

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Background

This report presents the findings of a survey on the research activity, experience and needs of staff working in the field of education in Wales. Since democratic devolution in 1999, the Welsh Government has developed an ambitious and distinctive reform agenda, which needs to be underpinned by a strong evidence base and the capacity to undertake rigorous evaluations into the success (or otherwise) of the successive policies that have been implemented. However, while the need for research on education in Wales has increased, it has not been matched by a growing education research community. Indeed, there have been ongoing concerns about a real decline in the volume and quality of educational research being undertaken in Wales – evidenced by successive research assessment exercises.

In order to evaluate the level of research activity that may not be picked up by research assessment exercises, and to provide some insights into why there is such an apparently low level of research activity in Welsh universities, WISERD Education undertook a questionnaire survey of academics working in the field. The survey received over one hundred responses and included academics from each higher education institution in Wales.

Key findings

Self-reported levels of research activity indicate that *there are significant amounts of research going on 'under the radar' of research assessment activities*. Only five percent of respondents claimed to be not engaged with research at all. The majority of respondents undertake research with their students and partner schools and almost half reported that they wrote and published for academic audiences.

There also appears to be a *relatively high level of grant-seeking for research*, with around 40 percent of respondents reporting that they had received external funding for research. Funding applications were most commonly made to the Welsh Government, but over one in ten had sought funding from the Economic and Social Research Council.

There was also *a significant level of collaboration for research*, with two thirds of respondents reporting collaboration. Not surprisingly, most respondents reported collaborating with colleagues in the same department, but over one third of those involved in some form of collaboration reported doing this with academics in other universities in the UK, and almost as many (29 percent) with international collaborators.

There is also evidence of a *strong commitment to research*. The overwhelming majority (90 percent) felt that research activity was important for improving the quality of teacher education and most (79 percent) would like to be more research active than they currently are.



Despite this commitment to research, the survey also revealed that academic staff in the field of education in Wales face *significant barriers in developing their research activities*. The barriers most commonly cited include heavy teaching and administrative loads, as well as lack of confidence and experience.

It is evident that *there are low levels of time allocated to research*. Over one quarter of respondents were on 'teaching and scholarship' pathways, where there is no formal allocation of time for research. But even amongst those respondents with a designated research remit, only 16 percent reported having an allocation of more than one day per week, and nearly one quarter claimed that they had *no* time set aside of research, despite this being part of their contract.

While time pressures are experienced by many academics, *time pressures seem particularly acute for those involved in initial teacher education*, which includes just under one half (48 percent) of our respondents. Qualitative data indicate that the longer term times associated with initial teacher education courses, the demands of school visits and the pressures of Estyn inspections make finding time for research very difficult.

In terms of confidence and experience, there appears to be *relatively low levels of specialist research expertise*. For 80 percent of respondents, working in higher education was their second career. And while the majority held some form of post-graduate qualification, and 40 percent had a PhD, these qualifications were not necessarily in fields that would have contributed to the development of research skills. While the majority had received continuing professional development, very little of this related to research training.

There also appears to be *relatively limited levels of institutional support for research*. While the overwhelming majority (86 percent) reported that their university encouraged them to be research active, the levels of investment seem quite low. While there was funding for conferences, 40 percent of respondents reported that there were no other funds to support them. Over two thirds (70 percent) reported that they were not able to take study leave, and one third (33 percent) indicated that there was no provision for research mentoring. Qualitative data indicate that many respondents feel that research is not a priority for their institution.

There are also indications that *structural changes within higher education in general and initial teacher education in particular have created additional pressures*. Respondents comment on the turbulence that has resulted from the institutional restructuring associated with recent mergers.

Despite the scale of challenges, the survey does indicate some avenues that could be explored in order to support research without placing too many demands on institutions. *Research mentoring could be more strongly developed* than it is at the moment. Expectations for the development of research collaborations could be built into conference funding. Internal research groups and seminars seem to be under-utilised and it would be worth exploring why this is the case. Finally, it would seem that most effective time allocation for research is not study leave but shorter and more frequent allocations of time. It may be possible for these to be arranged on a reciprocal basis between individuals.



Conclusion

This research indicates that there is still an active research community in the field of education in Wales, despite its lack of visibility in research assessment exercises. It also finds high levels of support for the role of research in relation to teacher education and a desire for greater engagement with research. While this might suggest that the situation in Wales may not be as bad as some have feared, it does not mean there are not real grounds for concern. The current level of research activity appears to be precarious and may not be sustainable in the future. Respondents outline a number of barriers they face in undertaking research and point to a serious shortfall in infrastructural investment in educational research.

Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that the kind of research which is being undertaken addresses the educational (research) priorities of the Welsh Government, for instance, in relation to literacy, numeracy and inequalities. Neither does it tend to involve the kind of school-based pedagogical research proposed in the 2014 Furlong Review.

Clearly, there are a number of challenges that need to be confronted. These relate not only to institutional priorities, but also to issues of expertise and experience in research and the role of research in teacher education. The report concludes that it is important that these issues are addressed – not only to ensure that universities in Wales can make an important contribution to the development of the Welsh education system, but also that academics in the field can benefit from the advantages that research career development can bring.



1. Background

Since democratic devolution in 1999, the Welsh Government has been developing a series of reforms that are increasingly divergent from those in place in England (see, for example, Rees 2005; Power 2016). These policies have been developed on an explicit commitment to pursue evidence-based rather than ideologically driven agendas. Matthew Quinn, then Head of Policy for the Welsh Government, claimed that:

Devolution presents distinct opportunities for evidence-based working, linked to the aspirations for devolution itself. The relatively manageable scale of Wales creates opportunities to deliver approaches to evidence much more closely attuned to the particular needs of policy makers and citizens. It offers too the prospect of achieving a greater sense of common purpose to solve problems – between the different tiers of government and between the public, private and voluntary sectors. Wales also has the chance to develop a greater capacity for addressing cross cutting issues, taking account, and promoting better understanding, of the interactions between different policies. Taken together, these give considerable scope for innovation in areas such as evaluation and analysis. (Quinn 2002: 29-30)

The importance of research evidence for education policy in particular – one of the key areas of devolved responsibility for the Welsh Government – was given especial prominence in order to ‘give clear demonstrations of the quantitative and qualitative return on Assembly investment’ (NAfW 2001: 11). However, despite these strong pronouncements about the need for significant amounts of robust evidence, there have been a number of concerns expressed over the years about the volume and quality of educational research being conducted in Wales.

Of course it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure the amount research activity in education across the system as a whole because it is undertaken in a variety of different settings – schools, local authorities and government agencies to name but a few. However, in terms of the academic sector, Welsh universities have arguably seriously ‘underperformed’. As Rees and Power (2007) illustrate, successive research assessment exercises suggest that the quality and volume of educational research in Wales has been declining in Wales. In the early and mid-1990s, there were around 100 staff deemed to be sufficiently ‘research active’ to have academic outputs that could be submitted for evaluation. However, by 2001, the figure had fallen to fewer than 80 staff – a decline of 25 percent over a five year period. In 2008, only 37 education researchers had academic outputs that were submitted to the research assessment exercise, for which Wales received an overall funding allocation of only £217,000. Indeed, the Chair of the Education Subpanel, in her subject overview, drew attention to the decrease in the number of research active staff returned in Wales and the ‘low average quality profile for Welsh institutions’. By the time of the next assessment exercise, REF2014, things appeared to have deteriorated even further, with only one Welsh university making an education submission, a submission which included only 21 staff.

The implications of this decline in university-based research are complex. Although evidence and evaluation does not necessarily need to be carried out in higher education institutions, as Richardson (2002) outlines, it is university-based researchers who have contributed most



significantly to the practice of educational research in the UK over the last century. This has also been true of Wales (Webster 1982; Thomas 1992).

However, it could be argued that the profile of research as measured by research assessment exercises is not a reliable indicator of levels of research activity – and particularly the kind of research which governments need. Additionally, the apparent decline over time may be less about the actual amount of research being undertaken and more about changes in the assessment exercises. The criteria for ‘grading’ outputs have not only changed over time, but have become more differentiated at the ‘top end’. There is also an increased emphasis given to esteem, infrastructure and environment.

Because of the significance of research assessment exercises for the prestige (and to a lesser extent, funding) of universities, many take very strategic decisions about submissions. As a number of analyses of the 2014 RAE have shown (e.g. Jump 2015), many institutions were highly selective in terms of which researchers they returned so that they could maximise their position in quality rankings. Their decisions will be informed by a number of factors. For example, many institutions do not submit where there are low numbers of staff – or staff working in the broad area of education, but not actually located in education departments. In addition, we should also be wary of presuming that decisions not to submit individuals because they fail to reach some kind of quality threshold means that their research is of low quality. Many HEIs chose to use 3* as the minimum threshold for individual outputs. This would exclude ‘excellent’ research that was deemed to be 2* and 1* - research that is of a quality that is ‘recognised internationally’ and ‘recognised nationally’ in terms of originality, significance and rigour’. It may be that these are just the kinds of outputs that are really important for providing an evidence and evaluation base for the Welsh Government and teacher education.



2. A survey of research activity, experience and barriers

In order to gain a more accurate and nuanced picture of the actual level of educational research in higher education institutions in Wales, we undertook a nationwide survey. The survey was designed to fulfil a number of functions. In addition to providing a more accurate picture about the level of research activity in Wales than can be provided by research assessment exercises, we wanted to undertake a bench-marking exercise in order to measure progress in the event of the more systemic attempts to improve research capacity in educational research, as outlined in the Furlong Review *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers* (Welsh Government 2014). We also hoped that we would gather more insights into the barriers to research so that we might better identify strategies to support colleagues across Wales.

The on-line survey (Appendix 1) contained questions on:

- Contracts and responsibilities
- Research activity and aspirations
- University support for research
- Engagement with the education research community

It was distributed to a database of those we deemed to be working in the field of education in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Wales. Indeed, this in itself represents one of the challenges of undertaking research on educational research in general – finding and identifying the population. There are some HEIs where there is no separate department of education – as with Cardiff. There are some HEIs with departments where members of staff may not appear on institutional websites. We tried to identify as many as possible – but we will certainly have missed some who may be doing work on educational topics in a range of other departments, such as medicine and health.

The survey was distributed in English and Welsh in December 2015 and then re-circulated in April 2016. It was also redistributed through UCET Cymru in order to ensure it reached any further members who had not received it first time round.

The respondents

Because it is difficult to identify the population of those academics working in the field of education, it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the response rate. The original email distribution list contained 444 names – however, we have no way of knowing whether these individuals were still working or considered themselves to be educational researchers – something which is likely to be a particular issue in multi-disciplinary departments.

The survey eventually elicited received 125 responses (120 for the English version and 5 to the Welsh version). However, these included one clear duplicate (which we have removed) and 23 partial responses. We removed any duplicates and returns with less than 50 percent of the survey questions completed, leaving a total return of 107 – though for some questions, there are fewer responses.



It is of course difficult to know how representative of those working in the field this is. In terms of the profile of respondents, they came from all HEIs in Wales (Table 1). In terms of other demographics, 69 percent of respondents were female and the mean age is 46.

Table 1: University affiliation of respondents

	Count
Aberystwyth University	6
Bangor University	10
Cardiff Metropolitan University	32
Cardiff University	16
Glyndwr University	*
Open University in Wales	*
University of South Wales	11
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	26
Total	107

*Values lower than 5 have been suppressed in order to avoid the risk of disclosure.

In terms of contractual status, 90 percent were employed on an ongoing basis and 10 percent were on fixed-term contracts; 83 percent worked full-time and 17 percent part-time. Table 2 shows the level of seniority across the respondents.

Table 2: Seniority and role

	%	Count
Lecturer	32.7%	33
Senior Lecturer	40.6%	41
Reader	3.0%	3
Reader/Professor	9.9%	10
Other	16.8%	17
Total	100%	101

In reporting our findings, we have chosen not to identify individual institutions because the numbers for some are very small and we would not want to make cross-institutional comparisons with such small numbers. Additionally, because the issues raised appear to be common across the universities. Despite their different histories, there does not appear to be a strong institutional dimension to the data.



3. Current engagement with research in education

Levels of research activity

It is clear that there is a lot more research activity going on in the field of education that falls ‘under the radar’ of recent research exercises. As Table 3 indicates, only 5 percent of respondents claimed to be ‘not engaged with research at all’. Of course, the nature of the engagement varies. While it might be expected that the large majority (nearly 80 percent) our-fifths consult academic journals for educational research, it is also the case that most (58 percent) are engaged in undertaking research with students and partner schools, and 44 percent said they ‘write and publish for academic audiences’. A further 23 percent said they were undertaking research for which they had external funding.

Table 3: Self-reported levels of research activity

	%	Count
I'm currently not engaged with research at all	5.0%	5
I read about educational research in the general media	51.0%	51
I read educational research in academic journals	79.0%	79
I draw on research evidence in my teaching activities	74.0%	74
I undertake research with my students and partner schools	37.0%	37
I undertake research which is of direct relevance to my teaching	58.0%	58
I undertake research which is of interest to me but not directly relevant to my teaching	29.0%	29
I undertake research for which I have external funding	23.0%	23
I write and publish for teaching purposes	26.0%	26
I write and publish for academic audiences	44.0%	44
Total	100.0%	100

The ability to attract funding is an important indicator of research activity, and a necessary condition of building research capacity on a sustainable basis. It is therefore encouraging that over 40 percent of respondents had made applications for research funding during the last five years. As Table 4 indicates, the most frequent organisation from which funding has been sought is the Welsh Government, with almost half of those (21/46) who have made funding applications submitting tenders here. But there is also a significant number of applications being made to the UK Research Council. Over one in ten (14) of our respondents have made an application to the Economic and Social Research Council.

There is also a significant level of collaboration for research – again an important element in building capacity and generating new ideas and projects that can increase sustainable research activity. As can be seen in Table 5, and as one might expect, most respondents report their collaborations involve colleagues within the same department. But over one third (36 percent) of respondents said their research collaborations involve links with academics in other universities and almost as many respondents (29 percent) reported international research collaborations.



Table 4: Organisations to which funding applications have been made

	%	Count
Local authorities	19.6%	9
Welsh Government	45.7%	21
UK Government	17.4%	8
European Commission	19.6%	9
HEFCW	10.9%	5
Higher Education Agency	17.4%	8
ESRC	30.4%	14
British Academy	17.4%	8
Nuffield	13.0%	6
Other	63.0%	29
Total		46

Table 5: Research collaborations

Do you have any academic research collaborations with ...	%	Count
... colleagues in your department?	75.4%	52
... colleagues in a different department in your own university?	42.03%	29
... academics in other universities in Wales?	28.99%	20
... academics in other universities in the UK?	36.23%	25
... academics outside the UK?	28.99%	20
Total	100%	69

The importance of research activity for teacher education

There have been ongoing debates about whether research should be an integral element of teacher education and the relationship between research and teaching (e.g. BERA 2012, BERA 2014). These have been triggered by concerns across the UK about the future of the field, and moves, particularly in England, to move significant amounts of initial teacher education outside higher education institutions and into school-based routes.

As Table 7 shows, it is clear from our respondents that research is considered an important element of teacher education. While it might be expected that there would be considerable support for ensuring that teacher educators were research literate and able to understand and transmit to their students the latest evidence on effective teaching and learning, it is clear that there is also a desire to see teacher educators as active researchers – and not just research ‘consumers’. The overwhelming majority (90 percent) of respondents agreed with the statement that ‘having research active teacher educators improves the quality of initial teacher education’.



Table 6: Perceptions of the significance of research for teacher education (%)

	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
Having research active teacher educators improves the quality of initial teacher education	89.8%	9.2%	1.0%
Teacher educators need to have research skills to be good teachers	60.2%	25.5%	14.3%
You can be an excellent teacher educator without being research active	45.9%	31.6%	22.5%
Teaching experience is more important for teacher education than research experience	52.0%	31.6%	16.3%
Undertaking research is a distraction from delivering high quality teacher education.	5.2%	17.5%	77.3%

As we have already seen (Table 3), the majority of respondents reported that they were already research active in terms of undertaking research. However, it was also clear that they would like to be *more* engaged – with 79 percent indicating they would like to be more research active. In the next section, we explore some of the factors that appear to be creating barriers to greater involvement in research.



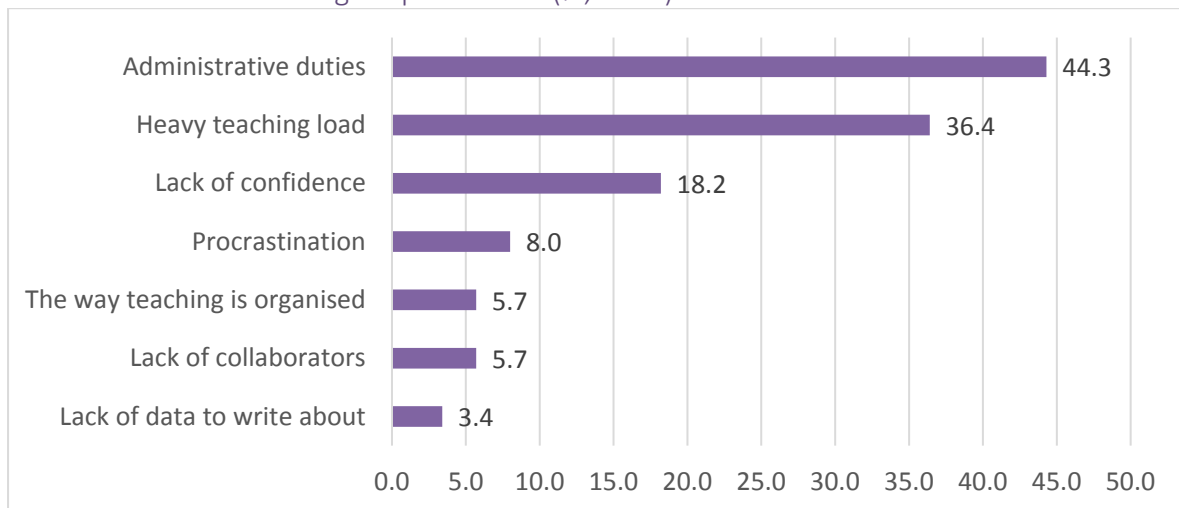
4. Barriers to increased research activity

In trying to identify some of the key obstacles to increased research activity, we focused on two aspects of research that are significant for ensuring sustainability and for building the field – publishing and research funding.

Barriers to writing publications and grant proposals

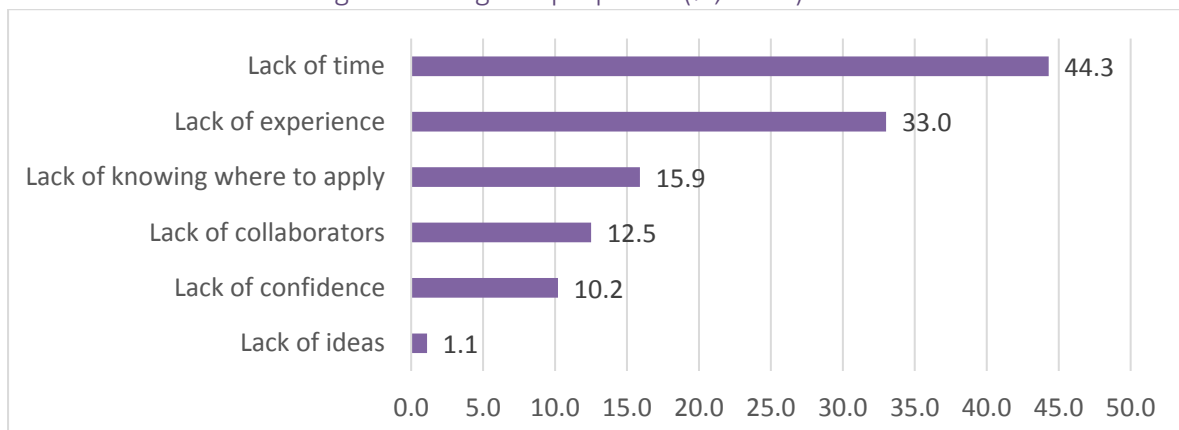
We asked respondents to identify from a pre-specified list which two factors created difficulties for them in trying to write for publication. Their responses are presented in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Barriers to writing for publication (% , n=88)



A similar pattern of responses can be found in relation to factors that create difficulties in writing research grant proposals (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Barriers to writing research grant proposals (% , n=88)



In relation, to writing for publication, administrative duties and heavy teaching load are the two most selected factors. Lack of time is also the most selected factor that creates difficulties in writing research proposals for external funding. However, issues related to personal confidence and lack of experience also feature quite strongly in relation to both kinds of activities. In the next sections, we explore these issues of time, experience and confidence in more detail, before going on to look at levels of institutional support.

Time allocation

While it might be argued that finding to write, whether for publication or for external funding, is a fairly universal difficulty which all academics experience in trying to manage the competing demands of teaching, administration and research, it would appear that our respondents generally have relatively low levels of time allocated for research.

As Table 7 indicates, over one quarter of respondents are on teaching and scholarship contracts, where there is no formal allocation of time for research.

Table 7: Contract type

	%	Count
Teaching and research (T&R)	53.0	53
Teaching and scholarship (T&S)	26.0	26
Research only (R)	7.0	7
Other	14.0	14
Total	100.0	100

But even among those on a teaching and research contract, there appears to be relatively little time set aside for research purposes.

Table 8: Proportion of time allocated for research

	%	Count
31% +	14.3	5
11-30%	34.2	13
0- 10%	31.6	12
Other/Not sure	21.1	8
Total	100.0	38*

* Includes only those with designated research remit who responded.

It is difficult to undertake accurate analysis of time allocations because different institutions have different ways of allocating time for research. For example, some of the 'other' responses included numbers of hours (e.g. '100 hours'), which were not possible to translate into a proportion without knowing the overall budget of hours. Nevertheless, even with the limits of the data, Table 8 would suggest that even for those with a formal research role, the amount of time given is very small. Only 16 percent of those with a research remit appear to have an allocation for research of more than one day per week. Almost one quarter (of what is albeit a



small sample) appear to have *no* time set aside for research, even though this is a formal part of their contract of employment.

The respondents' qualitative comments on the barriers to research emphasise the challenge of finding sufficient time to devote to it. Typical responses include:

Time, time and time.

Lack of time is the main barrier.

Time to conduct research. Timetable is very heavy.

There were also concerns about the uneven distribution of work, which meant that more junior colleagues found it even more difficult to put time aside for research – which surely must be a major concern for building future research capacity:

Fragmented organisation of teaching and workload responsibilities at my institution, which makes it difficult to balance research demands. - An overly hierarchical culture at my institution where junior staff are not really considered to be research active because they are there to do all the teaching for the disproportionately large number of professors.

While time pressures are experienced by many, time pressures seem particularly acute for those involved in initial teacher education, which includes just under one half (48 percent) of our respondents. Qualitative data indicate that the longer term timers, the demands of schools visits and the pressures of Estyn inspections make finding time for research even more difficult, for example:

Working full time in ITET leaves very little if any time for personal research. Even if you can gather data, it is then very difficult to put together and article for publication. There is no space. The PGCE year is constant.

Workload and the intense focus on quality assurance, accountability, recruitment and the student experience; these areas seem to take priority over research activity. Contractual hours are teaching / marking heavy. Plus time to do school visits and pastoral duties etc. etc. don't leave much time unfortunately.

The PGCE course as a one year programme is very time intensive, from assignment marking, school visits, teacher and monitoring of paperwork, even with the best intentions research is not possible.

Most of my time is taken up by my responsibilities with the trainee teachers. There is not a high enough status given to ITT and research in general - there are too many other pressures.

There was a general frustration that unless more time it was impossible to undertake research without the allocation of time being respecting in practice.



Although we receive a notional allocation on our academic workload for research, expectations for high volumes of teaching, covering the work of a number of colleagues who are either on long term sick or who have resigned without being replaced etc.. There appears to be an expectation to research in your free time

As one respondent commented:

Research almost feels like an indulgent luxury.

Expertise and experience

As we saw in Charts 1 and 2, time issues are compounded by lack of experience, expertise and confidence. Across the profile of respondents there are relatively low levels of research expertise. For over 80 percent of the respondents, working in higher education is a second career, with many having moved to university employment after teaching in schools and colleges.

And while the majority had some form of post-graduate qualification, and 40 percent had obtained a PhD, these qualifications often related more closely to their previous careers. There were a wide variety of subjects studied at masters and doctoral level – music, French, physics, to name a few. While these are undeniably invaluable in building a solid expertise in these specialist subjects, they may not be the best training for undertaking research in education – research that is broadly social scientific in nature.

Even in terms of engagement with students, there was relatively little supervision of research. Only around half (48%) were engaged in the supervision of master's level dissertations and one third (34%) were involved in supervising doctoral level dissertations.

While three quarters (74 percent) had received some form of continuing professional development (CPD) in the last 12 months, virtually none of this was research-related. We asked respondents to identify three areas in which they had received CPD, only a handful identified support for writing or grant-getting.

It is not surprising therefore that many of those working in the field of education, feel they lack the expertise, experience and confidence to be more proactive in research. The following comments are fairly typical responses to an open-ended question on the barriers to being more involved in research:

Fear of being inadequate. Lack of quantitative analysis skills.

Confidence in your own skill level, misunderstanding of what research is or can be

Not knowing how to go about research



conferences that cost up to £250 per person. Morale is extremely low as people feel their research is not valued.

There is support//money but it is not very well advertised and when it is, there is usual very little time to act upon it. The pressure to then do this is usually so great that it is easier not to as you know it will affect your teaching load.

Research takes time. If an institution wants research then it has to invest in that time. No investment = no research. There is a mismatch between what an institution claims to want to do or is doing and the experience of its employees - there is a lot of window dressing going on.

There has been a recent call to try and encourage academics to become more research active - but it is not accommodated within the work load - it takes time to attend seminars and explore avenues - but with the demands as they currently are – it's not possible

There were also indications that recent structural changes in higher education in Wales, and in initial teacher education in particular created additional barriers to research activity, e.g.:

External change within the sector is necessitating considerably greater time commitment to attend meetings and planning for future developments. Research time is being further squeezed by this.

In the next section we identify whether there are viable ways forward to support those trying to develop greater research capacity in Wales.



5. Ways forward

It is clear that there is considerable commitment to research in the field of education and it would be really good if ways could be found to build on this commitment. In addition to asking respondents to identify some of the barriers to engaging more actively with research, we were interested to learn what kinds of support they would find most useful and whether they had any comments to make on the kind of research capacity-building that WISERD Education has been involved with over the last three years.

Building a research culture

As we noted in the last section, there appear to be limited amounts of investment and infrastructure to support research. It is beyond the remit of this report to provide recommendations on how higher education institutions should organise their infrastructure and distribute workloads. Nevertheless, it seems that some fairly minor measures might be put in place to take a research capacity-building agenda forward.

Table 8 indicated that only a minority of staff (41 percent) avail themselves of research mentoring. The remaining academics either did not think it was available or did not use this support. This seems to us a missed opportunity as research mentoring can provide an important vehicle for building capacity on a personalised basis. It is also a form of provision that is relatively easy to put in place. Related to this is the lack of opportunities for external collaboration, which is presumably also connected with the lack of funds to support research activities (other than conference attendance). External collaborations are increasingly important as research becomes more inter-disciplinary and collaborative. It would be worth considering whether conference attendance could be explicitly linked to developing external collaborations rather than simply undertaking presentations. Given how expensive conferences can be, it might also be worth considering whether these funds might be more effectively used for small-scale research projects or fellowships.

Of course, building research within schools and departments is also important. Quite why only 50 percent of our respondents attend various research groups and seminars even when they are available is interesting and worth exploring. Clearly putting the time is likely to be one factor, but it may also be the case that the foci of the groups do not match the interests of colleagues or that the content is not sufficiently geared to the level of expertise of the members. It could also be in issue of expectation. Is there an explicit expectation that colleagues should not only attend regularly, but also undertake a presentation every now and then? It would be good if schools and colleges could explore why participation is so low.

Support for writing

As we noted in the last section, only a small minority of respondents felt they were able to take study leave. Putting time aside for research – either for writing research grant proposals, for



collecting and analysing data, and for writing for publication – is important. And when time pressures are great as they appear to be, it is crucial that the organisation of any remission for research is as effective as it can be. To this end, we asked our respondents to select from a list of alternatives which kind of ‘spaces’ they would ideally like to be put aside as time for writing.

Table 10: The most useful time put aside for writing

	%	Count
A regular time put aside each day	3.1%	3
A regular time put aside each week (e.g. one day per week)	35.1%	34
Frequent short blocks (e.g. one week every couple of months)	39.2%	38
Less frequent longer blocks (e.g. one month every year)	8.3%	8
Study leave every few years	14.4%	14
Total	100%	97

As can be seen from Table 10, study leave may not be the most suitable way to support some colleagues in their writing plans as it was selected as ‘most useful’ by only 14 percent of respondents. Instead, most respondents preferred to have much shorter periods of writing time more frequently. The most preferred option is for a short period, such as one week, every two months. Such an arrangement does not seem to be too burdensome to arrange – either through designated departmental ‘writing weeks’ at four points of the year which are kept as clear of commitments as possible (e.g. no departmental meetings, limited email requests etc.). Alternatively, it would be good if small groups of staff could work together to ‘cover’ for each other on a reciprocal basis.

WISERD Education

WISERD Education, which is part of WISERD (Wales Institute of Social and Educational Research Data and Method) has been funded over the last few years to support research capacity-building in Wales through the development of a shared data resource and various research capacity-building exercises. These have involved annual visits for research mentoring, research presentations to showcase the data, funded placements to analyse the data, research consultancies and writing workshops.

At the time of writing, an independent evaluation of WISERD Education is being commissioned. However, in the meantime, we were interested to know how far our activities had ‘reached’ out into the educational research community in Wales.

The survey indicates mixed success. It is encouraging that only a minority of respondents has ‘never heard of WISERD or WISERD Education’ and that almost half (43 percent) had attended a presentation on WISERD Education. However, beyond this, the levels of engagement seem quite limited (Table 11).



Table 11: Involvement in WISERD and/or WISERD Education

	%	Count
I have never heard of WISERD or WISERD Education	4.3%	4
I have heard of WISERD and WISERD Education but have had no involvement	50.5%	47
I have been to a presentation on WISERD Education	43.0%	40
I have attended the WISERD Annual Conference	15.1%	14
I have taken part in WISERD Education research mentoring	4.3%	4
I have had a WISERD Education Research Fellowship Placement	4.3%	4
Total	100%	93

Invitations for comments on their engagement (or lack of engagement) with WISERD or WISERD Education indicate a number of challenges, both institutional and connected with WISERD Education itself:

WISERD seems quite far removed from what is going on within the institution. There needs to be a higher profile given to e.g. research mentoring/ seminars/ workshops in order for staff to engage more fully.

Colleagues were encouraged to attend a briefing meeting. I would like to present a paper at the next annual conference but funding is scarce.

I think there is a need to support funding awareness and networks which specifically focus on building 'funded' research groups who actively seek funding with support to write bids etc. Wiserd doesn't seem to actually help research seek research funding - a little 'odd' really

We hope that the independent evaluation will provide more detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of WISERD Education's capacity-building and how we can build on its (albeit limited) successes.



6. Conclusion

The results of this survey indicate that there is still an active research community in the field of education in Wales, despite its lack of visibility in research assessment exercises. It also finds high levels of support for the role of research in relation to teacher education and a desire for greater engagement with research. While this might suggest that the situation in Wales may not be as bad as some have feared, it does not mean there are not real grounds for concern. The current level of research activity appears to be very precarious and may not be sustainable in the future. Respondents outline a number of barriers they face in undertaking research and point to a serious shortfall in infrastructural investment in educational research.

Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that the kind of research which is being undertaken addresses the educational (research) priorities of the Welsh Government, for instance, in relation to literacy, numeracy and inequalities. Neither does the kind of research being done match closely the school-based pedagogical research proposed which Furlong Review (Welsh Government 2014) argued was important for improving the quality of teacher education and teaching more general in Wales.

There are clearly no easy solutions to the problem of building research capacity in a context where there is a declining resource, time is under pressure and many colleagues feel that they lack the expertise and confidence to build research careers. In addition to individual challenges, there are also institutional and political challenges to be addressed. These relate not only to higher education and government priorities, but also to more fundamental issues the role of research in relation to teacher education in general and the future of the field of educational research in Wales in particular.

It is perhaps important to have a debate about the extent to which research is valued an integral element of high quality teacher education. It might also be important to have a debate about whether research on and for education needs to be located in higher education at all. Indeed, some might argue that there is no necessary need for educational research on Wales to be carried out by *Welsh* higher education institutions in particular – and certainly the Welsh Government does not privilege ‘home-based’ bids when awarding contracts. To what extent is it important to have an ‘indigenous’ research community? What would be lost if academic research on education in Wales were to be lost? To what extent can research from outwith Wales bring the necessary levels of understanding the Welsh context to bear in their enquiries? To what extent do we need a community of Welsh-speaking educational researchers? To what extent will universities in Wales themselves be diminished if there is not critical mass of educational research being conducted within them?

These kinds of issues are both fundamental and important and will involve recognising the role of research as a public good – which is essential for the critical and non-partisan interrogation of education policy and practice. But is also important to remember that research is not only a public good, it is also a private resource for university academics. Research is a significant part of academic identity and being deemed ‘research active’ is not only intellectually rewarding, but in many universities is the most effective criteria for promotion and the means to enhance geographic mobility. If Wales wants to attract and retain educational researchers in its



universities it needs to have a demonstrable and visible profile of research excellence in the future.



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8. Appendix: The questionnaire survey

As part of our HEFCW-funded programme of research capacity-building in Wales, we are undertaking a survey to identify the research background, experience and needs of academic staff working in the field of education in universities in Wales. We see this survey as an important step in building a sustainable and research active community of education scholars in Wales. We have not 'required' you to answer any questions as we would rather receive partial returns than none at all. However, obviously the more information we have, the better your experiences and opinions can inform what happens next.

There are five sections:

- You and your work
- Your research activity and aspirations
- Your university's support for research
- Engagement with the education research community
- A few final questions

We are collecting the data anonymously and will ensure that individuals are not identifiable in any reports of the findings. We will, though, circulate to all of you a copy of the survey findings. We are also sending as a separate survey an invitation to be included in a Directory of Research Expertise. Obviously this can't be anonymous, but we hope you will also respond to this too - even if it's just to say you don't want to be included.

Many thanks in anticipation of a good response.

Sally Power and Chris Taylor



Q2.1 At which institution are you currently employed?

Q2.2 What year did you start working here?

Q2.3 Have you ever worked in any other higher education institution (HEI)?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Have you ever worked in any other higher education institution? Yes Is Selected

Q2.4 Please list up to three of the other HEIs in which you have worked:

- HEI 1
- HEI 2
- HEI 3

Q2.5 What would you nominate as your main area of academic expertise?

Q2.6 What is your principal role at the moment?

Q2.7 Are you involved in initial teacher education?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Are you involved in initial teacher education? Yes Is Selected

Q2.9 Please list up to three activities in the area of teacher education in which you are involved:

- Activity 1
- Activity 2
- Activity 3

Q2.10 What is your principal medium of instruction?

- English
- Welsh
- Equal use of English and Welsh



Q2.11 Please indicate which of the following qualifications you hold (tick as many as apply):

- B.Ed/B.Ed(Hons)
- Other Bachelor's degree (incl Hons)
- MA/MSc Education
- MSc Social Research Methods
- M Phil
- Other Master's degree
- PhD
- Professional Doctorate (eg EdD)
- Certificate of Education
- PGCE
- PG Dip
- Other _____

Q2.12 What was the main subject you studied for your first degree?

Display This Question:

If Please indicate which of the following qualifications you hold (tick as many as apply).

B.Ed/B.Ed(Hons) Is Selected

Or Please indicate which of the following qualifications you hold (tick as many as apply).

Certificate of Education Is Selected

Or Please indicate which of the following qualifications you hold (tick as many as apply).

PGCE Is Selected

Q2.13 Where did you study for your teaching qualifications?

- In Wales
- In England
- In both Wales and England
- Other _____

Q2.14 Do you hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)?

- Yes
- No

Q2.15 Did you have another career before you worked in higher education?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Did you have another career before you worked in higher education? Yes Is Selected

Q2.16 Please state what you did before working in higher education:

Q2.17 What is your current position?

- Lecturer



- Senior Lecturer
- Reader
- Professor
- Research Assistant (Gr 5)
- Research Associate (Gr 6)
- Research Fellow (Gr 7)
- Other _____

Q2.18 Do you currently work...

- full-time?
- part-time? (including on a zero hours contract)

Q2.19 Is your contract...

- ongoing?
- fixed term?

Q2.20 Have you had any continuing professional development (CPD) in the last twelve months?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Have you had any CPD in the last twelve months? Yes Is Selected

Q2.21 If 'yes', please list up to three areas of CPD covered in the last twelve months:

CPD 1

CPD 2

CPD 3

Q2.22 Do you currently supervise master's level dissertations?

- Yes
- No

Q2.23 Do you currently supervise doctoral level dissertations?

- Yes
- No

Q3.1 What kind of contract do you have?

- Teaching and research (T&R)
- Teaching and scholarship (T&S)
- Research
- Other (please specify) _____



Display This Question:

If What kind of contract do you have? Teaching and research (T&R) Is Selected
Or What kind of contract do you have? Other (please specify) Is Selected

Q3.2 What percentage of your time is formally allocated for research?

Q3.3 Which of the following statements do you agree or disagree with?

	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
Having research active teacher educators improves the quality of initial teacher education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teacher educators need to have research skills to be good teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You can be an excellent teacher educator without being research active	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching experience is more important for teacher education than research expertise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Undertaking research is a distraction from delivering high quality teacher education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3.4 Which of the following describes the level of your research activity? (Please tick as many as you like)

- I'm currently not engaged with research at all
- I read about educational research in the general media
- I read educational research in academic journals
- I draw on research evidence in my teaching activities
- I undertake research with my students and partner schools
- I undertake research which is of direct relevance to my teaching
- I undertake research which is of interest to me but not directly relevant to my teaching
- I undertake research for which I have external funding
- I write and publish for teaching purposes
- I write and publish for academic audiences

Q3.5 Would you like to be more 'research active'?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Would you like to be more 'research active'? Yes Is Selected

Q3.6 What do you think are the barriers to your being more involved in research?

Q3.7 Thinking about publishing in particular, the following factors are reasons why some people find it difficult to write for publication. Please indicate up to two factors that create difficulties for you:

- Heavy teaching load
- The way teaching is organised
- Too many administrative duties
- Procrastination
- Lack of data to write about
- Lack of collaborators
- Lack of confidence
- Don't know
- Other _____

Q3.8 In thinking about putting aside time for writing, which one of the following do you think would be most useful for you?

- A regular time put aside each day
- A regular time put aside each week (eg one day per week)
- Frequent short blocks (eg one week every couple of months)
- Less frequent longer blocks (eg one month every year)
- Study leave every few years



Q3.9 Have you ever had external funding for your research?

- Yes
 No

Q3.10 Please indicate the organisations to which you have applied for research funding in the past five years...

- Local authorities
 Welsh Government
 UK Government
 European Commission
 HEFCW
 Higher Education Agency
 ESRC
 AHRC
 British Academy
 Leverhulme
 Nuffield
 Joseph Rowntree Trust
 Society for Educational Studies
 Other _____

Q3.11 The following factors are reasons why some people find it difficult to write research grant proposals. Please indicate up to two factors that create difficulties for you:

- Lack of time
 Lack of experience
 Lack of ideas
 Lack of knowledge about where to apply
 Lack of collaborators
 Lack of confidence
 Don't know
 Other _____

Q3.12 Do you have any academic research collaborations with.... (again, please tick as many as apply)

- colleagues in your department?
 colleagues in a different department in your own university?
 academics in other universities in Wales?
 academics in other universities in the UK?
 academics outside the UK?



Q4.1 Does your University encourage you to be engaged with research?

- Yes
 No

Q4.2 What support does your University provide for research activity and do you draw on this support?

	These are not available to me	These are available, but I don't draw on this support	These are available and I have used this support
Research groups and seminars	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Funds for conference attendance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Periods of study leave	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Funds to support research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research mentors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for external collaboration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4.3 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the availability of institutional support for research in your university?

- Yes
 No

Display This Question:

If Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the availability of institutional support for research in your university? Yes Is Selected

Q4.4 Please enter your comments here:

Q5.1 Are you a member of the British Educational Research Association (BERA)?

- Yes
 No

Q5.2 Please list up to three other learned societies of which you are a member:

Society 1

Society 2

Society 3



Q5.3 How involved have you been in WISERD and/or WISERD Education? (Please tick as many as apply)

- I have never heard of WISERD or WISERD Education
- I have heard of WISERD and WISERD Education but have had no involvement
- I have been to a presentation on WISERD Education
- I have attended the WISERD Annual Conference
- I have taken part in WISERD Education research mentoring
- I have had a WISERD Education Research Fellowship Placement

Q5.4 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about WISERD or WISERD Education that might help us support you:

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Is there anything else you would like to tell us about WISERD or WISERD Education that you think would help us support you: Yes Is Selected

Q5.5 Please enter your comments here:

Q6.1 Are you ...

- Male
- Female

Q6.2 Your age last birthday ...

Q6.3 Are you a Welsh speaker?

- Yes, fluent speaker
- Can speak some Welsh
- No or very limited Welsh

