

Regional Value for Money (VfM) Evaluation 2018-2019

Education Achievement Service (EAS)

**Report Author: Rod Alcott (External Consultant)
Date of final report: 24 May 2019**

Contents:

	Page:
Executive Summary.....	3
Recommendations.....	4
Economy – Spending less.....	5
Efficiency – Spending well.....	6
Effectiveness – Spending wisely.....	12
Equity – Spending fairly.....	18
Sustainability – Spending for the long term.....	20
Conclusion.....	23
Appendix: Pen Portrait.....	24

Executive Summary

Value for Money (VfM), or cost effectiveness, is a measure of how well resources are being used to achieve intended outcomes. Good value for money is the optimal use of resources to achieve intended outcomes. VfM is usually measured by considering:

- **Economy:** minimising the cost of resources used while having regard to quality (inputs) – spending less;
- **Efficiency:** the relationship between outputs and the resources used to produce them – spending well; and
- **Effectiveness:** the extent to which objectives are achieved (outcomes) – spending wisely.

While the above represent the traditional method of measuring VfM it is also possible to include two further dimensions:

- **Equity:** the extent to which services are available to and reach all people that they are intended to – spending fairly. Equity is sometimes included within considerations of effectiveness but is treated separately here to highlight its importance to the work of EAS; and
- **Sustainability:** an increasingly standard consideration within the context of the Well Being of Future Generations Act (WBFG) – spending for the long term.

Assessing the performance of EAS against the criteria outlined above the conclusion is that:

EAS is providing good value for money in terms of those aspects that are within its control – notably economy, efficiency, equity and sustainability. However, collective action involving EAS, its constituent local authorities and school leaders is required to address concerns over educational outcomes across the region and those schools that are underperforming.

This conclusion has been arrived at because:

- *Economy:* EAS is delivering its services to all schools across the region while continuing to spend less.
- *Efficiency:* The regional approach to deployment of resources allows economies of scale to be achieved; and the impact on service delivery of reduced EAS resources is being mitigated by a concerted effort to build compensatory capacity within schools to allow the quality of support to schools to be maintained.
- *Effectiveness:* Overall, educational outcomes are not improving at the desired rate in all schools, particularly within identified schools within the secondary phase, and this needs to be addressed through acceptance of collective responsibility and accountability to improve performance.
- *Equity:* A comprehensive programme designed to better equip schools to support vulnerable learners has been established across the region, based upon cluster working and reinforced by the distribution of wellbeing grants to every cluster.

- *Sustainability*: EAS has an agreed Medium Term Financial Plan that sets out a sustainable approach to financial management in the future and is concentrating upon preparing schools to meet the challenges of curriculum reform, based upon a robust regional delivery network for professional learning that is intended to ensure that pupils needs will be met in the future and the workforce are well prepared and informed on all aspects of the reform agenda.

Recommendations

The VfM report for 2017-18 contained a small number of recommendations and progress against these recommendations is summarised below:

1. Develop a framework for on-going analysis of VfM throughout the year that enables EAS to form a clear judgement on whether VfM is being secured. The approach needs to be one that embeds VfM as part of an on-going process throughout the year, rather than a one-off retrospective review annually. Such an approach will require:
 - ensuring VfM is considered in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of service delivery;
 - including VfM analysis within the self-evaluation process;
 - including VfM review within a forward work programme for all governance groups;

Progress: A framework has been established through inclusion of VfM considerations within the on-going Focus, Analysis, Delivery, Evaluate (FADE) approach to self-evaluation. This provides a suitable platform for future development and refinement of the approach that includes the necessary increased consistency and enhanced rigour. No evidence is available regarding forward work programmes for governance groups.

2. Develop a robust Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) that:
 - provides a clear and concise view of future sustainability and the decisions that need to be made to balance the financial implications of objectives and policies against constraints in resources; and
 - forms the pivotal link that translates the organisation's ambitions and constraints into deliverable options for the future.

Progress: A robust MTFS that is closely aligned to the Business Plan has been developed and shared with governance groups

3. Work with other consortia to develop a national framework for assessing VfM at a regional level to encourage the sharing of good practice and ensure consistency of approach.

Progress: This requires a national approach and there is no evidence available regarding the development of a national framework.

Recommendations from 2018-19 VfM Review:

1. Further develop and refine the current approach to VfM evaluation in FADE reporting by ensuring that:
 - FADE reports include (or are accompanied by) resource and cost data;
 - intended outcomes for specific strands of work are attributable to that specific intervention and do not include organisation wide aspirations such as improve performance at KS4;
 - a robust and rigorous mechanism is developed for identifying the impact of specific interventions on the promotion of high standards and improved outcomes; and
 - individual strands of work are evaluated for VfM as part of a formative process that is brought together mid-year and later at the end of the year in an organisation wide summative evaluation.

2. Consider whether there are cost-effective ways to secure the involvement of Head Teachers in further developing the annual VfM report for 2019-20.

The main body of this report sets out the evidence that underpins the VfM evaluative statements contained in the executive summary.

***Economy:* EAS is delivering its services to all schools across the region while continuing to spend less:**

The amount of money available to EAS to spend on resources in 2018-19 was less than in previous years. Both core funding from the constituent local authorities, based on a WG driven formula, and grant funding have reduced. Income from trading services has ceased as the result of a conscious decision that charging schools for services runs counter to the philosophy of the organisation.

Trading income derived from EAS selling their services to schools either through training or intensively supporting schools/departments in need of support. EAS does not intend reverting back to being a trading organisation because it is felt that this compromises their legitimacy, is not in line with the changing national agenda and is at odds with the strategic direction set by the Company Board.

The extent of the reduction in core funding, grant funding and trading income is shown below. There has been an agreed 7.8% reduction in LA funding over the past 3 years which along with the elimination of, trading income, has resulted in a reduction in total core funding of some £1.2m or 27% in absolute terms between 2015-16 and 2018-19; although in real terms, when inflation and pay awards are taken into account, the reduction has been in excess of 30%. Over the same time period the small reduction in the amount of grant money

received from the Welsh Government has resulted in EAS having £1.9m or 3.3% less, in total, available in absolute terms.

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
LA Funding	£3,481,085	£3,376,653	£3,275,353	£3,209,847
Trading Income	£924,853	£601,974	£447,460	£0
Total Core Funding	£4,405,938	£3,978,627	£3,722,813	£3,209,847
Grants	£52,703,146	£56,082,261	£52,033,572	£51,991,066
Total	£57,109,084	£60,060,888	£55,756,385	£55,200,913
Delegated to Schools	£47,413,811	£50,384,126	£46,481,315	£48,886,304
Delegation Percentage	90%	90%	89%	94%
Residual Income ¹	£7,687,144	£7,668,633	£7,278,655	£6,314,609

However, if increases in the rate of delegation to schools are taken into account then residual income spent on running the organisation, including staffing costs, fell by some £0.96m or 13.24% from 2017-18 to 2018-19

The evidence clearly demonstrates that EAS is spending less than in previous years and that the rate of reduction is accelerating, while the overall number of schools being supported has remained largely static.

However, spending less is not in itself proof of providing VfM. Delivering VfM also requires the reduced spending to be used efficiently to maintain the quality of service being offered to schools across the region. The next section of the report will look at the evidence around how well resources have been deployed.

Efficiency: The regional approach to deployment of resources allows economies of scale to be achieved; and the impact on service delivery of reduced EAS resources is being mitigated by a concerted effort to build compensatory capacity within schools to allow the quality of support to schools to be maintained.

The centralised model of service delivery that has been adopted across the region has enabled efficiencies to be realised and economies of scale to be secured, particularly in relation to avoiding duplication of functions. Some illustrative examples of this are:

- the reduced cost of financial management resulting from centralising the function within EAS rather than having it duplicated across the five constituent local authorities; and
- centralising governor support within EAS rather than having it replicated across five local authorities.

¹ Residual Income is after distribution of Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant (MEAG) and Gypsy Traveller Children Grant

EAS recognises that the role of Governors is integral to the leadership capacity within each school and that it is therefore critical that governing bodies are well informed so that they can effectively discharge their role of challenge and support. In relation to the provision of governor support it is worth noting that EAS remains the only consortium to include Governor Support Officers, who work in partnership with Challenge Advisers to strengthen governance.

The Governor Support Service is provided through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) that schools can opt into if they so choose. It is significant to note that the take up for the Clerking SLA across the region has increased to 99%; a level of elective engagement that would appear to suggest that it represents good value for money.

This perception of good value for money is further strengthened by the results from a survey, to consider the impact of the EAS Training programme and the Professional Clerking Service, that was undertaken in July 2018. 541 Governors completed the Online Governor Support Survey. The survey revealed that out of the governors surveyed:

- 93% agreed that they are satisfied with the overall service provided for the last 4 years;
- 93% agreed that training has made them more effective and helped them understand their role more clearly;
- 92% agreed that the training helped them understand their strategic role;
- 91% agreed they were more confident to challenge and to monitor progress;
- 95% agreed they are confident to challenge the Headteacher's report; and.
- 80% agreed that they understood the priorities and outcomes of Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG).

EAS is addressing the lower confidence of Governors when it comes to understanding PDG through training sessions provided by the Strategic Lead for Equity and Wellbeing. These sessions are designed to enable governors to develop their knowledge and understanding of:

- the current national and regional agenda regarding Wellbeing and Equity and Grants available to schools;
- the terms and conditions of each grant;
- how to evaluate grant expenditure within their schools; and
- how they can challenge their schools on the progress of vulnerable learners.

2019-20 will see further development of the support service for Governors through the introduction of two options for the SLA to ensure the service meets the needs of governing bodies throughout the region:

- Option 1: Local Authority (LA) Statutory Service and Clerking Service
- Option 2: LA Statutory Service and Clerking Service with Statutory Committee Support

From October 2018 the provision of a specialised Human resources (HR) service across the region, that was previously contracted out to a local authority, has been brought in to EAS. The service has a dedicated resource through the appointment of a Regional Specialist HR Senior Officer. The service has provided the following support across the region:

- Training for Headteachers and leadership teams
- Training and support on capability procedure
- Governor training
- Training for EAS staff

The aim of the service is to ensure that:

- the appointment process for Headteachers is suitably robust;
- school leaders are effectively implementing processes to deal with underperformance of staff;
- governors are suitably trained to manage statutory processes; and
- processes for performance management of staff and leaders are effectively implemented.

EAS will review the implementation of its programme of support and evaluate its impact as part of its mid-year review of the Business Plan in the autumn of 2019.

Curriculum expertise is another area where savings can be achieved through the employment of one person to provide expert support in a specific area of the curriculum, as opposed to each local authority having to employ its own dedicated resource. The development of Learning Network Schools has further accelerated this process of securing efficiency savings through allowing one school to provide support in a specific curriculum area to a number of participant schools across the region, rather than needing a Network School per local authority. The gain in this example can be qualitative as well as quantitative. It might allow the only school within the region that has the level of expertise that is ideally required to be used, rather than potentially diluting quality through the need to identify one Network School per authority.

Centralised delivery that eliminates duplication also allows efficiencies to be realised in terms of staffing levels; while centralised administration of grants to schools, as opposed to administration per authority, has enabled school budgets across the region to benefit from receipt of an ever-increasing proportion of Welsh Government grants, as the delegation rate to schools has risen from 90% to 94%.

Centralised financial management, governor support services, curriculum expertise and grant administration are specific examples of the potential for efficiency gains. However, in more general terms, efficiency savings will be realised across the region for as long as there is no duplication of school improvement services from the £3m EAS receives from its partner LAs and the funding that LAs retain.

Reduced spending has inevitably resulted in a considerable reduction in staffing numbers, with the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff reducing from 107 in 2015-16 to 77 in 2018-19, representing a 28% reduction. FTE numbers are projected to continue to fall to 72 in 2019-20, taking the total reduction in FTE staff reduction to 35 over the period 2015-16 to 2019-20, representing a reduction of approximately one third in staffing levels.

However, effective resource management is about more than cost saving through staffing reductions. The challenge for EAS has been to manage the reduction in such a way as to mitigate the impact on service delivery. Throughout the process EAS has recognised the need to be flexible in its approach to ensure it remains fit for purpose and able to deliver its Business Plan priorities. With this in mind a balanced approach has been taken to ensure key posts are retained to enable continuity of delivery with minimum disruption to the support provided to schools. In particular re-structuring has been designed to ensure continuation of the progress that has been made in developing a self-improving system across the region and extending the collaborative opportunities for schools so that they are able to meet the demands of the reform agenda.

EAS has also realised the necessity for emerging structural arrangements to facilitate effective succession planning and the need to streamline and strengthen the SMT and SLT structures to ensure maximum value for money is achieved.

To ensure the continued effective delivery of school improvement services, in the face of staffing reductions, EAS has recognized the need to ensure that systems are in place to support schools to work collaboratively and become partners in a self-improving system in which school leaders have the skills, capacity and commitment to continually learn and improve their practice.

Fundamental to this approach has been the development of a Professional Learning programme designed to support improvement and development in schools to help them fully engage and prepare for curriculum reform. As part of this programme EAS provided funding of £ 5,822 pounds to each non pioneer school with the expectation that this would help fund a Professional Learning Lead in each school. Postholders would then contribute to the development of professional learning to support schools in preparing for curriculum reform, developing the use of the new professional teaching and leadership standards and developing Schools as Learning Organisations.

In carrying out their role it is expected that Professional Learning Leads will:

- promote effective teaching and learning strategies in preparation for curriculum reform across the school and relevant wider networks;
- develop professional values and dispositions;
- develop professional learning through effective collaboration and development of innovations across the school and wider school community; and
- lead, develop and enhance professional learning of other staff.

As of November 2018, 482 school leaders from across the region had participated in formal leadership programmes provided by EAS. The Professional Learning programme includes

the provision of mentor support for leadership in secondary schools, the delivery of services through the development of school-based networks, the development of cluster-based approaches to school improvement and the introduction, facilitation and support of peer working arrangements.

Mentor support for secondary schools entails a range of supportive interventions designed to increase leadership capacity and secure an effective rate of improvement. These interventions include the allocation of:

- mentors for Headteachers in identified schools;
- mentors for Deputy Headteachers in identified schools;
- a mentor for a Chair of Governors in an identified school;
- a mentor for newly appointed Headteacher in an identified school; and
- experienced acting Headteachers to identified schools.

Mentors are professionals who have been chosen and allocated on the basis of their proven leadership abilities and come from schools both within and outside the region. Their role is to provide a balance of support and challenge that builds leadership capacity as a pre-requisite for securing future improvement. However, raising standards will be dependent upon capable leaders engaging with the range of professional school improvement services being provided by EAS.

EAS commitment to capacity building through mentor support is demonstrated by the spending of some £167,000 to fund this programme in 2018-19. In value for money terms the test of the effectiveness of this spend will be the extent to which outcomes improve over time in the schools that have been the recipients of this resource expenditure.

The importance attached to capacity creation through collaboration is reflected in the EAS Business Plan for 2018-19 where *'Supporting collaboration and a self-improving system'* is an identified priority accompanied by a mid-year (November 2018) progress judgement of *'Satisfactory progress - many aspects addressed but still significant work to do in important areas'*.

The Learning Networks that have been established across the region comprise:

- Learning Network Schools who are funded to provide support to the participant schools through a series of activities; and
- Participant Schools who are the schools that are benefiting from engagement; they are the schools that will do most, although not all, of the learning from the experience. Participant Schools are generally not funded.

Currently across the region there are 61 primary Learning Network Schools and 17 secondary schools who deliver up to 46 different options for professional learning within the secondary phase.

Between January and April 2018, the University of South Wales (USW) undertook an independent research project looking at the delivery of development services through

learning networks. In their final report they stated that *'delivering development services through Learning Schools Networks is an effective strategy for adding-value, accelerating improvement and building confidence, thereby establishing a sustainable self-improving system'*.

While the report acknowledges that there are a small number of areas for development and stresses the need for consistency of approach, it also highlights the large number of ways in which the programme works well. These are identified as:

- *Network and Participant Schools understand their role and take ownership of it. Senior leadership teams are engaged.*
- *There is rigorous selection of Network Schools and clarity that they have the capacity to support without detriment to their own standards.*
- *There is transparency with Network and Participant Schools and EAS carrying out diagnostic and support planning phases.*
- *Schools have established improvement networks and share resources.*
- *There is a clear process for capturing impact in short and medium term.*
- *There is a clear understanding of how the programme fits within the wider school-to-school EAS programmes*

In addition to the research undertaken by USW, EAS also commissioned a research team from the Education and Social Research Institute of Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) to evaluate the development of cluster-based school improvement. The aim of the project was to assess the extent to which the potential rewards of the cluster approach initiated in South East Wales in 2017 had been achieved across the region in the first year of the programme. MMU reported their findings to EAS in August 2018.

The background to the research project was the introduction by EAS, in May 2017, of a cluster-based model of school improvement. The aims of the cluster-based approach were to develop a more socially inclusive curriculum and identify more effective models for the professional development of the teacher workforce. The school-cluster model was intended to become the 'anchor' for professional practice and capacity building that occupied an important strategic role in the regional approach to delivering a self-improving system.

In its final report MMU concluded that the following benefits had been realised from cluster working in 2017-18:

- *Some clusters have engaged in joint practice development to improve experiences of transition and are developing common school policies.*
- *Cluster working is supporting the development of a collaborative culture across institutional and stage boundaries.*
- *Cross-phase cluster working is promoting collective responsibility for outcomes by focusing attention on the progression of learning.*
- *Distributed leadership of cluster activity can provide rich professional development opportunities that support professional renewal and the development of adaptive expertise.*

- *Close cluster working has provided opportunities for enhanced peer support and reciprocal learning among senior colleagues at different stages of headship.*

In addition to Learning Network Schools and cluster arrangements EAS has also been engaged in building school leadership capacity through other forms of peer working arrangements. One strand of this work was the bringing together of Headteachers to form peer review teams for school categorisation in the summer and autumn terms in 2018. Participating schools received funding of £500 per school, amounting to a total expenditure of £46,500 across the 93 schools that opted to engage with this approach as opposed the alternative of draft categorisation by the Challenge Adviser.

An evaluative survey was conducted of participating Headteachers which elicited 41 responses (44% response rate). One striking aspect of the responses was that 36 out of 39 respondents either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that *'the process of working in the peer review group had enhanced their strategic leadership and professional skills'*

In addition to the school categorisation peer review process EAS commissioned Professor Mick Waters to provide a commentary on their approach to peer working. One of Professor Waters' recommendations was that *'The skills of school evaluation and review need to be learned and developed over time and EAS should think of developing several models of peer review across the region so that those involved are taking part in an action research programme rather than a training programme. This could be a fundamental turning point for school improvement and emerging models could be a prototype for development in other regions.'*

As a result, EAS has been exploring different Peer Working Models from January 2019 through a programme entitled: *'A collaborative leadership approach to school improvement - Action research into effective models for peer working and review.'* The programme has taken the form of conducting a pilot of six models of peer working involving 44 schools. These models can be summarised as:

- Secondary School Pedagogy Programme
- Cluster Working
- Self-Chosen Existing Secondary Networks
- Raising the Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters (RADY)
- Secondary schools with common priorities
- Sharing Practice Within and Outside the Region

It is expected that each group will submit a report by the 30th June 2019 as part of an evaluation of the programme, scheduled to be completed by 10th July, which will address a number of key questions in order to shape further work on peer review:

- How effectively did each model work?
- What did we learn about the peer review process?
- How do we keep improvements going?

- In what way do head teachers need support in such programmes?
- Was the investment worth it?
- If so, what is needed in the next phase?

Switching from a centrally delivered support programme to a cluster-based approach requires switching financial resources out from the centre into schools, so that schools have the time, money and people in place to support their own improvement and improvement in other schools.

The most obvious manifestation of this, across the region, has been the increase in the rate of delegation to schools of grant funding received from the Welsh Government. The rate has increased from 89% in 2017-18 to 94% in 2018-19 resulting in an additional £2.4m being allocated directly to schools.

However, it is important to note that not only has the delegation rate increased but also the way in which it is allocated has been refined to ensure its distribution more closely reflects the commitment to support cluster working. Thus in 2018-19 some £1.5m of grant funding was allocated on a cluster basis as opposed to individual schools. This grant funding was used to provide support to a number of cluster-based approaches including:

- Looked After Children (LAC)
- Wellbeing
- More Able and Talented (MAT)
- Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

The rationale behind this is that pooling financial resources on a cluster basis can lead to more efficient use of the money. The use of LAC monies can serve as an illustration of the efficiency benefits that can be derived from a cluster-based allocation of grant money.

Historically schools were allocated circa £1,150 for every LAC pupil. Thus, in a cluster with a combined total of 30 LAC pupils, distributed unevenly across the cluster, an individual school with two LAC pupils would receive £2,300 – an amount with which they could do very little. However, allocation on a cluster basis would see the cluster receive circa £34,500 which could permit the appointment of a LAC teacher for the cluster. It is worth noting that this approach to cluster funding is entirely consistent with the recommendation to EAS in the August 2018 report on cluster working from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) to ‘*Sustain and extend funding to allow school clusters to mature and plan more effectively*’.

Effectiveness: Overall, educational outcomes are not improving at the desired rate in all schools, particularly within identified schools within the secondary phase, and this needs to be addressed through acceptance of collective responsibility and accountability to improve performance

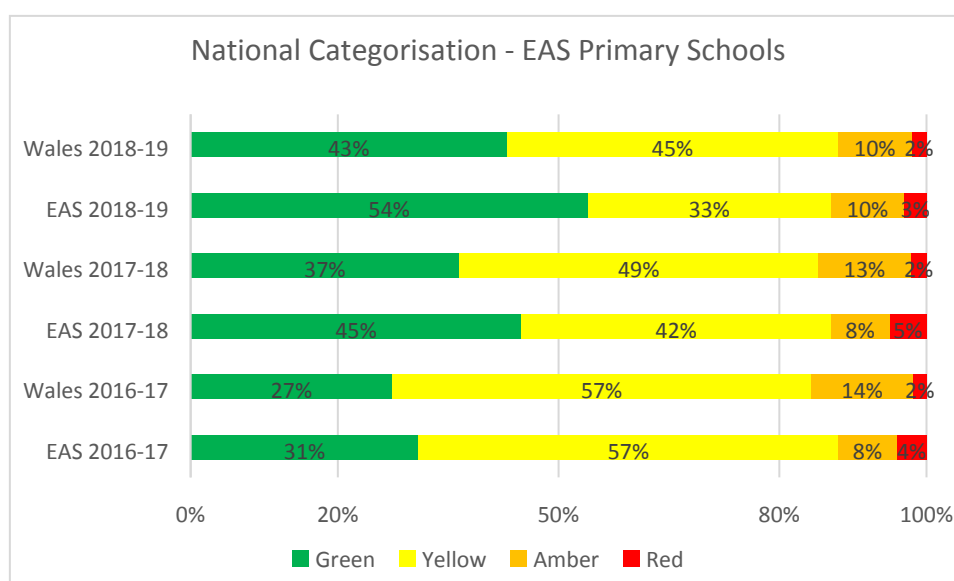
While maintaining the quality of support to schools is essential, effectiveness depends upon what this support achieves. The overriding purpose of EAS, as set out in its mission statement, is to ‘*transform the educational outcomes and life chances for all learners across South East Wales*’.

Consequently, assessment of effectiveness must relate to its contribution in bringing about this desired transformation. One approach to this assessment is to look at educational outcomes as measured by categorisation outcomes, Estyn inspection outcomes and pupil outcomes. However, it must be recognised from the outset that these outcomes cannot be achieved by any one organisation or programme of support. They require collaboration and a collective effort for which there is a collective responsibility and accountability. In relation to this report this collective responsibility and accountability extends to Welsh Government, EAS, Local Authorities and schools

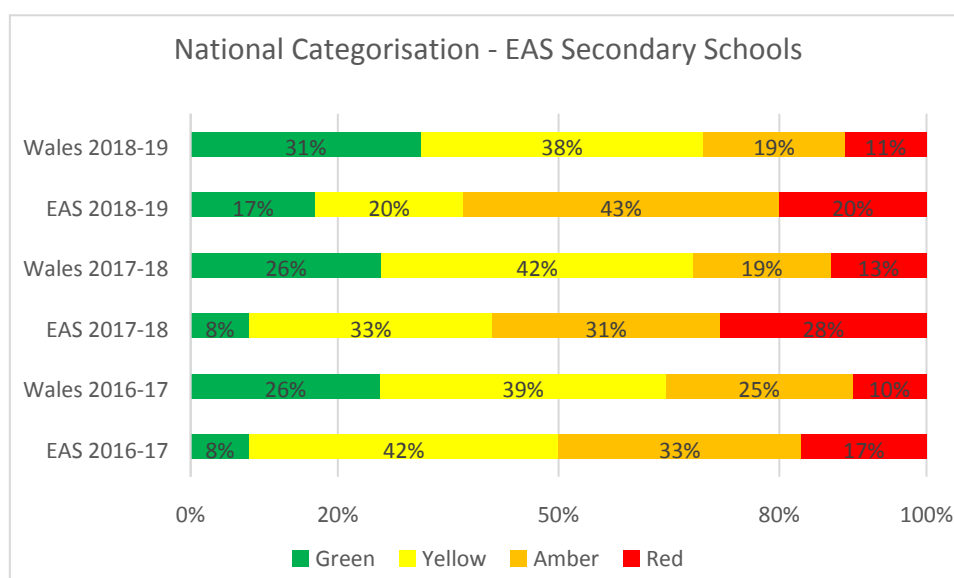
Categorisation:

The National School Categorisation System was introduced in September 2014. The system places schools into four categories green, yellow, amber and red in descending order of the amount of support they are judged to require. Thus, green schools are judged to require the least support and red schools the most support. The system is not purely data driven, it also considers the quality of leadership and teaching and learning in schools. The model was jointly constructed between Welsh Government and the four regional consortia.

The categorisation outcomes go through a rigorous moderation process that allows valid comparison to be made within the region over time and between regional and national outcomes. The picture for schools in the region is illustrated below:



The above table illustrates that the combined percentage of primary schools in the green and yellow categories has remained consistent over the last three years and is now broadly in line with the Wales average. However, within this picture of consistent performance it is worth noting that the percentage of primary schools in the green category has risen by 23 percentage points over the last three years resulting in the extent to which the percentage of green schools in the region exceeds the Wales average increasing from 4 percentage points to 11 percentage points.



The above table illustrates that the percentage of secondary schools in the green and yellow categories has fallen from 50% in 2016 to 37% in 2019. This is despite an increase from 8% to 17% for schools in the green category; an improvement that has narrowed the gap between schools in that category across the region and those across Wales. However, the gap between secondary schools in the green and yellow categories across the region and schools across Wales has widened over the three-year period.

Another measure of school improvement is Estyn inspection outcomes across the region. In September 2017 Estyn introduced a new framework for judging school performance based upon assessments across the following five categories:

- Leadership and management
- Care, support and guidance
- Teaching and learning experiences
- Well-being and attitudes to learning
- Standards of achievement

For each category school performance is judged to be either excellent, good, adequate or unsatisfactory. As part of the new framework no overall judgement is arrived at and no assessment is made of prospects for future improvement. This marked divergence from the previous approach means that valid comparisons cannot be made with past judgements. While valid historical or trend comparisons cannot yet be made it is still possible to make comparisons between the judgements arrived at across the region compared with those across Wales; and between primary schools and secondary schools.

In terms of these comparisons the following picture emerges for 2017-19 based on the inspection of 47 primary schools and 9 secondary schools:

- Of the 47 primary schools inspected, 36 were judged to be either excellent or good in every category.
- Every primary school inspected in 2018-19 was judged to be either excellent or good in terms of well-being and attitudes to learning.

- Of the 9 secondary schools inspected, 4 were judged to be either adequate or unsatisfactory in every category.
- 8 out of the 9 secondary schools were placed in a follow-up category.

While this picture of inspection outcomes is a snapshot based upon a relatively small sample, particularly in the case of secondary schools, it does serve to further highlight the differentiation in performance between primary schools and secondary schools across the region.

In addition to the support provided to maintained schools EAS also provides support to 82 Non-Maintained Settings (NMS), which provide education for children before compulsory school age, across the region. These settings are subject to inspection (formerly by Estyn and currently jointly by Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)) with judgements made about performance. Under the joint inspection regime Estyn leads on the quality and standards of education and CIW focuses on childcare, with both aspects covered in a single report. The move to joint inspection has been accompanied by a revised inspection framework that makes historical comparison or trend analysis of specific areas of provision very difficult. However, the one constant measure is the proportion of setting that are placed in a follow up monitoring category as a result of inspection. A summary of performance, based upon this measure, over the last five years is shown below:

Year	No. Inspections	No. Monitoring	%Estyn Monitoring
2014/15	21	0	0.0%
2015/16	17	1	5.9%
2016/17	12	2	16.7%
2017/18	7	1	14.3%
2018/19	12	3	25.0%
Total	69	7	10%

The table clearly shows that performance in some 90% of settings was judged to be of a standard that required no follow-up monitoring. It is also worth noting that 3 out of the 7 settings that were placed in a follow-up category have subsequently been removed meaning that only 4 or 6% of settings remain in a follow-up category.

In keeping with the EAS practice of fostering school to school support, settings who have good and excellent inspections are invited to share in network meetings; and support from one lead setting has resulted in another setting being removed from Estyn monitoring.

As stated earlier, in addition to looking at school-based measures, one fundamental indicator of effectiveness is pupil outcomes and a summary of the data relating to these outcomes is presented below.

Foundation Phase²:

² Comparison with the rest of wales is no longer possible for Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 because the Welsh Government ceased publishing benchmarking information after 2017

Regional performance in the Foundation Phase Indicator (FPI) has exceeded the all-Wales average for each of the last five years. In 2018 the gap had grown to +3.4pp – representing the largest margin achieved over the 5-year period.

The percentage of schools in 2017 placed in top 25% of similar schools (34.4%) and in the top 50% of similar schools (66.1%) for the FPI are both above expectation. The percentage of schools in the bottom 25% of schools (10.6%) is also significantly lower than expectation.

Key Stage 2:

Regional performance in the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) has also exceeded the all-Wales average for each of the last five years. In 2018 the gap was +1.2pp representing the second largest margin achieved over the 5-year period.

The percentage of schools in 2017 placed in top 25% of similar schools (31.6%) and in the top 50% of similar schools (57.3%) for the CSI are both above expectation. The percentage of schools in the bottom 25% of schools (18.2%) is also slightly lower than expectation.

Key Stage 3:

In 2018 performance in the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) was above the all-Wales average for the first time in the last 5 years. This was the result of performance across the region improving at a faster rate over the 5-year period (+9.5pp) than across Wales as a whole (+7.1pp).

The percentage of schools in 2017 placed in top 25% of similar schools (37.1%) and in the top 50% of similar schools (57.1%) for the CSI are both above expectation. The percentage of schools in the bottom 25% of schools (14.3%), is much lower than expectation.

Key Stage 4:

Performance in the Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and mathematics (L2 inc E/W and M) has been below the national average every year for the last five years. The relative gain achieved in 2017 when the gap narrowed to -1.7pp was reversed in 2018 with the gap increasing to -3.7pp which was slightly higher than the average gap over the period of -3.2pp.

The percentage of schools in 2018 for the L2 inclusive threshold, placed in top 25% of similar schools³ (20%), is lower than 2017 and lower than expectation (7 schools out of 35). The percentage of schools in the top 50% of schools is 45.7%, slightly lower than expected (16 schools), and in the bottom 25% of schools the figure of 28.6% is the same as 2017, and slightly higher than expected (10 schools).

When looking at school performance at the L2 inclusive threshold against Welsh Government Modelled Estimates⁴, nine schools in the region performed above or in line with

³ All secondary schools are placed in one of 5 Free School Meal (FSM) groupings based on the average percentage of pupils entitled to FSM over a three-year period. Similar schools are those in the same grouping, for example FSM between 10% and 15%.

⁴ Model 2b estimates show how a particular cohort of pupils would be predicted to perform in future assessments, given the prior-attainment and characteristics of pupils in the cohort

prediction. This is an improvement on 2017 when only five schools performed above modelled estimates. Five schools reported performance more than 10% below their modelled estimates and fifteen schools reported performance within 5% of their modelled estimates, either below or above.

In summary, and as illustrated in the table below, attainment at Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 has been above the national average for each of the last 5 years. Between 2015-18 over 90% of pupils across the region made the expected progress between KS2 and KS3, resulting in attainment at Key Stages 3 rising above the national average for the first time. However, attainment at KS4 remains a cause for concern.

		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Foundation Phase FPI	EAS	88.2	88.0	88.8	89.2	86.0
	Wales	85.2	86.8	87.0	87.3	82.6
KS2 CSI	EAS	87.0	88.1	89.9	90.2	90.7
	Wales	86.1	87.7	88.6	89.5	89.5
KS3 CSI	EAS	79.0	82.2	83.8	86.4	88.5
	Wales	81.0	83.9	85.9	87.4	88.1
KS4 L2 Threshold E/W/M	EAS	52.2	55.1	55.5	52.9	51.4
	Wales	55.4	57.9	60.3	54.6	55.1

In all regions there will be some schools that perform less well than others and this is something that regional consortia have to address. EAS is attempting to address the problem of underperforming schools across the region through its Schools Causing Concern (SCC) process. While both primary and secondary schools can be a cause for concern, it has to be recognised that on all outcome measures; categorisation, inspection judgements and Key Stage results, the performance of secondary schools across the region is significantly below that of primaries.

SCC are placed on the Schools Causing Concern Register which is used regularly to review the actions taken by local authorities, EAS and religious authority (as appropriate) for each school identified at risk to ensure that appropriate support and challenge has been provided to secure the necessary pace of improvement and to improve regional consistency, particularly in the use of statutory powers. Schools listed on the register are agreed by local authority Directors of Education and the EAS Managing Director. The Headteacher and Governing Body are notified in writing if their school is placed on the Schools Causing Concern Register, this letter will note the reasons why the school is included and the support that both the local authority and EAS will provide. This information will already be included on the school's support or intervention plan.

The register considers a range of criteria to identify schools at risk including:

- pace of progress against current school support or intervention plan;
- national categorisation outcomes (3-year period);

- current Estyn category (e.g. statutory category / remaining in a category for a longer than anticipated period of time);
- pupil outcomes for relevant age phase including a comparison to Welsh Government modelled estimates at KS4;
- information provided through the target setting and progress towards targets process;
- attendance (Benchmarks over a 3-year period);
- exclusions; and
- any other LA specific concerns linked to: Finance, Safeguarding, Human Resources, Additional Learning Needs.

The register is reviewed on a half termly basis by senior officers within the local authorities and EAS to ensure that levels of support and challenge are consistent. Progress of schools will also be discussed at the meetings with all Cabinet Members for Education on a termly basis. Following these meetings schools will be notified if there are any changes to their inclusion on the register or any updates regarding support.

The composition of the register as of autumn 2018 can be summarised as

- In total there are now 28 schools on the register. Of these 19 are secondary schools. This reflects both outcomes in the sector and the greater risk associated with underperformance in secondary schools.
- Of these 28 schools, 3 have been added, during the year.
- 18 schools have been removed from the register as they have made sufficient progress for their inclusion to be no longer warranted.

While the fact that the number of schools being removed exceeds the number being added is positive overall, this cannot mask concerns over secondary school performance across the region. Secondary schools account for 32 (13.5%) of the 238 schools across the region but 19 (68%) of schools on the SCC register. This means that over half (59%) of secondary schools are on the SCC register.

EAS has identified the following potential causes for underperformance at secondary school level across the region and the slow progress in addressing it:

- Agreed actions are not carried out in a timely manner by EAS and/or LA e.g. Schools Causing Concern Register actions.
- EAS and LA staff do not demonstrate a united front when dealing with schools, particularly those that give cause for concern.
- Schools are not held to account in a timely manner.
- There is not consistent application of agreed regional protocols.
- Timely consideration is not given to the use of LA Statutory Powers e.g. low standards, attendance, exclusions, leadership

- Limited impact of the work of EAS in schools where underperformance in leadership is not challenged effectively.

This list of potential inhibiting factors reinforces the earlier point that achieving better outcomes requires acceptance of collective responsibility and accountability for improving performance. This collective responsibility and accountability extend to the role of EAS, its constituent local authorities, school leaders and governors. Within this context of joint working the primary role of EAS is to provide support and challenge through the work of its Challenge Advisors and to support improvement in school leadership through its extensive programmes of professional development that are covered in more detail elsewhere in this report.

While work on SCC is included here in relation to improving outcomes it could be included in the following section on equity because, as last year's VfM report noted..... *'equity demands that all pupils are able to achieve their potential irrespective of their background, personal circumstances or the school they attend.....One of the biggest barriers to equity is variability in school performance and the aim has to be that all pupils attend a good school'*.

Equity: A comprehensive programme designed to better equip schools to support vulnerable learners has been established across the region, based upon cluster working and reinforced by the distribution of wellbeing grants to every cluster

As stated earlier, the overriding purpose of EAS, as set out in its mission statement, is to *'transform the educational outcomes and life chances for all learners across South East Wales'*. In considering equity then the crucial word in that mission statement is the word *'all'*. Equity in education has two dimensions. The first is fairness which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances, for example, gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin, should not be an obstacle to *all* learners achieving their educational potential. The second is inclusion, in other words ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for *all*.

In keeping with its mission statement to ensure equity EAS has appointed an Equity and Well-being Lead and developed a Wellbeing and Equity Strategy. This strategy sets out how it will support schools and clusters to build capacity to provide high quality support and resources to ensure all pupils have equal access and that those requiring support, receive appropriate provision.

One way in which EAS is proactively working to implement this strategy, to ensure the needs of all learners are met, is through The Cluster Wellbeing and Equity project. This project provides an opportunity for clusters to develop the Wellbeing agenda and to appoint Wellbeing leads within their own schools and within the cluster. The project involves both termly network meetings and the provision of training and is funded by EAS, based on the cluster funded formula model. This formula sets out conditions that have to be met in order for funding to be accessed, including the stipulation that the grant must be used in a sustainable way and must be focussed on developing the capacity of the cluster to implement the agreed wellbeing strategy. To date only one cluster has not engaged in the regional Wellbeing Network Meetings.

In addition to attending the Network meetings many clusters are using their Wellbeing and Equity grants to finance the release of staff to attend the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) 'train the trainer' programme. This training is designed to encourage schools to become trauma aware and to consider their provision for supporting such vulnerable learners.

Other examples of how the grants are being used to equip schools to deliver enhanced provision and support for vulnerable learners include:

- 35 schools engaging with the 'National Nurturing School Programme', including three clusters who are working together on this project. The National Nurturing Schools Programme is a programme that allows staff to develop personally and professionally whilst embedding a nurturing culture throughout their schools, enhancing teaching and learning, promoting healthy outcomes for children and young people. This is achieved by focusing on emotional needs and development as well as academic learning in a whole school environment. The programme is based on the six principles of nurture that have successfully underpinned nurture groups for over 40 years.
- 39 schools engaging with the regional Family and Community Network meetings. These have been focussed around the Welsh Government Family and Community Engagement (FaCE) toolkit. This toolkit is designed to provide practical support for schools to help them develop and strengthen their approach to FaCE. The emphasis is on engagement that helps families to actively support their child's learning, with a focus on how to engage with families of children who are currently underperforming, children from deprived backgrounds, and those receiving less support for their learning at home.
- 17 schools engaging with the Families Connect Programme, facilitated by Save the Children. Families Connect focuses on supporting parents and children to learn together. It helps parents to support their children's learning in three key areas:
 - Literacy and language development
 - Numeracy
 - Emotional development
- 39 schools engaging with, and regularly attending, the More Able and Talented (MAT) network meetings. These are focused on developing school to schoolwork by encouraging schools to lead meetings, showcasing their work and sharing the impact it has had upon their MAT learners.
- 6 MAT Learning Network Schools have been identified; three Secondary and three Primary schools. The direction of their work consists of:
 - school to school support via a self-referral system;
 - leading presentations at network meetings; and
 - participating in research work to inform future regional workings e.g. transition of more able learners, identifying 'most able' learners.

While the above serves to illustrate the extensive work being undertaken to better equip schools to support vulnerable learners it is too early in the programme to generate any longitudinal evidence of impact.

Currently, the most commonly used method for measuring the impact of poverty on attainment is the performance of pupils in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM). The percentage of pupils aged 5-15 eligible for FSM (PLASC 2018) in the region was 18.4%, which is above the Welsh average of 17.4%, and the second highest of the regional consortia, second to Central South Consortia (CSC).

FSM pupil performance across the region is adequate. Performance of both FSM and non-FSM pupils at foundation phase, key stage 2 and key stage 3 was higher than the Wales average last year, except for KS3 English and Maths, which were comparable. The gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils is narrower than the national gap at each phase. The gap widens as pupils progress through each phase.

L2 inclusive threshold performance of FSM pupils in 2018 has declined by 2.2pp since 2017 to 24.3%. In comparison, the Wales FSM average improved by 0.9pp to 29.5%, therefore the gap between FSM performance across the region and that across Wales is now 2.0pp. In terms of comparison with non-FSM pupils the gap narrowed in 2018 at KS2, KS3, but widened at FP and KS4.

Another commonly used indicator for assessing outcomes for vulnerable pupils is that of outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC). The performance of LAC learners has declined in primary schools, and remains below all pupils' performance, with the gap widening at both FP and KS2. At key stage 3 performance of LAC learners has improved considerably since 2015 and the gap between these pupils and all pupils is narrowing. Performance of LAC learners at key stage 4 between 2015 and 2018 improved for L2+ measure, but declined for core subjects, which was also mirrored by performance of non-LAC pupils. Numbers are very low across the region (between 40 and 80 pupils at each Key stage per year), so results can be volatile.

In terms of measuring the success of the EAS programme for improving support for vulnerable pupils it is too early to expect significant improvement in end of Key Stage outcomes. Given that, compared to their peers, vulnerable pupils have historically been more likely to miss school and more likely to exhibit challenging behaviour when in school, then attendance and exclusion rates might, in the short to medium term, be valid measures of success. To create a reliable evidence base for measuring success using the criteria of attendance and exclusion rates, it might be necessary to collect this information as a discrete data set based upon the identification of vulnerable pupils.

Sustainability: EAS has an agreed Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) that sets out a sustainable approach to financial management in the future and is concentrating upon preparing schools to meet the challenges of curriculum reform based upon a robust regional delivery network for professional learning that is intended to ensure that pupils needs will be met in the future and the workforce are well prepared and informed on all aspects of the reform agenda.

In the context of service provision by EAS, sustainability or spending for the long term, has two fundamental dimensions. These dimensions relate to both ensuring the availability of future resources to enable services to continue to be delivered in the longer term and ensuring that current spending is directed towards meeting future needs.

In terms of ensuring the availability of future resources to enable services to continue to be delivered EAS has engaged in a significant financial planning and management exercise to develop an agreed MTFP. The MTFP is designed to ensure that:

- A. funding priorities align with the delivery priorities of the organisation as set out in the regional school improvement business plan;
- B. services can continue to be delivered in the face of financial pressures;
- C. the risk to service delivery in the future is minimised;
- D. progress that has been made in creating a self-improving system across the region becomes embedded;
- E. the delegation rate into school budgets is maximised; and
- F. collaborative opportunities for schools are extended to enable them to meet the demands of the curriculum reform agenda.

In relation to the final bullet in the list above there is clear recognition that those charged with meeting the needs of the curriculum reform agenda will require extensive support if it is to be successfully addressed. To this end EAS has embarked upon an extensive professional leadership programme. This programme comprises:

- Curriculum reform Support Programme activity sessions to support dissemination and discussion in schools. Over 300 teachers attended the sessions and 100% of partner (non-pioneer) schools have now engaged with the Curriculum Reform Support Programme.
- The awarding of a contract to the University of Stirling to develop a Cluster-based approach to professional enquiry CCPE (Critical Collaborative Professional Enquiry). The purpose of the project is for participants to develop the skills to complete professional enquiries across their cluster that will enable teachers to alter aspects of their practice on the basis of their research and evaluate the impact on pupil learning/outcomes. 29 of 35 clusters have engaged with the project.
- Working in partnership with Welsh Government to run a series of seminars with Headteachers to explain, in an appropriate level of detail, the structure of the new curriculum and how the different structural components of the new curriculum will align.
- Engaging with regional schools in the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) development. A representative school from each LA was involved in shaping the self-review survey tool that will support schools in reviewing how well they are developing as a learning organisation. The region has representation on the National SLO Implementation group and as a result has worked closely with 10 regional pilot schools that have been trialling the latest version of the SLO snapshot survey tool. The final SLO survey tool became available to all school across Wales from the beginning of April 2019. Across the region, during the spring term, the 32 Professional

Learning cluster lead schools delivered over 40 workshops to all Headteachers and professional learning leads to enable them to prepare their own staff for engaging with the SLO survey in April 2019.

- The professional learning team has worked in partnership with schools to develop a programme to support the roll-out of the Excellence in Teaching and Leadership Framework (ETLF) for practitioners at different leadership and teaching milestones. The programmes have been designed to support individuals from Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) to Headteachers to be able to reflect against the professional teaching and leadership standards. This supports teachers in being able to identify their strengths and areas for development and, as a result, their relevant professional learning needs. The programmes also support schools in understanding how to use the frameworks to support self-evaluation and improvement planning processes and as a result, further develop staff understanding of the Professional Teaching and Leadership Standards. There has been a high level of engagement with the programme as the following summary illustrates:
 - Most schools (200+) engaged in familiarisation sessions
 - 18/21 red or amber Secondary schools are engaging with the ETLF Headteacher & Deputy Headteacher (HT/DH) professional learning programme. The schools that have not engaged to date have booked on to future cohorts.
 - 188 HT/DH participants, from 136 schools have started ETLF HT/DH programmes across 8 cohorts. Another 4 cohorts will begin at the end of spring term 2019 and run over summer term 2019. Total capacity for this programme will then have been 12 cohorts for 360 participants.
 - 32 schools are leading the ETLF professional learning programmes across the region. In addition to this, 7 schools host 'pedagogy in practice' learning visits to support the ETLF teacher programme.
 - The ETLF 'online school' has been established and contains access to completed forms for school to use to support their own self-evaluation and is used as part of the ETLF PL programmes for Headteachers.
 - An ETLF online system trial for Challenge Advisors to support them in their work began in January 2019 and was reviewed at the end of Spring term 2019.

Once again it is worth noting that this approach to developing professional leadership is entirely consistent with the recommendation to EAS in the August 2018 report on cluster working from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) to '*Continue to support the development of collaborative leadership capacity through the provision of rich professional learning opportunities and coordinated cross-network activity.*'

Conclusion:

While the report is written in discrete sections, to mirror the constituent parts of a VfM evaluation, it is important to recognise that discrete does not mean unconnected. On the contrary, achieving value for money requires delivery strands to complement and reinforce

one another to create a coherent and consistent overall approach that makes the best use of resources.

For EAS this coherence and consistency comes from its ever-evolving approach to supporting the emergence of a self-improving system based on cluster working. This approach runs as a consistent theme throughout the report as illustrated by the following examples:

- Financial underpinning through maximisation of delegation rates and remodeled approaches to cluster funding.
- The development of a Wellbeing and Equity Strategy centred around a cluster-based approach.
- The creation of Learning Schools Networks and enhanced peer working arrangements.
- A professional Leadership offer that emphasises collaboration and shared development in a cluster-based context

The above demonstrates that the approach adopted by EAS is consistently centred around attempting to create additional capacity in schools, utilise external support and research to shape service delivery, focus sharply on interventions that provide support and challenge to underperforming schools and to ensure that the demands of curriculum reform can be met in a sustainable way that does not compromise current provision. In financially constrained times, with impending major curriculum reform, this would appear to represent a very sensible use of resources.

Appendix

Pen Portrait: Rod Alcott

Rod Alcott is a former senior manager with the Wales Audit Office who has become a self-employed education and local government consultant. Between 2014 and 2016 he was appointed to two Ministerial Education Recovery Boards (Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire) and was Chair of the independently established Powys Education Recovery Board. In 2016 he was appointed to succeed Robert Hill as Chair of the Education Development Board for Cardiff. Between 2016 and 2017 he carried out two National Studies for the Welsh Government under contract to the Welsh Local Government Association. The first of these was a study into the role of School Business Managers in school improvement across Wales and the second was a study into the role of Pupil Referral Unit Management Committees across Wales.