being AoLE. Among the examples given by

schools were holding a cluster inset day focusing on health and well-being; undertaking a whole-school evaluation of existing well-being systems and processes; and partnership working with other schools, Welsh Government, and local education consortia. Breakdowns by school FSM entitlement showed a higher proportion of high-FSM schools reported doing nothing or waiting for guidance (18%), while a lower proportion reported training staff (62%) or adopting new health and well-being interventions (38%) (Figure 3a). A higher proportion of low-FSM schools reported planning cross-curricular teaching (82%) and undertaking student consultations (58%). Of the schools sampled, bilingual schools tended to report the lowest levels of preparatory activity around the delivery of the new Health and Well-being AoLE with only 1 in 2 (52%) having undertaken staff training at the time of data collection (Figure 3b).

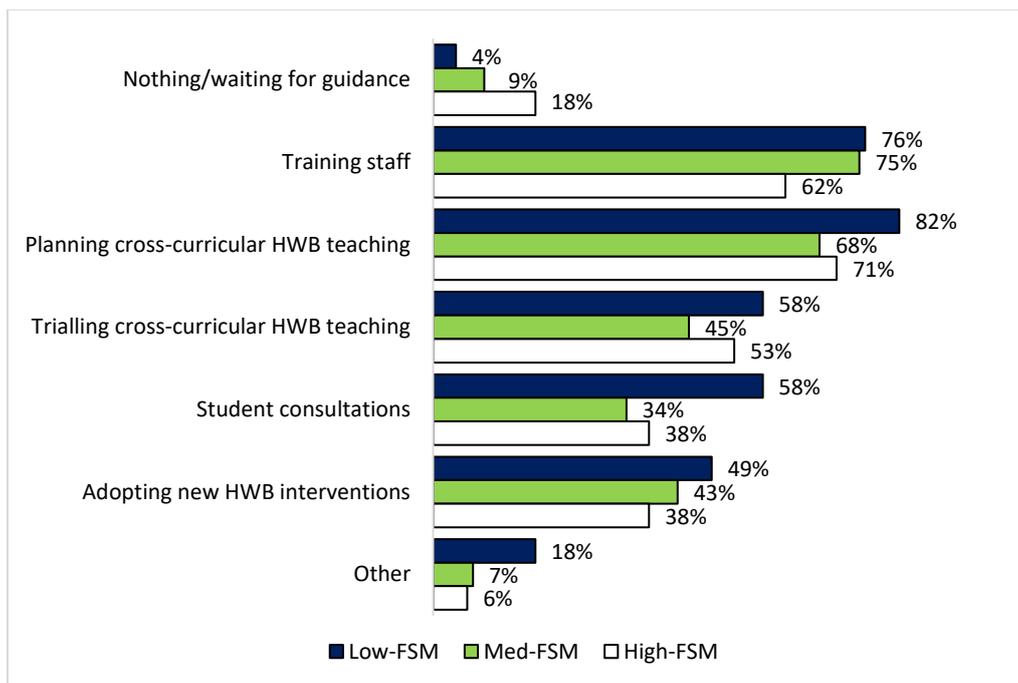


Figure 3a: Types of activities undertaken by schools in preparation to deliver health and well-being (HWB) education in the new curriculum by school FSM entitlement

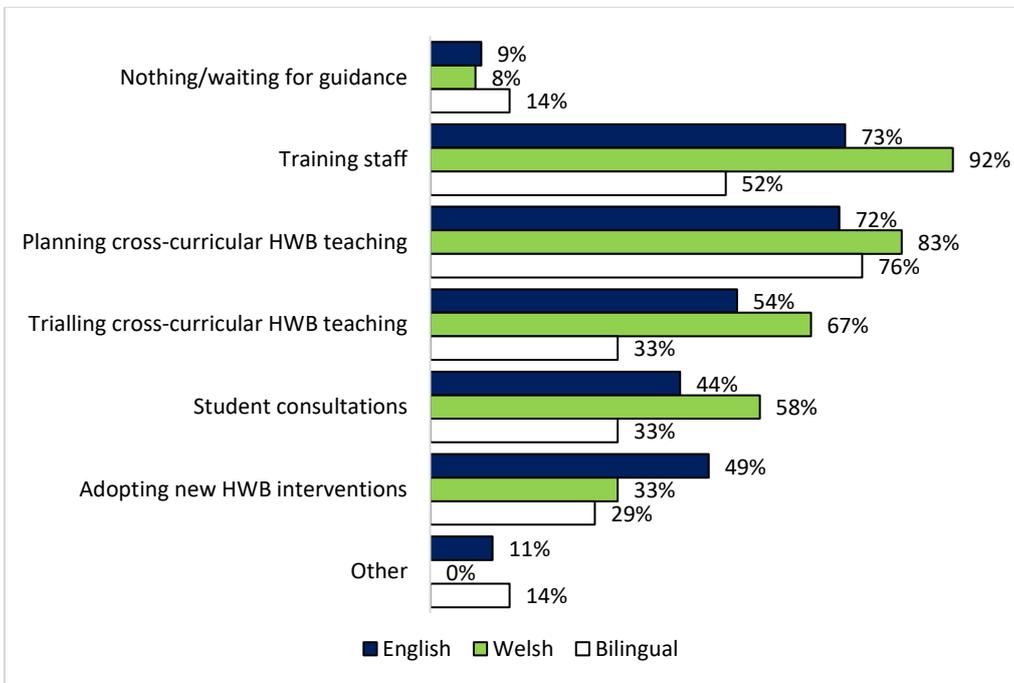


Figure 3b: Types of activities undertaken by schools in preparation to deliver health and well-being (HWB) education in the new curriculum by school language medium

Challenges in delivering curriculum reform

Schools were asked to identify potential challenges to delivering curriculum reform within their school. In total, 99 schools responded to this question with delivery challenges commonly identified around: **planning and implementation; assessment; and staff capacity and ‘buy-in’**. Planning and implementation challenges included ensuring adequate time for curriculum development (e.g. cross-curricular working) and to address the practicalities of implementation (e.g. staffing and timetabling). Challenges related to assessment included navigating transitions between pupil progression steps and the need to balance a flexible curriculum with a more rigid assessment structure. Challenges associated with staff capacity and ‘buy-in’ commonly identified by schools included ensuring staff professional development needs are adequately met and addressing any staff anxiety or inertia around curriculum reform (select quotes are presented below).

Planning and implementation

“Time - in order to plan the curriculum effectively staff need time to develop a joint understanding of the curriculum first and foremost whilst also continuing to plan and deliver lessons of a high standard to current students. More time is then needed to work collaboratively across subject, AOLEs, clusters and across schools to ensure there is a joint understanding of key concepts. The staff will then need more time to develop an effective curriculum which maps the development of each AOLE over time from 3 - 16 years.”

“Staffing and time are two challenges that we will face as a school. Staffing is always a challenge, having time to make changes and adapt to the new curriculum will also lead to further challenges at all levels.”

Assessment

“Balancing the new curriculum with the examinations. Schools will have to teach a flexible curriculum to rigid examinations which have yet to be designed.”

“Assessment is the biggest challenge and what that will look like linking to A levels/Post 16, pupils progression and exit strategies from schooling.”

“...Researching, planning, trialling and implementing effective assessment systems that meet the needs of the learners, the school and wider community.”

Staff capacity and ‘buy-in’

“Staff training- ensuring purposeful professional learning is provided which matches needs.”

“Ensuring teachers have time, knowledge and skills to build their curriculum based on the curriculum principles and meeting the outcomes of the four purposes.”

“Expertise - ‘out of subject specialism’ delivery and skills based delivery.”

“Staff are very nervous about the change and accountability.”

“Encouraging teachers to embrace new teaching styles and coordinate topics which fulfil the requirements.”

Things to consider

- Data were collected between January-March 2020 and the landscape around schools' preparations for delivering the Curriculum for Wales will likely have changed over the last two years.
- While the survey boasts a high overall school response rate (78%, n=162 maintained schools), responses to questions concerning schools' preparations for delivering the Curriculum for Wales were lower at around 51-62% of the maintained schools invited to participate.¹²
- Schools with high FSM entitlement will likely face additional challenges that may act to reduce their capacity to engage in preparations around curriculum reform.
- Health and well-being are relatively new additions to school curricular. This makes the Health and Well-being AoLE arguably the most challenging for schools to prepare to deliver and may explain why schools reported feeling less prepared to deliver it compared to the other AoLEs.
- Exploring differences in schools' preparations for delivering the Curriculum for Wales by school FSM entitlement and language medium can inform what type of support is required, and for whom, to ensure this is tailored to schools' needs.

Acknowledgements

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¹² This was due largely to a combination of 'don't know' responses and partial survey completions (the latter likely owing to questions on the new curriculum being positioned at the end of the questionnaire).

Appendix

Table A1: SEQ questions on curriculum reform

Question	Response options	
<p>Please rate the extent to which your school staff feel prepared to deliver each of the six Areas of Learning and Experience where 1 is not at all prepared and 5 is fully prepared.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Expressive arts -Health and Wellbeing -Humanities -Languages, Literacy and Communication -Mathematics and Numeracy -Science and Technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – Not at all prepared • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5 – Fully prepared • Don't know • Not applicable 	<p>Low preparedness (1-3) High preparedness (4-5)</p>
<p>To what extent have the following groups been involved in preparations to deliver the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience at your school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Senior management team -Other teaching staff -Pastoral and support staff -Students -Families -Wider communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not at all • A little • Moderately involved • Quite a lot • Very much involved • Don't know • Not applicable 	<p>Low involvement ('Not at all', 'A little', 'Moderately involved') High involvement ('Quite a lot', 'Very much involved')</p>
<p>What is your school doing to prepare to deliver health and wellbeing education within the new curriculum?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nothing/waiting for guidance • Training staff • Planning cross-curricular teaching of health and wellbeing • Trialling different approaches to cross-curricular teaching of health and wellbeing • Consulting students on how to deliver health and wellbeing education • Adopting new health or wellbeing interventions • Other • Don't know • Not applicable 	<p>As described</p>
<p>What do you think are the potential challenges in delivering curriculum reform within your school?</p>	<p>Please write your answer below</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't know • Not applicable 	<p>As described</p>

Table A2: Base sizes for figures 1a-3b

Figure	Item	Base size
1a, 1b	Expressive Arts	125
	Health & Well-being	128
	Humanities	126
	LLC	125
	Mathematics & Numeracy	125
	Science & Technology	125
	SLT	110
2a, 2b	Other teaching staff	111
	Pastoral and support staff	109
	Students	109
	Families	106
	Wider community	106
	Nothing/waiting for guidance	123
	Training staff	123
3a, 3b	Planning cross-curricular health & well-being teaching	123
	Trialling cross-curricular health & well-being teaching	123
	Student consultations	123
	Adopting new health & well-being interventions	123
	Other	123