

Evidence base for the National Professional Learning Model for Wales

Area of work: Area 4 - The national Professional Learning offer, and allocation of time

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Research questions

1) How is time allocated to professional learning in comparable, high-performing systems?

2) How is successful professional learning for teachers currently being conceptualised and modelled? What do these models imply for the allocation of time?

Methodology

In order to answer these research questions, the methodology consisted of the following strands:

1. An analysis of the policies relating to time allocation for professional learning in countries within the OECD: Finland, Singapore, Sweden, Netherlands, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, UK and the USA. These countries/ territories were chosen based on: performance in PISA 2015; membership of the Atlantic Rim Collaboratory; availability of English-medium documentation.
2. A literature review of evidence of the effectiveness of professional learning approaches in these countries/territories, focusing on the study-time allocated for professional learning. This was followed by a literature review of recent peer-reviewed studies of professional learning focusing on the same countries/ territories, identified using academic search engines.
3. Exploration of the operation of policy through informal research with some practitioners in the countries or regions identified.

Findings RQ1

The countries/ regions surveyed use the following strategies to allocate time for professional learning in a variety of combinations:

- Specified days across the school year for teachers to engage in professional learning, generally with pupils absent;
- Specified number of hours which the teacher is expected to fulfil, beyond their regular workload allocation;
- Specified number of hours which the teacher is expected to fulfil, demarcated within their workload allocation;
- Notional weekly allocation of hours, within a broader range of non-contact duties;
- Various grants, with allocation of time included, that teachers can bid/ apply for.

In addition, most of the systems listed above develop an expression of vision and values regarding professional learning that implies that teachers will continue to allocate time to professional learning themselves, within their professional duties, above and beyond any systemic, centralised specification.

Findings RQ2

Across the literature, professional learning is conceptualised in five overlapping ways. The differing implications for the allocation of time are summarised as follows:

Emphasised aspect of professional learning	Key implication for the allocation of time
Professional learning as a disposition or professional behaviour	Allocating time away from existing professional duties may give teachers more opportunities to engage continuously in professional learning. However, demarcating non-contact time as 'professional learning time' may undermine the notion that teachers should <i>always</i> be learning and developing their practice.
Professional learning as bespoke individualised opportunity	Allocating time for professional learning should allow teachers the space to take ownership of the shape and scope of their professional learning.
Professional learning as collaborative endeavour	Allocating time for professional learning should enhance the possibilities for collaborative learning to take place within and between schools.
Professional learning as network of opportunities	Allocating time for professional learning would give teachers more space to reflect upon the learning options that are available to them, to research possibilities that suit their particular needs and to share their experiences with others
Professional learning as high status opportunity (but as limited resource)	Time allocations are already a feature of this model of professional learning, but they would only be available to a proportion/ selection of teachers.

Conclusions

School systems could consider adopting a variety of strategies, in terms of allocating time to professional learning, with each having implications for equity, quality and professional culture:

