

EDUCATION POLICY: WHAT COULD ENGLAND POSSIBLY LEARN FROM WALES?

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On 14 May 2009, David Hawker gave his inaugural lecture as Professor of Education of The College of Teachers at the Institute of Education, University of London. After over 30 years working in the English education system, Professor Hawker was appointed Director of the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills for the Welsh Assembly Government, and discovered that Wales had been showing the way to England in several aspects of educational policy for a very long time indeed, and in some areas continues to do so. Following the lecture, another of The College's Professors of Education, Anthony Seldon, provided a response. The event ended with a Question and Answer session.



After over 30 years working in the English education system it has been an interesting experience moving to Wales. The first thing that struck me was how friendly everyone is. It really does seem to be the case that everyone knows one another, and has worked together in some capacity at some point in the past, if not now. The feeling of being a close knit professional community is palpable. The second thing was to recognise that, far from being a slightly quaint offshoot of England, Wales is a vibrant and proud nation in its own right. With its unbroken history stretching back to the days of the Roman Empire, its own cultural traditions and its own language - the oldest living language in Europe - it has a markedly different heritage. Since devolution it has become increasingly confident in making its own policy, in education and in other areas, while at the same time remaining an integral part of the United Kingdom. And in answer to the question "What can England learn from Wales?", it turns out to be quite a lot. Indeed, as I shall argue, Wales has been showing the way to England in several aspects of educational policy for a very long time indeed, and in some areas it still is.


But there are challenges. With a population of around 3 million, Wales is slightly smaller than New Zealand, and a similar size to several independent European Community member states. But by comparison with England, it is really quite small, accounting for about 5% of

the UK population. There are talented people on a par with the best in England, but there are fewer of them. Budgets are proportionately smaller, so Wales has to be smarter in what it tries to do. It can't compete with England – nor indeed should it - in terms of the number and scope of its initiatives. It has a fraction of the number of people to dream them up and take them forward. So it has to concentrate on a small number which are proven to work.

On the other hand, because it is small, it can potentially get everyone together in one room to discuss a policy – the short lines of communication mean that there

can be a real sense of engagement with practitioners across the field with the development of educational policy. There is nowhere to hide – in a very real sense it is a close knit community. And because of its size it realised there was no sense in continuing with the plethora of separate agencies for different functions which characterises England. So four years ago Wales decided to have a bonfire of the quangoes, folding all of them except the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, into the department which I now run. So now the Welsh equivalents of the LSC, QCA, the TDA, NCSL, the National Youth Agency and the Basic Skills Agency are all in

A Brief History of Welsh Education


 Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
 Welsh Assembly Government

1731	Griffith Jones establishes the first SPCK 'Welsh School'
1854	Welsh schools absorbed into the English system
1889	Welsh Intermediate Education Act
1905	Coercion of Wales Act
1908	Education Board for Wales – Lloyd George
1940's	First official Welsh Medium schools
1964	Creation of Welsh Office
1988	Education Reform Act
1997	Blair promises electoral and legislative devolution
1999	National Assembly for Wales created
2001	'The Learning Country' published

house. Two agencies - Ofsted's equivalent Estyn and the General Teaching Council for Wales – remain separate because of their constitutionally independent status, but even they are regarded more or less as part of the family.

So there is a very different flavour in the Welsh educational scene from the English one. This is strengthened by a more marked historical sense of community, where collaboration rather than competition is the watchword for public services, and where co-operative instincts are deeply ingrained in local communities.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WELSH EDUCATION

Wales' distinctive educational heritage has emerged a consequence of a long struggle for its own identity, which many would argue was fought in the teeth of several centuries of opposition from the British (for which read English) establishment.

The Romans left Britain in 410 AD, leaving the province to its own devices. For England this spelt the beginning of a progressive loss of civilisation, but in Wales there was a rather different story. The language was preserved, along with the culture of what we now call Celtic Christianity, complete with a full two centuries - the so-called age of the saints - when Wales seems to have taken on the moral and spiritual leadership of what had once been the Western Roman Empire. Saints Cunedda, Teilo, Tisilio, and of course David - Dewi Sant - among many others, all made their contribution to the spread of Christianity during what we in England are familiar with as the Dark Ages. In Wales these centuries were anything but dark – indeed they were a time of learning, where the predominantly oral culture of the Welsh, supported by a thriving industry of poetry and storytelling, was widely spread throughout the population. Coupled with a distinctive set of laws, compiled by Hywel Dda in the 10th century which, among other things, conferred equal status in marriage to men and women, and insisted on splitting inheritances among all the children, rather than passing everything on to

the firstborn son, this Welsh cultural landscape created a strong national ethos, which, was then able to withstand repeated invasions and subjugations by the Normans and Plantagenets.

Ironically it was the Tudors - a dynasty of Welsh extraction - who did the most damage to Wales as a nation. The last Welsh born Prince of Wales - Llywelyn II - was killed by the English army of Edward I in 1282, and there was a brief but glorious attempt under Owain Glyndwr in the early years of the 15th century to regain independence. But neither of these military defeats had much impact on the cultural development of the nation, which continued more or less unimpeded. Indeed, many people think that it was in these early centuries of the second millennium that Welsh poetry reached its greatest flowering. (And there are no problems reading it either - to all intents and purposes, the Welsh language has been very little changed since the 6th century).

Perhaps it was just unfortunate that Henry Tudor didn't realise the richness of his own inheritance. It is not clear whether he was a Welsh speaker himself - certainly the prevailing culture among the ruling nobility was becoming more and more English at the time. For him and his dynasty, the key imperative was to create a strong nation state, and this meant suppressing all competing nationhoods, beginning, of course, with Wales. The Act of Union in 1536 was quite unequivocal about it: "His said Country and Dominion of Wales shall be, stand and continue for ever from henceforth incorporated, united and annexed to and with this his realm of England." And to emphasise the point, it spells out the disadvantage of continuing to speak Welsh: "... from henceforth no person or persons that use the Welsh speech or language shall have or enjoy any manner office or fees within this realm of England, Wales or other the Kings Dominion upon pain of forfeiting the same offices or fees, unless he or they use and exercise the English speech or tongue."

So for the next four and a half centuries, the Welsh language was banished completely from official life. It's

something of an achievement therefore that, by the middle of the 19th century, Wales was still 95% Welsh speaking. Broadly, there was a chasm between the ruling and legal classes, who used only English, and the people, the 'gwerin', who spoke Welsh. Leadership of Welsh culture continued in the hands of the bards and the poets, without further reference to the nation's rulers.

However even the most vibrant cultural tradition cannot preserve a language for ever. What really made the difference was the democratisation of education in the early 18th century by means of the non-conformist church, led by a remarkable preacher and organiser called Griffith Jones. The first Welsh Bible had been published in 1588, and church services had been conducted in Welsh more than in English since that time. Working alongside other early 18th Century revivalists such as Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland (who actually began their work before Wesley and his colleagues in England), Jones established the first Welsh medium school for ordinary children under the aegis of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, in 1731 in Llanddowror. By the time he died thirty years later, there were 3,495 schools across Wales, and almost half of the population of Wales - some 158,000 people - had passed through them.

So Wales' education tradition is inextricably bound up with its language, its culture and its religion. Its roots also deeply democratic and egalitarian - the ruling classes played absolutely no part in it from the mid-16th century on, and indeed the workings of government were actually inimical to it, because of the Welsh language question. But arguably the schools established by Griffith Jones constituted the first genuinely inclusive schooling system in the modern world. All that changed of course when the state started to take responsibility for education in the mid-19th century. A Government commission which reported in 1847 – the so called Blue Books - recommended making the Welsh no different from the English, principally by suppressing their language, in a spirit exactly akin to the Victorian colonialist's well known desire to civilise the natives. 'The Welsh

language', said the report, 'is a vast drawback to Wales and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people.' And the legendary chief inspector Matthew Arnold agreed: 'It must always be the desire of a government to render its dominions, as far as possible, homogeneous ... Sooner or later the difference of language between Wales and England will probably be effaced ... an event which is socially and politically desirable'.

So from the 1870 Education Act on, Welsh as a medium of instruction was effectively banned in Wales. The Welsh Not was introduced in some places to discourage children from speaking Welsh at school. A small wooden plaque, it was hung round the neck of a child caught speaking Welsh. The child wore it until another child was similarly caught out, who was then passed it to wear. And so on through the day, with the last child wearing the Not at the end of the day receiving a punishment - presumably physical. Actual documented instances of its use are quite rare - nevertheless it has come to symbolise the less than enlightened attitude of the English establishment towards things Welsh to this day. The eminent Welsh educationalist Sir Owen M. Edwards, writing in later life, having experienced this system as a child, regarded his state schooling as a waste of time, and said that it had only been his attendance at Welsh medium Sunday school which had ensured he became literate.

Despite this official repression, intellectual life continued in Wales, and there is a rich ongoing cultural effort, through literature, music and poetry, in Welsh throughout the 19th century. A significant development took place in 1872 with the founding of the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth - followed in 1893 by the University of Wales as a national expression of the intellectual life of the nation. The Eisteddfodau, so much a symbol of Wales' cultural vitality, continued to be held, and in 1873 even hosted a visit by William Gladstone. Nevertheless, despite producing luminaries like Lloyd George, Wales remained curiously ineffective in asserting its national identity until the

nationalist movement started to gather steam after the Second World War. It was in fact O.M. Edwards - historian, journalist and educationalist - who through his widely read publication *Cymru'r Plant* (The Welsh Child) probably did more than anyone else in the early 20th century to ensure that there was still enough of a Welsh-speaking population to build on when official policy finally started to change.

The first Welsh medium schools to be funded by the state were established after the Second World War, and the Welsh Office as a department of state was created in 1964, with education responsibilities.

From the 1960s, when Welsh medium education started to regain a substantial foothold, policies have consistently strengthened that position. Now, a growing number of people - currently around one fifth of the population - regard themselves as fluent in Welsh. The proportion of primary aged and secondary aged children attending Welsh medium schools has now reached 15% and 20% respectively. Large numbers more - possibly up to a half - receive at least part of their primary schooling through the medium of Welsh, despite not being in official Welsh medium schools. And the numbers are still growing, as parents, particularly in the urban centres of South East Wales, increasingly choose Welsh medium education for their children. The net effect is that new Welsh medium schools are continuing to be set up in these areas to meet the growth in demand, despite the general demographic downturn. Now, more children and young people are able to speak Welsh than their parents.

In the wider context, the growth of Welsh has also been helped by both broadcasting policy - with the BBC and the flagship S4C channel leading the way - and by the determination of the Welsh Assembly Government to encourage the use of the language in public life. The most visible manifestations of this to the visitor to Wales are of course the bilingual road signs and notices. They are a constant reminder to everyone that there are two

official languages in Wales, not one.

So, in contrast with the rest of the United Kingdom, Wales is becoming more typical of other countries by operating in two languages. However, bilingualism does not come free. It is more expensive to maintain a system where there are two official languages, where schooling has to be provided in both, and where every official document has to be produced in both. However, the money cannot be spent twice, so choices have inevitably to be made about what not to spend money on in order to support this system. The Welsh Assembly Government has no doubt that it wishes to see a bilingual Wales, and is confident the investment will pay off. It has just published its first Welsh Medium Education Strategy, which sets out the next steps along the road of running a truly bilingual system, along with the benefits of doing so in economic, social and personal terms.

There is no doubt that Welsh medium education is working. The growth of the sector, and the fact that many parents, particularly in South East Wales, who are not themselves Welsh speakers, want their children to go to Welsh medium schools, is a mark of a vibrant and successful sector. But there are many challenges in maintaining the strength of the early years through the system. At GCSE level there is a marked trend towards students taking their exams through English, even when they have been attending Welsh medium schools. The process becomes even more marked post-16. By the time students enter Higher Education, only 1,500 or so - barely 3% of the total - carry on their studies through the medium of Welsh. A review of Welsh Medium Higher Education is currently underway, in search of what can be done to encourage more students to continue their studies in Welsh, and finding the solution looks like being a major challenge.

PROGRESS TOWARDS DEVOLUTION

Away from language issues, the establishment of the Welsh Office marked the start of a gradual process of devolution, although for a couple of

decades it was little more than a postbox for an essentially centralist government. It was the advent of the national curriculum in the late 1980s which marked the first really significant step on the path towards a properly devolved system. The explicit recognition by Government in London that it was appropriate for Wales, within certain limits, to develop its own curriculum, really set the ball rolling. A Curriculum Council for Wales was created to parallel the National Curriculum Council in England, and was charged with defining an educational programme for Wales, within the terms of the 1988 Education Reform Act. Thus, a 'Cwricwlwm Cymreig' was created, which not only made Welsh a statutory subject for the first time, but also gave a specifically Welsh flavour to other parts of the curriculum, notably history, geography, art and music. Throughout the 1990s thinking moved progressively towards devolution, and the Curriculum Council for Wales became ACAC, with the addition of responsibility for pupil assessment. Later, when the English SCAA became QCA with the addition of responsibilities for the vocational qualifications system, ACAC added an extra C to its title and became ACCAC, to reflect the parallel change in Wales. Then, when the Blair government came to power in 1997, one of their election pledges was to pursue electoral and legislative devolution for Scotland and Wales. There was a strong appetite for this in Scotland, but the Welsh referendum in that year only just squeaked through with a bare majority. Nevertheless the National Assembly for Wales was created in 1999, with a number of devolved powers, including education (other than teachers' pay and conditions, which remain an England and Wales matter). Before long, educational policy began to diverge quite markedly from England's. The landmark document signalling Wales' developing policy, called 'The Learning Country', appeared in 2001, and remains to this day the most comprehensive statement of what the Welsh education system is seeking to become.

The political differences between the Blair administration in London and the devolved Welsh administration didn't take

long to emerge. As London became more and more critical of local authorities in the governance of schools, the National Assembly for Wales reaffirmed their importance. The national literacy and numeracy strategies, which imposed rigid lesson formats and teaching methods in English schools, were shunned in Wales, as were the new specialist schools and Academies. Wales had never warmed to the Conservatives' Grant Maintained Schools policy. So, even though a few Welsh schools had gone grant maintained at the time, there was nothing like the same lobby in favour of local school autonomy from former GM Heads when the law abolishing them was passed, as there was in England.

The net effect of this was that the infamous 'bog standard' comprehensive debate which raged so fiercely in England between 2002 and 2006 took on a different flavour in Wales. There, a unitary system remained intact, with little or no call emphasis on the themes of choice, diversity and competition which have come to characterise the English scene. By and large, Welsh schools served a more socially diverse population than the more stratified system that had developed in England. The conclusion was that comprehensive education as it had developed in the 80s and 90s was both desirable and deliverable in Wales. A fundamental difference allied to this was the way accountability was being viewed. The National Assembly took the view from the outset (supported, it has to be said, by large parts of the educational establishment in England) that publishing league tables of schools based on their test or examination results would not be desirable. They fundamentally rejected what they saw as quasi-market models for public sector services. Because the driving ethos of the Welsh system was egalitarian, the idea of a 'survival of the fittest' approach was anathema. They felt that to publish league tables would be to create unhealthy competition among schools, generate dissatisfaction among parents, and weaken the system. In any case, one of the main reasons for publishing comparative information in England – to enable parents to choose the best school for their child – was scarcely relevant in most of Wales,

where a combination of rural sparsity and small close-knit communities meant that in most cases there was no realistic alternative to the local secondary school anyway. So a decision was taken not to join in with the English system of performance tables, a decision which has held firm despite some pressure from sections of the media.

A related argument was used in respect of pupil testing. The first decision was to abandon the formal tests at Key Stage 1 for 7-year-olds - a decision in which England quickly followed suit. Then, in 2005 the Key Stage 2 and 3 tests (for 11- and 14-year-olds respectively) were also abolished, on the grounds that they were not helping the educational process, and because test preparation was taking up too much time, at the expense of teaching and learning. The tests were never popular with the teaching profession, and in the absence of a league table culture, the Welsh Assembly Government also could see no particular point in them. The replacement – moderated teacher assessment, plus an emphasis on the learning process through improving pedagogy – is designed to be rather more supportive of children's learning. Having been responsible for managing the national testing system for seven years in the 1990s, and having sought to mitigate the 'teaching to the test' effect by trying to improve their diagnostic and pedagogical value, this sequence of events has a particular resonance for me. In my view the Welsh Assembly got it pretty well right. England has of course now followed Wales' example at Key Stage 3, and it seems to be the case that only the continuance of primary school performance tables prevents it from doing so at Key Stage 2. Of course, we in Wales are now looking on with some curiosity to see what will happen this year in England following the recent Union conferences. The third key difference between Wales and England is the different demography. As well as being at least partly bilingual, Wales is a predominantly working class nation. The school system has a crucial historic role in both respects. For many years education has been viewed more highly than in England, and for several generations having a teacher in the family was always a matter of considerable

pride. Wales is intensely proud of its sons and daughters who have made a success in public life through having been educated. But, in contrast to England, commitment to education in Wales has been almost exclusively through the state system, with a steady proportion of only around 2% attending private schools, as compared with over 8% in England. Welsh socialism had a strong educational flavour, as witnessed by the strength of such eminent institutions as the Workers Educational Association, which persist to this day. And the rights-based approach on which a lot of policy is now based owes its origins to a socialist tradition of citizenship and engagement. So while much of the old mining and industrial base has now disappeared, the ethos of civic engagement and pride in education is still very much alive in the modern context.

In summary, the Welsh education system has some very obvious features which set it apart from England, so that it is now no longer really possible to lump them together as a single system with a few minor differences. That process is likely to continue, as Wales charts its own course, and takes decisions on a very wide range of issues stemming from these fundamental differences of philosophy. Already in the last ten years it has started to diverge very markedly from the English system it had been hitched to before devolution. Along the way, it has looked at educational policy in a number of other countries, including Scotland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Finland, as well as other regions in Europe with devolved administrations and separate languages, such as the Basque region of Spain. All this has been to help inform the development of Wales as a mature system in its own right, able to learn from and contribute to the development of other systems, both in the UK and elsewhere.

Like any dynamic system, Wales has lots of policies, and some of them are, I believe, genuinely leading edge in international terms. My job is to try to make sure they are implemented. Our current Minister - Jane Hutt - has said on a number of occasions that she doesn't want to launch any new initiatives this

year, because we need to focus on implementing the ones we already have. As you can imagine, this has gone down rather well with the teaching profession - and also, I have to say, with civil servants. One of the striking things about Finland's success in international terms is that they took ten years to change the system and then avoided any further major change for the next 30 years. I don't suppose Wales will quite manage that, but it certainly recognises the need to translate good policy into effective practice by working at it consistently rather than constantly starting new initiatives. So, I am hoping that once we have got the current crop of policies in place we shall be able to allow the system to grow and evolve, using the innovation and creativity that springs up naturally from within it.

In the time available this evening I couldn't possibly describe all the policies which the department I lead is responsible for. In English terms, this would be to describe all the work of two major Government departments - DCSF and DIUS. We are pursuing priorities across the board, from early years policy to school effectiveness, children's rights, 14-19 curriculum reforms, transformation of the post-16 sector, a newly focussed mission for higher education and, of course, our response, in terms of skills development and training, to the economic recession.

What I would like to do now, however, is to draw together three key themes which I believe underpin much of what Wales is trying to achieve, and which I am confident also have relevance in England.

A PHILOSOPHY OF LEARNING

My first theme is the principle that all educational policy should be firmly based on a clear philosophy of learning. Learning is at the heart of wellbeing, from the earliest years to adulthood and indeed into old age - and one of the surest routes to happiness is to become a lifelong learner. Learning preserves an interest in the world around us, a flexibility to respond to different circumstances, and a willingness to listen to others. One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is an appetite to learn,

and anything which spoils that appetite is harmful. As a local authority director, and now in my role with the Welsh Assembly Government, some of my most enjoyable days have been spent visiting schools and seeing children learning. I invariably come away inspired by their enthusiasm, and by the sheer creativity of it all. Teachers are probably the most privileged profession in the world, to have charge of this incredible process. Sadly, schools can sometimes spoil it, teachers can spoil it, and certainly what we do as administrators and decision-makers can spoil it, as we have seen all too often with some of the educational policies of the past. On the other hand, if we make wise decisions about the systems and structures in our schools, how they are monitored and supported, and how the terms of reference are defined, we can help provide the environment in which children can become effective and enthusiastic learners.

Wales uses the language of 'learners' a lot, in recognition of the fact that learning is essentially a continuous process from early years to adulthood. Some of the key features which characterise successful learning - engagement, interest, individual motivation, communication - are built explicitly into policies. The most striking example is the new early years curriculum. I remember the battles we fought in QCA in the 1990s to get play accepted as a legitimate learning activity in what we rather quaintly called the 'Desirable Outcomes'. One camp viewed learning primarily as formal instruction, with children as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, while the other viewed it as a developmental process, in terms of building children's own personalities and skills. This is a caricature, of course, but it does illustrate a fundamental difference in philosophy.

Wales decided early on, with the benefit of international research evidence, that a developmental, skills-based and activity-led approach was preferable to a more narrowly knowledge-based one. So the new Foundation Phase curriculum is designed explicitly along those lines. It has many of the overall learning objectives in common with the Foundation Stage in England, and of

course both of them build on the original Desirable Outcomes.

But in contrast to the English Foundation Stage, which stops at the end of the Reception Year, the Welsh Foundation Phase is for 3-7 year olds, and thus subsumes the whole of Key Stage 1. This means, according to how you like to view it, either that schooling in Wales starts at 3, or that formal schooling doesn't start until 7.

The Foundation Phase has many distinctive features, such as making greater use of the outdoors, where children can spend part of their time every day whatever the weather, engaged in a wide range of learning activities. The emphasis is on verbal communication, social skills and becoming effective learners. Children are allowed to move freely from one area of the classroom to another as they take part in different activities, and the classrooms themselves resemble a kind of Aladdin's Cave, with corners devoted to different types of activity, equipped with materials, objects, and displays of various kinds. Staff are trained to work intensively with both small groups and individual children to make sure each of the activities becomes a purposeful learning experience. The logistics are often complex, and tracking the children as they take part in the different activities places considerable organisational demands on the staff. To assist this, and to enable them to give individual attention to each child, the Welsh Assembly Government has designed the Foundation Phase to provide staffing ratios of 1:8 for 3-4 year-olds, and 1:15 for 5-7 year-olds.

The Foundation Phase is costly to run because of these staffing ratios, and the Assembly Government has had to put in significant extra funding to pay for it. It went live for the youngest children last September, and will be fully implemented for the whole age range by 2012. Evaluation of the initiative will be very important, to see whether the intended gains in terms of better learning, greater confidence, independence and social skills among our young children really do materialise. As with any early years programme, the long-term dividends

in terms of better school results, social capital and ultimately the economy can only be properly measured in at least ten years' time, but it is important, from both a political and managerial point of view, to get a firm handle at a relatively early stage on whether the programme is on course for fulfilling the very high expectations being placed upon it. With the simultaneous introduction of the Foundation Stage in England, an ongoing comparison of the two systems will be very interesting, as part of a wider benchmarking of early years practice internationally.

This philosophy of learning has also translated itself into a new skills-based national curriculum which has just been introduced for Key Stages 2 and 3, and a pedagogy initiative which links teaching techniques and a concern for the learning environment with a deeper understanding of the learning process itself, using assessment for learning and thinking skills as two of the key strands of the initiative.

In the 14-19 phase, Wales is currently in the process of developing a new entitlement-based programme. Also in line with this philosophy is a new 14-19 programme which will start to come on stream from September 2009, embodying learner choice and again placing essential skills (as we now call them) at the core, and last but not least our very popular and successful Welsh Baccalaureate, which is now preparing for its third year of implementation.

The Welsh Baccalaureate is the first example in the UK of a formal certification mechanism which recognises these skill areas as part of the core award. It is designed along the lines envisaged by the much admired but (in England at least) ill-fated Tomlinson proposals. It has proved hugely popular by providing a single package of qualifications at three levels – Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced, the Core of which is a range of personal, social and work related skills, including volunteering in the community. The Baccalaureate package can include (or not, as the case may be) traditional GCSEs or A Levels, but it gives equal status to a range of vocational

equivalents. The Core and Options model means that the award of the qualification requires a broad range of achievement, but it also allows learners to specialise, if that is what is right for them. For instance, from September this year learners will be able to include Principal Learning and Project Qualifications as part of the Baccalaureate and there will be 168 centres in Wales offering the Baccalaureate to some 30,000 learners. That's well over half the secondary schools and three quarters of the FE colleges in Wales, as well as a growing number of training providers. Universities in Wales (and some in England) have agreed to accept the Baccalaureate for the purposes of undergraduate entry, using the national points tariff system.

So the Welsh Baccalaureate, has neatly got round the knotty issue of the academic/vocational divide which has dogged the English system for so many years. It has done it not by trying to prove their equivalence, but by including both within a larger package built on a philosophy of learning which places life skills, in the broadest sense, at the centre. It is a powerful narrative, made more so by the fact that it is not restricted to a particular phase of learning, but runs like the lettering in a stick of rock through all the phases. As we look forward to the kind of education which will be needed in the coming century, this is a lesson which Wales may well be able to share with England.

RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION

My second theme is about rights and participation. As someone who, for the past ten years, has been deeply involved in the Every Child Matters reforms in England, one of my key drivers was always the need to make sure children and young people were properly respected and involved as active participants in the system, and not as the passive recipients of adult largesse. Our concept was of a whole system, in which all the children, young people and their families would have an active part to play alongside the professionals. We deliberately steered away from an approach which only targeted specific vulnerable groups, in favour of an

inclusive system in which everyone played a part. So the music service and the sports clubs were as much part of the organisation as the services for looked after children, or those with additional needs.

I think we need to preserve this sense of participation and universality, and there is a real danger that children's trusts in England may get sucked into a narrower set of concerns about welfare and safeguarding. Important though these things are, if this becomes their sole preoccupation, they may start to lose relevance for much of the educational world, and will miss out on a unique opportunity to transform the system. When I arrived in Wales, I discovered that rights and participation sat at the heart of government policy in a way that was simply not the case in England. I was immediately struck by this fundamental difference in the Welsh approach. The equivalent document to Every Child Matters in Wales was called 'From Rights to Action', a telling difference in itself. The five Every Child Matters outcomes in England - be healthy, stay safe and the rest - have their equivalent in that document in the form of seven core aims for children. On first inspection they appear to cover the same ground. But a closer look shows that, whereas the five ECM outcomes are focussed on what children and young people themselves are expected to do, or be, the seven Welsh aims are framed in terms of what they are entitled to expect from society. Of course, it doesn't mean that Wales has no concern for outcomes, nor that England ignores entitlement. But it does demonstrate a difference in perspective. Colleagues in Wales tend to caricature England's approach to children's services as 'welfarist', whereas they see the Welsh approach as more participatory and rights-based.

A number of policy differences have flowed from this. Wales was the first UK country to appoint a Children's Commissioner, and the first to adopt the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Wales had a national Youth Strategy before England. It has legislated for School Councils, and has an impressive record on young people's participation,

with the flagship 'Funky Dragon' youth assembly operating on a national level to quiz Ministers on a regular basis, including the First Minister, about their policies. The Welsh Assembly Government has committed itself, in a way the UK government has not, to scrutinise all its policy initiatives in terms of the impact they are likely to have on young people. The Assembly Government has campaigned for a ban on physical punishment, and has opposed a number of significant aspects of youth justice policy (which is currently not a devolved function). Other policies show what Wales believes in. It has introduced free breakfasts for all children. It is currently legislating for increased play opportunities for children and young people with disabilities. It has introduced a Child Poverty Measure ahead of the equivalent piece of legislation in England, and is currently intending to give children a right of appeal in respect of Statements of Special Educational Need.

So, in terms of official policy, children and young people are respected more obviously than they are in England. It would be an interesting research study to find out if this means they become happier, fit in to society better, and cause less trouble than their counterparts in England. One hopes that it does. In other aspects of children's policy there are similarities, but also some important differences from England. For example, in its response to the 2004 Children Act, Wales deliberately took a different approach from England. They did not take the same step as England in creating the new statutory role of Director of Children's Services, preferring to stick with separate Directors of Education and Social Services, with one of the two designated as the lead director for children and young people. And Wales does not do Children's Trusts. However, local Children and Young People's Partnerships exist in all local authorities, as do statutory Children and Young People's Plans, and some local authorities have decided to bring together education and children's social care along English lines, where they believe that to be the best model for them.

The net result is that children's services

have not become as high profile in Wales as they have in England. The plus side of this is that the moral panic which occurred in England in the wake of the Baby P tragedy was scarcely felt in Wales. We simply sent out a letter to all directors reminding them of their responsibilities for child protection and asking them to send a return in to the social care inspectorate, which is now following up with a programme of inspections to check the robustness of their systems and practices.

This generally more low key approach to children's services is fairly typical of many areas of public policy, where consensus tends to dominate over rivalry (except on the rugby pitch, of course). There is a general reluctance to be told what to do, and haranguing doesn't help. The style of leadership which works in Wales, and the way reforms are implemented, tends to be based on building alliances and working alongside people, even when financial and regulatory levers are also in place. It is very much a 'Team Wales' approach. Although inevitably this description is a bit of a caricature, it maybe does also help to explain why Wales has approached services for children and young people in a rather different way from England. There are nevertheless some highly targeted programmes in Wales. One of the most impressive is Flying Start. This is a programme for 0-3 year-olds in the most deprived communities, which has its origins in community regeneration. When England started to roll out children's centres in every locality and, in effect, establish Sure Start as a universal programme, Wales decided on a different approach, influenced by evaluation evidence suggesting that the greatest benefits would be gained from a concentrated programme of support in targeted communities, rather than a broader based but more dilute programme. So Flying Start was launched in late 2007 in defined neighbourhoods across all 22 Welsh local authority areas. It is a programme for children from birth to age 3 and their families, based on intensive health visitor work on a ratio of one health visitor per 110 families, (a normal allocation elsewhere would be around 300), who co-ordinates support

from a range of agencies providing parenting support, other forms of social support, support for speech and language development, and free part-time childcare. The childcare is provided by trained practitioners working for a variety of agencies, but normally in a group setting, where there is a strong element of learning through play. Currently the Flying Start programmes involve 16,000 children in these defined geographical communities, and extra investment will increase the number by around 10% from later this year. We are evaluating Flying Start, both in terms of the benefits to the children and their families, and also in terms of the impact of the scheme on the local areas where it is running.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND SYSTEM CHANGE

My third theme is about how we manage public services. I have already mentioned the bonfire of the quangoes, which meant that Wales has had if anything more organisational change at government level than even England has over the past five years. But change always needs to be for a purpose. As public servants, not only has the public entrusted us with its money, it has given us responsibility for looking after its interests in some of the most important areas of public life. So we have an absolute duty of care to society, and we must therefore be constantly concerned to improve the performance of the services over which we have stewardship. Sometimes this means making some fairly radical changes to them.

My first experience of change management at national level was the introduction of Records of Achievement in the mid-1980s. I managed to avoid taking part in the introduction of GCSE, either as a teacher or an administrator, but I did get involved in introducing the national curriculum as a local authority adviser, and then spent a very interesting seven years managing the national school tests for QCA and its predecessors. This was change management of sorts, based on a laudable concern to improve outcomes. But looking back to those days, now over ten years ago, it is clear that our understanding of what constituted quality,

to say nothing of our approach to change management, was naïve to say the least. Nine years as a local authority director since then has taught me far more on that front than my previous experience in a national role ever did.

What all this has done is to ingrain a deep appreciation that good change management depends on having a holistic understanding of quality. Hence the development of a whole system approach to children's services in Brighton and Hove.

When the Welsh Assembly Government decided to abolish key stage tests it recognised that it needed to benchmark itself against other countries via the three yearly PISA surveys of student achievement. The 2006 PISA round provided confirmation that the baseline was really rather low - it showed Wales lagging behind the rest of the UK in all domains, with maths and reading literacy also being below the OECD average. The PISA findings helped to galvanise the development of the new school effectiveness framework. A small team of academics, working with the Welsh Assembly and with schools, designed the framework based on the principles of so-called 'tri-level reform'.

The three levels are the school, the local authority and the government, all of which need to play their part in securing better outcomes for learners. A fourth level - that of the classroom - was added to the model, to recognise the fact that school effectiveness actually starts with individual teachers and good pedagogical practice.

The School Effectiveness Framework picks up the idea of a developmental 'school profile' not dissimilar to the balanced score card which England is seeking to introduce. The idea is that, through training, support and some external challenge, schools will target their improvement activities along the lines of the profile.

The key to the success of the Framework will be how effectively it develops networked learning communities across schools and local authorities. At present,

pilot funding is paying for heads to visit participating schools, in a parallel to the School Improvement Partner system, in England, helping them to interpret their data and advising on specific strategies for improvement. The challenge for the future will be to achieve this networking of challenge and support within existing resources.

The School Effectiveness Framework sits at the heart of a cluster of policies aimed at improving the quality of the educational process for children - our initiative on pedagogy, our CPD programmes, the introduction of learning mentors in the 14-19 phase, the development of higher order literacy skills - the list could go on. And we are working with Estyn - Ofsted's equivalent in Wales - who are currently revising their school inspection framework for 2010, to make sure that all these policies are supported in the new framework.

The Effectiveness Framework also has its parallel in the FE sector, which is already relatively strong in Wales. So the idea is that there will be a seamless approach to institutional evaluation across the sectors. System improvement work is also now underway at the second level - the local authority level - of the tri-level model. Wales has legislated, as has England, for all local authority areas to have Children and Young People's Plans, and has given more guidance on the content of those plans than has England. However, the superstructure of indicators and an annual performance management cycle, which in England has been worked out as part of the machinery of Local Area Agreements, is still at a relatively early stage, mainly because the wider issues of performance management of public services in Wales have not been addressed so far in the same way. But there are now plans afoot to introduce annual review and planning meetings with local authorities, looking at both school performance and the Children and Young People's Plan, so that actions to support improvement can be effectively co-ordinated at both local and regional level.

One theme which currently looms very large in Wales, and is inextricably linked

to questions of quality, is organisational change. Every sector is involved in active consideration of institutional mergers, partnerships, joint ventures, relocations, rebuilding programmes and so on. Some of this is policy generated - our 14-19 reforms, for example, demand that schools, LEAs and FE colleges work together in local areas to provide a joint offer for all the students in their area, and this has inevitably led to considerations of mergers, shared governance, and other partnership arrangements. In the HE sector the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has used a special transformation fund to encourage mergers and collaborations between Universities. A similar process is underway in the FE sector, and in the schools sector a substantial number of Wales' 22 local authorities have recently been consulting on school reorganisation plans. In short, the system is going through a rather larger than usual amount of churn.

While nearly all of this change has an element of financial necessity to it - after all one of our themes in Wales is to get better value from the Welsh pound - the basic rationale is invariably about achieving better quality provision. The key will be to manage the changes in such

a way that they do actually result in the improvements they set out to achieve.

CONCLUSION

So, a philosophy of learning, the importance of rights and participation, and an appreciation of the nature of change and quality improvement - these are areas of policy and practice where I feel Wales has an important story to tell. It has some first-rate products, such as the Foundation Phase, Flying Start, the Welsh Baccalaureate, and some of the work done by the FE sector. Above all, it has an underlying ethos arising from its separate history, culture and language which I feel can, despite its modest size in comparison to its neighbour this side of Offa's Dyke, lead to some fruitful mutual learning.

PROFESSOR DAVID HAWKER took up his current post as Director of the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in the Welsh Assembly Government in August 2008.

Professor Hawker was educated at Wadham College, Oxford studying French and German and gaining a Postgraduate Certificate in Education. He began his career as a modern

languages teacher before moving to work for the Schools Examination and Assessment Council and later at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

He moved into local government in 1999, becoming Director of Education and then Director of Children's Services for Brighton & Hove where he set up the first fully integrated Children's Trust, before taking up a similar post at Westminster City Council.

He has served on a number of government advisory committees ranging from the regulation of early years childcare, foreign languages and the impact of socio-economic differences on educational outcomes. Professor Hawker also spent two years as the Chair of the Association of Directors of Education and Children's Services in England.

Internationally he has represented Wales and England on an EU committee of policy makers on educational evaluation; acted as a consultant to the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment project; worked with the British Council and the World Bank in Russia, and now sits on the General Education Sub-Board of the Soros Foundation which sponsors open society projects around the world.

He was elected a Professor of The College of Teachers in 2007, primarily due to his work in educational quality development and evaluation.