

<b>Institution:</b> Cardiff University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Education (23)		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Reshaping the effective delivery of early years and primary education in Wales		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013 – 2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Taylor, Chris Power, Sally	Professor Professor	01/08/2012 – present 01/06/2004 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 01/07/2011 – 31/12/2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Mixed-method evaluations led by the Cardiff team improved the delivery and effectiveness of early years and primary education in Wales by providing evidence-based recommendations on the new Foundation Phase curriculum. These were adopted by the Welsh Government and applied in all schools and nurseries. For example, an additional £1M was invested by the Welsh Government to develop the skills of Foundation Phase staff, new guidance materials were developed for policymakers and early years education teachers, and ambitious new targets were developed to close the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils across Wales.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The Welsh Government's Foundation Phase covers the teaching and learning of all three- to seven-year-olds in maintained primary schools and funded non-maintained pre-school settings. Its radical new curriculum moved away from formal, competency-based approaches and introduced a pedagogical approach focused on developmental, experiential and active learning. Following the roll-out (2004 to 2011), Cardiff University undertook three independent mixed methods research evaluations on the Foundation Phase. This included a Welsh Government-funded three-year independent evaluation of the Foundation Phase conducted between 2011 and 2015 [3.1, 3.2, G3.1]. It is one of the largest evaluations of a new education curriculum ever conducted in the UK [3.1].</p>		
<b>2.1 Evaluating the Foundation Phase</b>		
<p>The evaluation was led by Taylor and a Cardiff team with specialist expertise in education policy, evaluations, analysis of large-scale data, and complex research designs. The team was supported by a small number of researchers from four other UK universities for supplementary expertise in economic modelling and outdoor education in the early years.</p>		
<p>Cardiff's methodology included analysis of national administrative data, surveys, and systematic classroom observations in 51 randomly selected case study schools and pre-school settings across Wales. The evaluation collected data from a range of different stakeholders, including policymakers, headteachers, lead practitioners, classroom teachers and teaching assistants, hundreds of Year 2 pupils, and over 1,000 parents and carers [3.3].</p>		
<p>The evaluation used two approaches for assessing the impact of the Foundation Phase. The first was the innovative use of a stepped wedge design, utilising the phased roll-out of the Foundation Phase so that levels of attainment for pupils of the same age (7- and 11-year-olds) could be compared between schools that had introduced the new curriculum during early stages with other schools. The second approach was based on pupil-level systematic observations in schools. This identified the extent to which schools were implementing the new curriculum and pedagogies. Pupil attainment was compared between schools based on levels of implementation [3.1, 3.2, 3.4].</p>		

Key findings included:

- Pupils in schools with high levels of implementation had a greater likelihood of achieving the Foundation Phase Indicator at age 7 [3.1, 3.4].
- Schools with high levels of implementation saw higher rates of school attendance throughout primary school and a greater proportion of pupils achieving Level 4+ in KS2 English [3.1, 3.4].
- The Foundation Phase increased levels of attainment for particular groups of pupils, such as those eligible for free school meals, but there was no evidence that it reduced previous inequalities in attainment [3.2, 3.5].
- There was a positive association between the Foundation Phase and greater levels of observed pupil involvement and wellbeing [3.1].

## 2.2 Improving the Foundation Phase

The research concluded that the Foundation Phase had been successful and that its approach and design should be continued and supported by Welsh Government [3.1]. The research also focussed on processes of implementation and delivery. This included the advantages, disadvantages and use of the additional funding and resources made available for the Foundation Phase, the official guidance materials, and practitioner training materials [3.6]. It also examined the attitudes of practitioners, pupils, and parents towards the Foundation Phase. This important aspect of the research generated 29 formal recommendations for the further development of the Foundation Phase [3.4], including:

- Parents and carers need more information and involvement in the role of statutory literacy and numeracy assessments in Year 2 of the Foundation Phase alongside the emphasis on more first-hand, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences for their children.
- Teachers need practical advice on implementing the Literacy and Numeracy Framework within the Foundation Phase, including more emphasis on different pedagogical approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy.
- There is a need for increased training: Greater emphasis on the Foundation Phase within Initial Teacher Education courses and other professional courses; compulsory training modules for all head teachers and Foundation Phase teachers; training for KS2 teachers to help with the transition from Foundation Phase to KS2; the Welsh Government should undertake a follow-up process evaluation of the original case study schools in five years' time; consider further research on the impact of the Foundation Phase on particular low-achieving pupil groups; and ensure there is ongoing monitoring of the quality of provision.
- Funding should continue to be provided to ensure improvement of Foundation Phase learning environments.

Through these recommendations, Cardiff's evaluation provided the key evidence-base for the Welsh Government to further enhance and develop the Foundation Phase.

## 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Taylor, C., Rhys, M. and Waldron, S. (2016) Implementing curriculum reform in Wales: the case of the Foundation Phase, *Oxford Review of Education*, 42 (3), 299-315. DOI:10.1080/03054985.2016.1184872

[3.2] Taylor, C., Joshi, H. and Wright, C. (2014) Evaluating the impact of early years educational reform in Wales to age seven: the potential use of the UK Millennium Cohort Study, *Journal of Education Policy*, 30, 5, 688-712. DOI:10.1080/02680939.2014.963164.

[3.3] Taylor, C., Maynard, T., Davies, R., Waldron, S., Rhys, M., Power, S., Moore, L., Blackaby, D. and Plewis, I. (2016) *Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Technical Report, Social*

Research No. 38/2016, Cardiff: Welsh Government. <https://orca.cf.ac.uk/92118/1/160620-foundation-phase-technical-report-en.pdf>

**[3.4] Taylor, C.,** Maynard, T., Davies, R., Waldron, S. Rhys, M., **Power, S.,** Moore, L., Blackaby, D. and Plewis, I. (2015) *Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Final Report, Social Research No. 25/2015*, Cardiff: Welsh Government. <https://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2015/150514-foundation-phase-final-en.pdf>

**[3.5] Power, S. and Taylor, C.** (2018) How child-centered education favours some learners more than others, *Review of Education*, DOI:10.1002/rev3.3137.

**[3.6] Maynard, T., Taylor, C.,** Waldron, S., Rhys, M., Smith, R., **Power, S.** and Clement, J. (2013) *Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Policy Logic Model and Programme Theory, Social Research No. 37/2012*, Cardiff: Welsh Government. <https://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/130318-evaluating-foundation-phase-policy-logic-model-programme-theory-en.pdf>

#### Selected grant:

**[G3.1]** Taylor, C. (PI) *Evaluating the Foundation Phase*, Welsh Government, 11/08/12 to 27/02/15, £850,103

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Cardiff's evaluation of the new Foundation Phase curriculum demonstrated that Wales' flagship early years education policy was improving children's educational achievement, wellbeing, and involvement. Acting on this evaluation and the research team's accompanying recommendations, the Welsh Government agreed to continue to develop and enhance the Foundation Phase. The breadth and scale of the Foundation Phase – it universally applies to all primary schools and funded non-maintained settings across Wales – means that this decision has an important impact on all young learners. The Welsh Government also subsequently began a complete overhaul of the school curriculum for all learners up to age 16 that follows the principles and pedagogies of the Foundation Phase.

##### 4.1 Improving delivery and effectiveness of the Foundation Phase

All 29 research-led recommendations from Cardiff's evaluation were formally accepted by the Minister for Education, Huw Lewis AM in a Ministerial Statement (19 May 2015). Noting that the independent evaluation was undertaken by the team at Cardiff University, he thanked the researchers for their “*extremely robust and comprehensive approach*” and their “*continuing support and vigour in delivering a successful early education experience for our youngest learners*” **[5.1]**.

The Welsh Government established the Foundation Phase Expert Panel to coordinate implementation of the recommendations from the research. Lewis confirmed in his statement that the evaluation “*urges the Welsh Government to continue to develop and enhance the Foundation Phase. So, I have set up a group of experts to support this process. The group's work has to be based on evidence, and the evaluation report and its 29 key recommendations will be a key element*” **[5.1]**.

##### 4.2 Implementation of improvements

This led to a Foundation Phase Action Plan **[5.2]** in November 2016, developed under the guidance of the Expert Panel. It was described by the Minister for Lifelong Learning as “*[setting] out key actions for aspects on which research has shown us we need to focus*” **[5.3]**.

The plan's 34 short-, medium- and long-term action points were organised under four headings, all of which were identified as recommendations in Cardiff's evaluation: curriculum and assessment, professional learning, narrowing gaps in attainment, and regulation and inspection.

Action points directly corresponding to recommendations from the research included a requirement for Estyn, the school inspectorate in Wales, to have “*an appropriate inspection focus on the implementation of the Foundation Phase*” **[5.2]**. The plan also formally recognises

eleven 'pedagogical principles' for the successful delivery of the Foundation Phase. Each of these principles corresponds directly to pedagogical elements identified by the research and recommended in the evaluation as the basis for future training and development. The use of these principles has further been central to the development of the new curriculum in Wales.

#### 4.3 Increased funding, training and resources

Over a third of the research recommendations focussed on future training needs and all of these are included in the Action Plan. The Welsh Government announced a significant uplift of £1M, an investment to help *“develop the skills of those who teach the Foundation Phase, create new training opportunities and ensure there is consistency across Wales”* (Minister for Lifelong Learning, May 2018) [5.4].

This included the establishment of the Foundation Phase Excellence Network (of which Taylor is a member). This Network aims to strengthen the links between stakeholders involved in professional learning; use international and local evidence to develop professional learning; and improve children's experiences of the Foundation Phase. The Minister for Education Kirsty Williams stated that *“this new Foundation Phase network will support workforce and leadership development, boost the research capacity of the education profession in Wales and ensure that implementation of the Foundation Phase happens in a consistent and effective manner... This development goes to the heart of what our national mission and the new curriculum is about – raising standards, reducing the attainment gap and delivering an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence”* [5.5].

The research had an impact on practitioners and policymakers through engagement activities and the work of the Network. Its direct relevance was shown at a one-day Practitioner Conference (May 2016, Cardiff) to share key findings. Of the 78 participants (representing 60 different establishments, including schools, settings, and local authorities from across all four regional consortia in Wales), 100% agreed that the content was relevant to their needs (50% strongly agreed) and that resources provided would be useful in their practice [5.6].

Accessible resources developed by the Network include an online hub [5.7] with information, case studies and evidence-based content for all Foundation Phase practitioners. To date, 66 new online resources (including 29 case studies) have been developed for the Network. Case studies have been viewed 46,421 times to date and, of those that have been reviewed by users, 85% are rated 5\* [5.7]. Schools and teachers benefit in a variety of ways. For example, a federation of three schools in Carmarthenshire uses the hub to plan the curriculum, ensure consistency across the Foundation Phase, reduce teachers' planning workloads, and share best practice and strategies. The hub also enables the use of joint scrutiny spreadsheets to monitor the quality of teaching and learning – *“scrutiny of work across the Federation ensures consistent standards for Foundation Phase learners”* [5.7a].

The need for increased investment in this area also led the Welsh Government to extend the Pupil Development Grant (a resource allocated to schools on the basis of the number of Free School Meal pupils they have) to equivalent 3–5-year-olds in the Foundation Phase. Named the Early Years Pupil Development Grant, in 2020-21 the budget for this was £15.2M [5.7b].

#### 4.4 Ensuring quality of progress is maintained: further research and evaluation

One of the key findings from the research was that the Foundation Phase had little impact on addressing known systematic inequalities amongst particular groups of pupils. The research suggests that child-centred and experiential approaches to learning could actually be detrimental to such children [3.1], so key recommendations focused on investigating this further. This led to three developments:

- An ambitious national target to close the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils during the Foundation Phase – 80% of learners aged 7 eligible for free school meals (FSM pupils) to achieve the expected level by the end of the Foundation Phase by 2017 [5.8a]. This target was not met but the percentage of FSM pupils achieving the Foundation Phase Indicator (FPI) increased from 66.2% in 2012 to 75.9% in 2017 [5.8b].

- A national school categorisation system **[5.9]** was introduced in 2014 that required schools to report the attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils in the Foundation Phase **[5.9]**. This categorisation system helps schools determine their priorities and the level of support they require from local and national governments.
- A new Welsh Government-funded research project investigating the impact of the current major curriculum reform (for all 5–16-year-olds) in Wales on disadvantaged learners (September 2017 to February 2019) **[5.10]**. This research identified the demands the new curriculum will place on material and human resources and the risks of increasing flexibility for disadvantaged learners.

Another recommendation was to provide ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the Foundation Phase, and the Cardiff team is involved in further monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations. These developments are ensuring that quality of progress is maintained.

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

**[5.1]** Statement – Evaluating the Foundation Phase (Huw Lewis AM, Minister for Education and Skills, 19 May 2015 16:39, Record of Proceedings)

**[5.2]** Welsh Government (2016) *Foundation Phase Action Plan*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

**[5.3]** Written statement – Publishing the Foundation Phase Action Plan (Alun Davies AM, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, 7 November 2016)

**[5.4]** Announcement by Kirsty Williams AM, Minister for Education and Alun Davies, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, 18 May 2017

**[5.5]** Minister for Education launches new Foundation Phase Excellence Network

**[5.6]** ESRC IAA funding report for the Foundation Phase Conference

**[5.7]** **a.** Foundation Phase Excellence Network (FPEN) zone and case study demonstrating how a federation of three schools uses Hwb to improve consistency across the Foundation Phase **b.** Welsh Government allocation of the Early Years Pupil Development Grant 2020-21

**[5.8]** **a.** Written statement – Setting the revised target for the difference in attainment at the end of Foundation Phase (Huw Lewis AM, Minister for Education and Skills, 10 December 2015) **b.** Welsh Government statistics showing achievement of the Foundation Phase Indicator by pupils eligible for Free School Meals, 2012 and 2017

**[5.9]** National school categorisation system for Wales

**[5.10]** Power, S., Newton, N. and Taylor, C. (2020), 'Successful futures' for all in Wales? The challenges of curriculum reform for addressing educational inequalities. *The Curriculum Journal*, 31: 317-333. doi:10.1002/curj.39