

Welsh Audit Office (WAO)/Estyn reports. Central South Consortium Action plan
June 2015

Why did the WAO/Estyn undertake this work?

The Estyn and WAO undertook fieldwork in October 14 to January 15 to review the progress of the implementation of regional consortia working since the consortia were established in September 2012. They were specifically to look at the changes made in the implementation of the new national model for regional working which was finalised in April 2014 following Robert Hill's review of Education delivery in Wales.

For the Welsh Audit Office this was a scheduled thematic review called: 'Achieving improvement in support of schools through regional education consortia – an early view'. The WAO were looking particularly at the effectiveness of governance arrangements. Estyn were also reporting on the progress being made by consortia to provide school improvement services. Estyn were also keen to use the process to develop a framework through which consortia could be inspected. This is due out shortly and inspections of all four regional consortia will follow in the Spring/Summer of 2016. It was decided that the two reports would be developed side by side with joint fieldwork and a joint publication date.

What does this mean for Central South Consortium?

The findings from the reports are useful in determining the further improvement of the consortium and our work with schools and local authorities. Following the fieldwork by Estyn and WAO looking at the Central South region in November a number of recommendations were made, which recognised positive progress in establishing strategy and vision, engagement and relationships, self evaluation, governance and financial management and improving challenge adviser credibility. However, there were a number of areas where progress was still required which included: clarification about accountability of joint roles, development of consistent scrutiny function, smarter operational planning, more effective use of local authority annexes, effective use of the data team and clearer strategy for closing the gap.

Recommendations for Welsh Government

The majority of the recommendations made refer to action to be taken by the Welsh Government.

The Welsh Audit Office recommendations for Welsh Government were:

R1: To clarify the nature and operation of consortia.

- R2: To focus on outcomes through medium term planning
- R3: To develop more collaborative relationships for the school improvement system
- R4: To build effective leadership and attract top talent
- R5: To improve the effectiveness of governance and management of regional consortia

Estyn recommended that Welsh Government should:

- R8: Improve its strategy to develop senior leaders and managers for education at local authority and regional consortia level.
- R9: Work more collaboratively with consortia and local authorities to agree short and medium term business plans and reduce requests to change and add to plans mid year
- R10: Ensure school categorisation is rigorously moderated across the consortium
- R11: Develop an agreed understanding between teachers, schools, local authorities, regional consortia and Welsh Government about the purpose and use of attainment targets
- R12: Engagement more effectively with Diocesan authorities in developing its strategy for school improvement.
- R13: Ensure that consortia, local authorities and diocesan authorities are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities for schools in the Schools Challenge Cymru programme.

Recommendations for consortia and local authorities

The actions recommended to be taken by authorities and consortia are listed below. We have set out the action that is in place or being taken, or where more needs to be done.

Recommendation	Underway /already in Business plan?	Action	Who	When by
WAO recommendations				
R1 Local authorities should clarify whether consortia services are jointly provided or are commissioned services (services provided under	Yes	Legal agreement and governance statement already confirm that CSC is a joint partnership. This arrangement is confirmed by the	N/A	N/A

joint-committee arrangements are jointly provided services and are not commissioned services).		appointment of joint roles across most authorities this year representing partnership working in action.		
R2 As any possible local authority re-organisation will not be fully implemented until 2020, the Welsh Government and regional consortia should develop three-year plans for the further development, scope, and funding of regional consortia linked to appropriate strategic objectives.	Yes	Business plan has a three year vision already – LAs to work with WG to agree three year budgets and to develop future planning to cover the period up to 2020	Directors	Ahead of new business planning round – January 2016
R3 Regional consortia should develop improved arrangements for sharing practice and supporting efficiency (for example, one consortium could take the lead on tackling an issue or have functional responsibility for the development of a policy).	Yes	CSC leading on regional consortia practice sharing event in September, already sharing practice in 14-19 and welsh medium sector. Develop joint event with EAS/ERW around CtG	HW	September
R4 Local authorities should collaborate to support the professional development of senior leaders and to ensure appropriate performance management arrangements are in place for senior leaders.	Yes	ADEW developing CPD programme for senior leaders from September	ADEW	September
To improve the effectiveness of governance and management of regional consortia Whilst continuing progress is being made, we found that regional consortia have not yet developed fully effective governance and financial management arrangements (paragraphs 3.2 to 3.36). We therefore recommend that local authorities and their regional consortia should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve their use of self-evaluation of their performance and governance arrangements and use this to support 	Yes	Self-evaluation in CSC was recognised as honest and effective in feedback. Start new SER round in September across organisation. Strengthen further the links between the outcomes of self-evaluation and business planning especially where this relates to governance and performance management Commence evaluation deep dives into areas of risk/development using capacity within the organisation.	RH	New SER to be presented to JC in December

business planning and their annual reviews of governance to inform their annual governance statements (also mentioned by Estyn);				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve performance management including better business planning, use of clear and measurable performance measures, and the assessment of value for money (also mentioned by Estyn); 	Yes	<p>New operational plan and dashboard to be in place August 15 with sharp performance measures and monitoring</p> <p>VfM review underway Sept-December to review benchmark spending in CSC vs outcomes by region and LA and identify areas of improvement – to be presented to all scrutiny cttees.</p> <p>Evaluation of impact to be made more prominent in the monitoring of progress in year against in house work plans for each of the key headline priorities</p>	LB	<p>September</p> <p>December</p> <p>Termly</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make strategic risk management an integral part of their management arrangements and report regularly at joint committee or board level (also mentioned by Estyn); 	Yes	Risk management already recognised in Estyn rept in CSC – review risk register termly	HW	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop their financial management arrangements to ensure that budgeting, financial monitoring and reporting cover all relevant income and expenditure, including grants funding spent through local authorities; 	Yes	CSC recognised as good financial management through fieldwork. Continue to work with LA finance teams, review audit arrangements in each LA and complete VFM exercise above	LB	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop joint scrutiny arrangements of the overall consortia as well as scrutiny of performance by individual authorities, which 	No	<p>NEW: Review case for joint scrutiny?</p> <p>Produce information about consortia for Members and offer information sessions for</p>	<p>LAs</p> <p>HW/Las</p>	By December

may involve establishment of a joint scrutiny committee or co-ordinated work by local authority scrutiny committees;		Members across region. Implement a consistent approach to the information about schools' performance annually when reporting to scrutiny -	CS/HW	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure the openness and transparency of consortia decision making and arrangements; 	Yes	CSC recognised for transparency and clear decision taking/records by Estyn/WAO		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognise and address any potential conflicts of interest; and where staff have more than one employer, regional consortia should ensure lines of accountability are clear and all staff are aware of the roles undertaken; and 	No	Review senior CA JD and accountability model and publish –make expectation about the role clear through the amendments and the accountability explicit Develop policy for consultants	RH LB	October
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop robust communications strategies for engagement with all key stakeholders. 	Yes	CSC recognised as having broad communications strategy		
Estyn recommendations (not duplicated by the above)				
<p>R1 Improve performance management arrangements by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> capturing, sharing and using data (from pupil level up) efficiently and effectively monitoring the progress of pupils and schools regularly tightly managing the individual performance of their staff 	No Yes	<p>Develop pupil level data sharing model Strengthen the data and analyses about the performance of specific groups. Move towards pupil level target setting. Revise guidance and expectations so that the relationship between pupil level targets and overall targets is clear in the approach taken by schools and in the region</p> <p>PM model already in place – review and tighten monitoring in dashboard</p>	CS LB	Business plan by September

R2 Secure greater consistency in the quality of challenge advisers' evaluations of schools, particularly in relation to teaching and leadership	Yes	Review framework and associated guidance. Include a focus on expectations about and characteristics of good and excellent leadership in challenge adviser development programme. Address evaluative writing skills in relation to leadership in the development programme and continue quality assurance of writing.	RH	July
R3 Improve the quality and range of support for schools and in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o develop clearer strategies for maximising the potential of school-to-school support o provide or broker better support for teaching and learning in non-core subject areas 	Yes	School to school strategies in place – reviewing impact and sharing best practice Non core subject areas are not part of core role of CSC – will review potential for school led model and funding through pioneer model	AS LM/SD	
R4 Develop clearer strategies to address the impact of deprivation upon education outcomes and ensure that all actions are coherent in this purpose	Yes	New post in structure from April. CSC PDG guidance issued to schools in May. CtG strategy to be reviewed and shared more widely	HD/ME	September
R5 Involve diocesan authorities effectively in the strategic planning and evaluation of regional services	No	Set up regular meetings – consider case for involving in Advisory board	HW	September