



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Evaluation of the National Professional Enquiry Project (NPEP) C094/2021/2022

## TECHNICAL EVALUATION RESPONSE

Please read Section 1 – Instructions to Bidders and Section 2 – Specification prior to completing this template. You must submit your response using this template in Microsoft word, Arial font, font size 11.

Bidders are requested to read the questions carefully before considering their response.

Each question has a specific response limit. Please ensure you adhere to the response limits as indicated below. Any responses that are received over and above the limits will not be evaluated. Table and Diagrams must be included within word counts.

Where examples of your existing documents / policies are requested these will not count towards response limits.

Appendices will not be permitted.

The evaluation methodology, which will be adopted for assessing the Technical submissions, can be found at the bottom of this document.

Section & Question Weightings		
Q1	Understanding of Policy Context	15%
Q2	Methodology	30%
Q3	Resource Allocation	20%
Q4	Project Management	15%

Technical Criteria
<b>Question 1- Understanding of Policy Context</b>
<p>Demonstrate a clear understanding of the education policy context in Wales, specifically national professional learning provision, the significance of NPEP and the importance of this research to inform future policy developments.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Total:</b> 15% of Section Minimum Score Threshold: 60</p>
<p><b>Response Guidance</b></p> <p>Please demonstrate your understanding of the policy environment based on the information provided in Section 1 of the specification and your experience and expertise in undertaking comparable research. Outline your understanding of any data sources relevant to this evaluation. Set out your understanding of the rationale for undertaking the research, with reference to the background/context.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Word Limit: 2,500</b></p>
<b>Supplier Response</b>

## **Introduction**

In 2018, the National Professional Enquiry Project (NPEP) was introduced in order to help practitioners fully develop and implement the new Curriculum for Wales from 2022, through the use of a national network of schools (supported by HEIs) on behalf of Welsh Government. More established enquiry schools help develop and deliver the national approach to professional learning across the regions, and will also support the wider community of schools as the new curriculum is embedded in classrooms.

The NPEP programme was expanded to reflect the situation in Welsh schools in light of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, and the need to grow professional enquiry more widely across the Welsh education system. Following the completion of the first three phases of the project, Phase 4 (Consolidation and Evaluation) period is starting, from September 21 to March 22. There are no plans for further expansion of the programme during this period, but rather, enquiry schools will focus on developing a whole school approach to enquiry and working in enquiry clusters.

The objectives of this evaluation are to

- explore the different approaches adopted by regional consortia/HEI partners to support and develop enquiry schools;
- assess the approaches that are/were most effective in their relative contexts;
- demonstrate the value of the programme and investment;
- help inform policy decisions regarding the wider roll-out of the programme to all schools in Wales; and,
- present a range of options to support the transition from a project to a national programme in moving towards a more sustainable approach.

## **Project requirements**

This project presents an exciting opportunity to contribute to Welsh Government's goal of ensuring that professional enquiry becomes an established part of professional practice in Wales and a key enabler of the new school curriculum and other aspects of educational policy.

The evaluation will provide evidence to inform policy decisions to support national roll-out of the NPEP programme to all schools in Wales, and will consider NPEP in the context of the four phases of the programme. Whilst the focus of the evaluation will be on the NPEP, wider policy developments and context of professional learning will be considered and included in the final recommendations.

The ability to undertake this project, and to develop deliverables that meet Welsh Government needs, requires a unique set of skills. This includes:

- an in-depth understanding of the policy context and background;

- skills in the design and implementation of research methodologies, including consultations, policy analysis and data review; and
- knowledge of both the specificities of the Welsh education sector and broader educational dynamics around the world.

To respond to this need, colleagues from the Australian Council for Educational Research UK (ACER) and our Wales-based consultant, **[information redacted]**, are delighted to submit a proposal to undertake this evaluation. ACER works with multi-lateral organisations, national governments, state and local governments, examination bodies, schools, teacher education institutions and students to fulfil its mission of improving learning. ACER works in all regions of the world and has undertaken a number of multi-lateral, national and sub-national evaluations of the impact of educational interventions on student learning and on teacher skills. Our combined expertise and experience ensures that we are able to achieve the high expectations for the project.

In the next section we consider the aims of the project and our understanding of the policy context, both in order to identify the need for the project as well as to highlight how well our expertise and experience position us to undertake the work. Furthermore, we identify additional research, data and evidence that we feel will be pertinent in this evaluation.

### **ACER's understanding of the rationale for undertaking the research**

Following disappointing results in PISA 2009, Welsh Government has taken a series of measures to address concerns about the academic achievement of learners in Wales. These measures included the introduction of a national literacy and numeracy framework, supported by annual tests and more recently personalised assessments for years 2-9 and, following the Donaldson Review, the co-construction of a new and dynamic Curriculum for Wales. However, as shown in PISA 2018, learners in Wales continue to perform at a significantly lower level in reading than those in the other countries of the United Kingdom. In mathematics and science, performance was similar to Scotland and Northern Ireland, but significantly below England. Although PISA scores do not provide a comprehensive measure of the success of an education system, they do indicate scope for improvement and underline the need for the current reform journey in Wales.

The development of the Curriculum for Wales began in 2015 for roll-out in 2022, with the accompanying Education For Wales Action plan released in 2017 and updated in 2020. These act as frameworks for the implementation of the vision of education embedded in Welsh Government's vision. The Curriculum focuses on collaboration, partnership, leadership and inclusivity and lays out key approaches to implementation, including how the Four Purposes can be operationalised, how the Curriculum will be rolled out, the twelve pedagogical principles of the reforms, the role of Pupil Offer in

engagement and expansion of opportunities, and the development of the new National Assessment and Evaluation Framework.

In addition to reflecting the need for holistic growth, these purposes also reflect the specific context and needs of Wales, and in particular the importance of nurturing the Welsh language , including through the expansion of Welsh medium schools and promoting its use in English medium settings.

In addition to the six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs), there is a focus on mandatory cross-curricular skills of digital competence, literacy and numeracy. The Curriculum for Wales also marks a departure – particularly for secondary schools – in both what is taught, and how it is taught. The guidance celebrates integration and promotes the importance of collaboration and cross-disciplinary planning, learning and teaching, both within and across AoLEs. Great emphasis is also placed on the use of evidence and expertise to inform learning and teaching and the initial identification of twelve pedagogical principles reflects this. Teachers are encouraged to explore subject knowledge more creatively, making it more pupil-centred – ‘active learning’ is promoted, with a ‘real life’ relevance. The Camau project<sup>1</sup>, commissioned by Welsh Government and lead by the University of Glasgow and UWTSD, which had a primary focus on learner progression, also acknowledged the vital importance of professional development to enhance and develop pedagogical understanding.

More broadly, there have been a number of important advances in scholarly understanding of learning processes and outcomes in education across the world. Research shows the importance of foregrounding pedagogical practices that underpin contemporary curricular reform, thereby ensuring that content and delivery are intertwined. In many education systems these are reflected in an increasing focus on growth mind-sets, learning progressions, 21st century skills and social and emotional wellbeing. Educational policy makers and communities are increasingly emphasising the need for education systems to contribute to the holistic growth of young people.

In Wales, the establishment in 2018 of an arm’s length body, the National Academy for Educational Leadership, was intended to assist Welsh Government in regard to school leadership, within the context of its wider strategic aspiration to strengthen and deepen pedagogical understanding at all levels within schools. In the same year, the importance of pedagogy was underlined in the OECD report commissioned by Welsh Government<sup>2</sup>, which concluded that while the ‘majority of schools in Wales seem well on their way towards developing as learning organisations ... a considerable proportion of schools are still far removed from realising this objective’ (p 42). As part of the comprehensive response to that report the National Professional Enquiry Project was conceived, to develop and test approaches to professional enquiry in Welsh schools. In the spirit of co-construction which underpins the current curriculum reform, it is a partnership between the Welsh Government, the

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/education/research/fromlocaltogloballresearch/camauprogessionandassessmentinthe curriculumforwales/projectoverview/>

<sup>2</sup> Developing Schools in Wales as Learning Organisations, OECD, 2018

regional consortia, Welsh higher education institutions and a national network of “Lead Enquiry Schools”. Following initial piloting, a first round of enquiry-related work involved partner higher education institutions working with Lead Enquiry Schools and their partner schools in school “clusters” to explore and develop specific aspects of practice relevant to the development and realisation of the new curriculum. The development of a research-literate profession will involve continuous scaling-up of current “pathfinder” projects undertaken via the NPEP to involve the whole profession, developing school hubs and establishing enquiry as a key aspect of self-evaluation within the new Evaluation, Accountability and Improvement Framework.

### **ACER’s experience of similar projects**

ACER recently completed an evaluation for the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC). The focus of this evaluation was to undertake a review of the RSC Spectroscopy in a Suitcase (SiaS) programme. The purpose was to inform the RSC’s deliberations about the future development of the programme. SiaS was the RSC’s largest outreach programme and a part of the RSC’s commitment to the enrichment of chemistry teaching and learning. In its 11th year, this was an opportune moment to determine the extent to which the programme was meeting its goals and objectives, and how this could be enhanced. Following ACER’s evaluation, several changes were made to the programme (<https://edu.rsc.org/enrichment/spectroscopy-in-a-suitcase> ).

Evaluating projects with a focus on professional learning is another ACER strength. Only recently ACER concluded the work to develop a research-based assessment literacy and design framework that could support both the International Baccalaureate (IB) organization and IB World Schools in this important area of teaching and learning. Specifically, the IB could use the assessment literacy framework to inform curriculum and programme review processes as well as IB professional development. The definitional framework could also be useful to schools in supporting teacher self-evaluation and school-level initiatives to enhance teacher strengthening of assessment literacy (<https://ibo.org/programmes/> ).

The emphasis on holistic development is one that reflects best practice developments taking place in many education systems around the world. For example, ACER is currently leading the OECD’s global Study on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) (<http://www.oecd.org/education/cei/social-emotional-skills-study/> ) and is working with the International Baccalaureate to evidence creativity and curiosity among pupils in 155 countries (<https://jacobsfoundation.org/en/a-partnership-to-promote-curiosity-and-creativity/> ). ACER also undertakes cutting edge work in developing learning progressions for generic skills such as collaboration and critical thinking (<https://www.acer.org/gb/cari/projects/new-metric-projects/assessment-of-general-capabilities> ).

In addition, ACER’s Centre for School and System Improvement works with education systems on system-wide change, emphasising a holistic approach that takes into account the roles and responsibilities of a range of stakeholders (<https://www.acer.org/au/research/centres> ). The notion of a

systems approach to reform is highly pertinent in the context of this evaluation, underscoring the need to focus on multiple stakeholders, perspectives and layers of accountability. Assessment research are areas in which ACER is globally recognised for our expertise. We have designed and implemented many national, regional and international assessments, including leading PISA internationally for its first 5 cycles, and we are currently developing the UIS Reporting Scales with UNESCO ([https://www.acer.org/files/UIS\\_Reporting\\_Scales\\_concept\\_note.pdf](https://www.acer.org/files/UIS_Reporting_Scales_concept_note.pdf)). In the UK, ACER designs and implements the Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) (<https://standardisedassessment.gov.scot/>) which emphasise teachers' use of data to diagnose and support learner progress.

ACER unique expertise means that we have a deep understanding of the context for the project, the skills and experience to implement the activities it requires and the authority to be able to develop deliverables that are valuable resources in guiding the implementation of reforms.

In the Inception Phase, we will identify additional research, data and evidence that we feel will be pertinent in this project. This is likely to include the wide range of data already to be provided by the Welsh Government (WG) such as Internal NPEP evaluation, Testimonials, Core Brief, Quarterly HEI Reports and many others. We are well positioned to draw on insights from all of these sources to ensure that the project leverages and informs the evidence landscape and parallel work in the Welsh education sector.

## Question 2 – Methodology

Proposed methodology, which clearly outlines a detailed research design and demonstrates how the aims of this evaluation will be met. Suitability of the methodology – quality and appropriateness of the approach. Details of sampling approach. Demonstration of sound understanding of the challenges and priorities of the contract.

**Total: 30%** of Section

Minimum Score Threshold: 60

### Response Guidance

The tender should set out a detailed account of the methodology to adopt during the research, clearly outlining the benefits of any alternative/additional methodological approaches to those outlined in the specification to support this virtual evaluation, as well as how any specific methodological requirements will be met. Please note that the proposed methodology will need to relate specifically to conducting this research in a virtual environment. Any alternative approaches proposed must be consistent with and address the principles listed in section 4.21 of the specification, and meet all of the Aims and Objectives and the Client's Requirements listed in sections 2 and 4 respectively of the specification.

Outline your understanding of the specific objectives/research questions for this work. Set out how your proposed methodology will provide the required evidence for each of the overarching aims for this research.

Include information, where possible and applicable, on sampling frames, sampling methods, mode of administration, expected sample sizes and anticipated response rates (as well as methods to enhance response rates).

Set out how any qualitative data will be analysed and any specific quantitative analysis proposed.

Set out your rationale for adopting the methodological approach you propose and how the resource set aside (e.g. number of days) as specified in the Commercial Response Template will allow you to undertake the proposed work.

Highlight any dependencies (e.g. co-operation from different groups, access to data) and other feasibility issues.

**Word Limit: 4,000**

## Supplier Response

### Introduction

The overarching aim of the project is to explore the different approaches adopted by regional consortia/HEI partners to support and develop enquiry schools and assess the approaches that are most effective and the best value in their relative contexts. In order to achieve this goal, the ACER will present a range of options to support the transition from a project to a national programme in moving towards a more sustainable approach. To achieve this, ACER will:

- Set out key evidence and assumptions and provide a clear picture of the system and stakeholders that will implement them;
- Assess the extent to which the programme meets current objectives;
- Identify the evaluation questions and explore the extent to which they can be met credibly and reliably using existing, and new, data sources; and
- Recommend a detailed monitoring and evaluation strategy for addressing the evaluation questions.

This section identifies our proposed methodology for achieving these objectives. We propose utilising a mixed methods design that ensures that the most relevant insights needed to inform the development of deliverables is gathered from key stakeholders while minimising the burden on respondents and accounting for the challenging context created by Covid-19. Our approach takes into account the complexity of educational provision, incorporating multiple and overlapping responsibilities, relationships and dynamics, and the need to ensure that a holistic approach is used to monitor and evaluate the implementation of reforms.



## **Initiating the Project**

In the initial phase of this project we will meet with the Welsh Government and – based on our discussions - create an Inception Report that incorporates our methodology, approach to data collection and project management, a risk register with mitigations identified for each element of risk, a detailed timeline highlighting both activities and deliverables, the identification of any overlap with other research activities and a dissemination plan. The draft Inception Plan will be presented to the Steering Group for their review and input, and then finalised and agreed with the Contract Manager.

## **Methodology**

Based on what is known about the programme, the goals it intends to achieve and the method of implementation, in this section ACER proposes the methods it intends to use in the evaluation and how it intends to measure impact.

In order to answer the evaluation questions, a sophisticated approach to data collection will be utilised to ensure that the data collection is efficient and optimised. Some of the data can be obtained through a targeted document review. The document review will encompass project reports, papers, and any other relevant resources from the commencement of the project. Beyond desktop research, however, the bulk of the data needs to be collected from the relevant stakeholders.

In this evaluation it is important to obtain a balance of breadth and depth that is resource efficient, value for money and is also able to ensure that all necessary data is required to answer the research questions in sufficient depth.

Balancing all of these demands, ACER recommends the following approach to data collection in this evaluation. ACER staff have extensive experience in conducting all of these forms of data collection and ensuring that they generate valuable data. The recommended approach is:

### **Phase 1: Literature review**

- A review of literature, building upon existing intelligence, to produce an evidence base focused on effective professional enquiry approaches.

### **Phase 2: Documents review**

- Collation and analysis of existing policy and programme documentation and administrative data held by the Welsh Government, higher education partners, regions, local authorities and schools.
- Analysis of internal evaluative data, quarterly HEI NPEP reports and other relevant data made available by the Welsh Government.

- Review a sample of enquiry resources made available to support NPEP schools and also national enquiry and reflection resources to support the wider schools network.
- Desk work to produce an evidence-base of what works, lessons from the project and recommendations for the future.

### Phase 3: Qualitative research

- Stakeholder interviews and / or workshops with a cross representation of schools/key partners involved in NPEP.
- Case studies: a series of case studies focusing on a range of NPEP schools reflective of the different types and characteristics of learning settings developing as professional enquirers within a number of different region and local authority areas.
- Qualitative research with a range of stakeholders (regional consortia professional learning leads, local authority professional learning contacts, headteachers, teachers, support staff involved in NPEP).

### Phase 1: Review of Literature

The review will focus on effective enquiry approaches adopted by other systems.

ACER propose the following systematic review protocol for the project (based essentially on Sharma et al, 2015<sup>3</sup>):

1. Scoping and planning – determining the scope and focus of the review, including guiding research question(s); development of relevant search terms and inclusion/exclusion criteria
2. Searching the literature – performing the search according to agreed search terms
3. Screening and data extraction – assessment of identified studies according to the inclusion/exclusion criteria; key data extracted from each included paper
4. Synthesis and reporting – qualitative narrative synthesis of extracted data and reporting in accordance with the overall research questions and high level themes.

#### 1: Scoping and planning

ACER proposes use of a scoping review, to map the depth and breadth of a field of literature with broader inclusion criteria than a systematic literature review (Levac et al., 2010<sup>4</sup>). Using clearly described and replicable search strategies, this type of review is designed to capture a variety of

<sup>3</sup> Sharma, R., Gordon, M., Dharamsi, S., & Gibbs, T.S. (2015). Systematic reviews in medical education: a practical approach: AMEE guide 94. *Medical Teacher*, 37(2), 108–124.

<sup>4</sup> Levac, D., Colquhoun, H., & O'Brien, K. K. (2010). Scoping studies: advancing the methodology. *Implementation science*, 5(1), 1-9.

studies while avoiding the biases risked in a narrative literature review, such as selection bias, and the need to work from pre-existing knowledge of theory (Levac et al., 2010).

Arksey and O'Malley (2005)<sup>5</sup> identify six stages in their framework for conducting a scoping review:

- identifying the research question - This first stage requires clarification of the parameters of the research question 'What are effective professional enquiry approaches?' to ensure that focus and direction are not lost in pursuit of breadth.
- identifying relevant studies - The second stage involves balancing breadth with comprehensiveness. Levac et al, (2010) recommend that the research team carrying out the scoping study be comprised of individuals who have the methodological and context expertise required to make decisions regarding this trade-off between comprehensiveness and breadth. ACER has such expertise and when decisions must be made to limit scope due to comprehensiveness or feasibility, justifications will be provided to Welsh Government.
- study selection - ACER will build on the criteria for study consideration formulated by Albers and Pattuwage (2017)<sup>6</sup> which includes: types of study design (e.g. random control trial, quasi-experimental etc.), type of participant (e.g. pupils, teachers, school leaders etc.), type of intervention and type of outcome.
- charting the data - to extract data, a data charting form will be developed collectively by the ACER research team and will be an iterative process piloted by the project leader and one other team member to ensure it is fit for purpose before being applied across all studies by multiple team members (Levac et al., 2010).
- collating, summarising and reporting the results – a consistent approach to reporting is needed for comparison and identification of contradictory evidence, gaps in evidence and 'new frontiers'.
- consultation (optional stage) - A draft of the scoping study can be presented to key stakeholders as part of the primary data collection.

The intention of using a scoping review approach is to find the best evidence to respond to these key questions and not to interrogate the methodological quality or analysis and results of the research papers that are investigated. During the mapping process, however, researchers will note where there are gaps in the literature as well as evidence that can answer the key questions.

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<sup>5</sup> Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework. *International journal of social research methodology*, 8(1), 19-32.

<sup>6</sup> Albers, B., & Pattuwage, L. (2017). *Implementation in education: Findings from a scoping review*. Melbourne: Evidence for Learning.

From the scoping review an evidence map of research is produced. Evidence maps involve a systematic search of a broad research field (Miake-Lye et al., 2016)<sup>7</sup> followed by the coding of these studies based on their characteristics. We will present the results in a tabular format, with proposed characteristics including the intervention used, the target, implementation outcomes considered and study design, following the presentation of studies in Dyssegaard et al. (2017).<sup>8</sup> This will be used to delineate further areas for study in the systematic review of the literature

## 2: Searching the literature

The systematic review of the literature on implementation is designed to examine a particular area of the research as identified in the evidence map. The review approach will involve the development of a clear protocol that will facilitate the mapping of policy and practice evidence. Once created, the protocol will enable our team to gather information to build an evidence base.

## 3: Screening and data extraction

Explicit criteria based on the scope of the study as determined by the evidence mapping, will be applied to each reference to determine whether it should be included or excluded.

ACER's Cunningham Library will provide the study team with access to the most recent resources across the following databases: CBA Education, PsycINFO, ERIC (Educational Research Information Center), AEI (Australian Education Index), BEI (British Education Index) and Web of Science, restricted to peer reviewed studies in English and Welsh.

Utilising the Cunningham Library's search tools and drawing on the existing expertise within ACER, represents a highly efficient and effective approach that blends human expertise and technological solutions.

## 4: Synthesis and reporting.

A proposed approach follows Dyssegaard et al. (2017) in using a narrative synthesis to encompass both quantitative and qualitative evidence on implementation. Narrative synthesis aims to apply a thematic approach to combine and compare individual studies, allowing researchers to explore the similarities in findings from diverse studies.

Grounded in implementation science, the common elements that emerge from the conceptual scoping review will be used to inform the development of an initial background chapter of the report.

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<sup>7</sup> Miake-Lye, I. M., Hempel, S., Shanman, R., & Shekelle, P. G. (2016). What is an evidence map? A systematic review of published evidence maps and their definitions, methods, and products. *Systematic reviews*, 5(1), 1-21.

<sup>8</sup> Dyssegaard, C. B., Egelund, N., & Sommersel, H. B. (2017). What enables or hinders the use of research-based knowledge in primary and lower secondary-a systematic review and state of the field analysis: Dansk Clearinghouse for uddannelsesforskning, DPU, Aarhus Universitet

## **Phase 2: Document Review**

ACER will develop a document review plan and this will include reference to how the insights gained from the document review will triangulate with other forms of evidence collected during this project. Hence, the document review plan will include the following:

- A justification of which documents will be reviewed and the anticipated value of each one;
- Efforts to ensure a balance of documents across the selection;
- Considerations of the target audience for each document and the implications of this for the review;
- Considerations of the author of the document and the implications of this for the review;
- Any other considerations that arise during discussions with Welsh Government

The document review plan will also include a protocol for undertaking document review. The review will be undertaken by a number of ACER team members and hence it is important that we commence with a clear protocol, data identification form and coding approach that ensures systematic review across documents and individuals (Rohwer et al., 2014<sup>9</sup>). These will be piloted by the project leader and one other team member initially to ensure that they are practical to apply.

## **Phase 3: Qualitative research**

ACER's proposed approach to this project is inevitably informed by the unique circumstances caused by the Covid19 pandemic. Most consultations will take the form of virtual interviews and/or focus groups. Prior to all interviews or focus groups we will develop and share interview protocols that identify the themes to be discussed and the approach to be used. These will be made available in both Welsh and English. Draft Interview and focus group protocols will be shared with the Welsh Government Project Manager for review and feedback.

They will be accompanied by a Plain Language Statement and Consent Form (also bilingual) that give participants details about their participation, their rights, and how the data collected will be processed and stored. All participants will be asked to sign the Consent Form. Interview tools and accompanying documents will be reviewed by, and signed off by ACER Research Ethics Committee.

Participants will be given the choice to participate in consultations in either Welsh or English, as per their preference. With the permission of participants, consultations will be audio-recorded to enable researchers to collate detailed notes (but not transcriptions). Notes will be shared with participants after consultations so that they can amend or add more details if they wish.

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<sup>9</sup> Rohwer, A., Schoonees, A. & Young, T. (2014). Methods used and lessons learnt in conducting document reviews of medical and allied health curricula – a key step in curriculum evaluation. BMC Medical Education, 14: 236.

Our approach to consultations will be respectful and flexible. We will respect the fact that participants have many demands on their time. We will provide options in terms of response mode (phone, video-conference, email) and be flexible in scheduling. We will ensure that consultations are efficient, making the best possible use of participants' valuable time. Researchers undertaking consultations have extensive experience in doing so and have the appropriate skills to engage in warm yet professional communications with all stakeholders.

In this context, our approach to consultation with key stakeholders – including regional consortia professional learning leads, local authority professional learning contacts, headteachers, teachers, support staff – is designed to minimise any impact on them and will take place in the following steps: plan, prioritise, identify, approach.

*Plan* - At the start of the project the ACER team will identify the protocols to be used in participant selection, interview/focus group questions, and qualitative analysis plans. This will include:

- Rationale behind the selection of specific schools/key partners and how this ensures a representative sample of NPEP schools and partners in terms of school type, medium of teaching language, geography, learner characteristics and faith schools by using diverse selection strategy (Gerring, 2009<sup>10</sup>).
- a justification for the inclusion of specific perspectives and the intended benefit to be derived from each one.

*Prioritise* - we will carefully identify the sources of input that we feel would add the most value in addressing the aims this methodology is associated with. The purpose of prioritising inputs will be to ensure that no unnecessary consultation needs to take place in a context in which many stakeholders will be facing novel challenges in carrying out their professional responsibilities.

*Identify* - With these priorities defined, ACER will identify key individuals in each of the categories of stakeholders who are most likely to be able to provide the insights that we have defined as necessary and who are represented of key schools/partners.

*Approach* - ACER will approach schools/partners and individuals and make it clear that participation is voluntary.

ACER staff are used to collecting data from a large variety of education stakeholders including students, teachers, administrators and policy makers and are able to nuance their approach to each data collection in order to meet the specific needs of each group.

<sup>10</sup> Gerring, J. (2009). Case selection for case study analysis: Qualitative and quantitative techniques. In J M. Box-Steffensmeier, H. E. Brady, and D. Collie (eds) in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*.

The output from these interviews and workshops will be used to produce case studies on a range of NPEP schools across different regions and local authority areas which are reflective of the diverse learner settings across Wales.

### **Sampling Strategy**

We are very well aware of the immense stress that these groups have been under during Covid-19, and their likely fatigue at being asked to engage in the project. In response, we will aim to gather the important insights that we need while minimising the burden on respondents as far as possible. We will draw on our experience and design skills in order to achieve this balance.

We anticipate that response rates could be extremely low. For example, the Welsh Government's Education Workforce Survey in 2016/17 garnered a response rate of just 14.4%. The impact of Covid-19 may reduce this further, possibly to less than 10%. With this in mind, ACER will work with the Welsh Government and all our contacts in Wales to obtain introductions and referrals to all the stakeholders, and then work closely with the contacts to agree the best time for the consultations.

### **Data analysis**

ACER will utilise Dedoose (<https://www.dedoose.com/>) as it allows for team coding. We will start with core categories based on the scoping review and will then build up a series of codes on an iterative basis, ensuring that all documents are coded systematically, and revising the codes to combine some categories and to expand others as we work. This type of coding is suitable in the context of this project in that it allows for the 'bottom-up' approach informed by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967<sup>11</sup>) in which themes emerge from the materials under review, without being coloured by preconceptions, enabling us to use theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978<sup>12</sup>).

Coding will start with open coding to categorise themes, move to axial coding to develop relationships between codes and conclude with selective coding, in which categories are integrated to produce a comprehensive picture. Our approach will be flexible enough to allow additional documents to be added to the review as and when required, and will enable second coding of a proportion of documents to ensure consistency across team members.

ACER will analyse data to identify levels of success in implementation of programs and will identify key factors that contribute to these outcomes. We will draw on our experience in implementation science understanding what good-quality program implementation looks like and how to assess it in terms of devices like an 'implementation index'.

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<sup>11</sup> Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine

<sup>12</sup> Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory*. Sociology Press.

### **Proposed structure and delivery of the final report**

In agreement with the Welsh Government, ACER proposes that the key deliverables for this research include a full written report and presentation to the client. ACER will develop the report to adhere to its usual high standards of professionalism and to present clear findings based on a synthesis of all data collected during evaluation activities.

ACER proposes the following structure of the final evaluation report:

- Executive Summary;
- Contents;
- List of Tables and Figures;
- Acronyms;
- Introduction to the research, its context and its intended purpose;
- Research questions and a summary of the data collected to respond to each one;
- Methodology, with reference to the approaches used, their benefits and their limitations as well as details about approaches to sampling, data analysis and synthesis;
- Summary of findings from data to identify responses to each research question;
- Tabulated conclusions to provide an overview of findings for each of the six research questions;
- List of reference material; and
- Appendices with research data, research instruments, interview questions and (if desired) de-identified interview transcripts.

### **Question 3 – Resource Allocation**

Staff roles and suitability of staff for those roles: A clear and detailed description of the resources to be deployed, task allocation (including evidence of the suitability of the personnel proposed for this contract in terms of their experience and skills) and time allocated to the project for each.

**Total: 20%** of Section

Minimum Score Threshold: 60

### **Response Guidance**

Provide a list of the organisations and staff that will be involved in the project at all levels, as well as their specific role in this project. The list should briefly highlight their relevant experience and expertise (e.g. with reference to similar projects they have been involved in and the role they played in those projects), their estimated time to be spent on the project and the length of time they have been working with the organisation. Please provide a table with the number of days allocated to each staff member against each element of the methodology.

State the name of the project manager and a designated deputy.



Designate a quality assurer and detail how they will ensure that all the deliverables are delivered to standard.

Set out how the language requirements set out in the methodology and deliverables sections will be met. Successful suppliers will have a good understanding of the requirements of providing bilingual services and will either offer in-house capability to deliver such a service or have in place a service level agreement with a sub-supplier to support its delivery of bilingual services. Please identify which members of staff responsible for undertaking research bilingually.

Confirm that all employees (where appropriate, including agency staff working for your organisation) will at all times follow the [SRA ethics guidance](#) and will be fully aware of the [GSR professional guidance](#).

Provide information on the data security processes, including storage and transmission of personal data and data protection that will be followed (where appropriate).

**Word Limit: 3,000**

**Supplier Response**

**The ACER Team**

The team assembled for the project brings together prominent experts in curricula, assessment, data and educational system reform. It includes deep knowledge of the Welsh education system and a Welsh native speaker. Biographies for all staff are provided at the end of this section.

- [information redacted]
- [information redacted]
- [information redacted]
- [information redacted]
- [information redacted]
- [information redacted]

The table below summarises the number of days that each team member will spend on each activity.

Staff Member	Research Activity	Days
[information redacted]	Review of relevant policy and practice  Consultation tool design  Quality assurance of consultations  Deliverables	25
[information redacted]	Project management	35

	Review of data available  Consultations  Analysis of data  Deliverables	
<b>[information redacted]</b>	Review of relevant policy and practice  Deliverables	15
<b>[information redacted]</b>	Review of relevant policy and practice  Deliverables	10
<b>[information redacted]</b>	Review of data available  Research tool design  Consultations  Analysis of qualitative data  Deliverables	30
<b>[information redacted]</b>	Support for project management  Research tool design  Consultations  Analysis of qualitative data  Deliverables	30
<b>[information redacted]</b>	Deliverables	20
<b>[information redacted]</b>	Consultations  Deliverables	10
<b>Total Days</b>		<b>175</b>

**Bilingual Requirements**

The team takes our responsibility to ensure that Welsh is treated no less favourably than English in all aspects of the project very seriously. One of the members of the team for this project, **[information redacted]**

**redacted**, is a fluent Welsh speaker and will be an active participant in all research activities, including instrument design and consultation activities. Throughout the project we commit to:

- Ensuring that all written communications and tools used in the project – including the Plain Language Statement and consent form - are made available in both Welsh and English, and are of equivalent high quality in both languages.
- Ensuring that any stakeholders who wish to engage in email or telephone communication in Welsh can do so.
- Ensuring that all stakeholders who wish to engage in consultations, including interviews, focus groups and survey responses, are able to do so in Welsh if they prefer to do so.
- Providing all project deliverables in both Welsh and English, utilising a qualified English-Welsh translator to ensure optimal accuracy in both languages.
- Utilising a reverse translation process to check for accuracy in translations (English to Welsh and then Welsh to English).

### **Quality assurance**

All project staff will at all times follow the [SRA ethics guidance](#) and will be fully aware of the [GSR professional guidance](#).

We will designate two quality assurers for the project. **[information redacted]**, ACER **[information redacted]**, will ensure that deliverables meet the required GSR report standards. She will review all deliverables against GSR standards and advise the project team of any remedial action that is required to ensure adherence. The quality of Welsh versions of documents will be assured by **[information redacted]**.

### **Data collection**

We plan to collect input from stakeholders through virtual discussions (interviews or focus groups). For all consultation activities participants will be provided with information about the project and why we would like to input in the form of a Plain Language Statement (PLS). They will also be asked to provide consent to participate and for discussions to be recorded prior to participation in any discussions or surveys.

PLS, consent forms and consultation tools will be submitted to the ACER Research Ethics Committee for approval and **[information redacted]** will monitor and assure research activities to ensure compliance with ethical practices. No individual details (including names, professional roles or contact details) will be recorded at any point in the consultation process without explicit permission from participants, and no deliverables will identify any individuals unless they have given express permission for this to occur.

### **Data Storage and Access**

ACER UK deal with large volumes of highly confidential data and have sophisticated security processes in place to ensure that data is protected at all times, including in compliance with GDPR legislation. ACER UK also holds certificates for the Cyber Essentials.

ACER UK manages complex, sensitive, and high-stakes data analysis for a range of national and international clients. We have consistently demonstrated compliance with reporting, IT security, privacy, and confidentiality requirements, including projects with the highest levels of security, privacy and confidentiality compliance. ACER UK is committed to managing information securely and maintains Internet security by incorporating advanced technologies to provide layers of security around critical data and services. Staff computers are password protected which are updated regularly, and files are maintained on a network that is backed-up daily.

ACER UK has a robust and mature security environment that is continuously reviewed and improved and are fully GDPR compliant, utilising servers in both Dublin and London. ACER is committed to the protection of all personal information that is held and has an ICT Asset Management Policy which outlines the process of identification, control and management of ACER Information and Communications Technology (ICT) assets, ensuring the protection and sustained delivery of their business and services.

ACER's Network Access Control Policy outlines the control and management of all logical access to ACER information systems and information assets and our Retention Policy ensures that we meet all data protection principles, and personal information is stored, archived and destroyed in accordance with obligations. We have procedures in place to meet the "Right to Erasure" obligation, and safeguards are in place to identify, assess, investigate and report any personal data breach as early as possible. These procedures are explained regularly to all employees. ACER is GDPR compliant and we have a designated security manager to ensure continued compliance. For data transfer we utilise a cloud-based secure data transfer protocol, with data encrypted at both ends.

Data collected by this project will be processed and stored in compliance with current data protection legislation by ACER. Safety measures will include:

- Data will be stored in restricted access folders that are only accessible by the research team;
- Data will undergo regular backups to ensure data integrity;
- Data will be encrypted prior to transfer, transferred using a secure data transfer serves and will require password access, with passwords sent separately;
- Any hard-copy data will be stored in locked-filing cabinets in restricted access areas in the ACER UK office.

- Post-collection, data will be anonymised, with identifiable information removed and stored in separate, password protected lookup files.
- Data collected from participants will be retained should any participant wish to invoke their rights under the data protection legislation.

**Team biographies**

[information redacted]

[information redacted]

[information redacted]

[information redacted]

[information redacted]

[information redacted]

**Question 4 - Project Management**

Understanding of, and ability to meet, project timetable and dependencies/risks. A clear description of the project management plan for the research (including a timetable detailing key milestones; an outline of a robust management (including across sub-contractors, if any), delivery and reporting structure; detailed risk register).

**Total: 15%** of Section

Minimum Score Threshold: 60

**Response Guidance**

Provide a detailed timetable for carrying out the work based on the proposed approach and method and the milestones set out in the specification. The timetable should include estimated timescales for project scoping, development of research instruments, primary research, analysis and reporting. Highlight in particular any deadlines you identify as critical from the specification.

The timings should allow for any translation requirements set out in the specification.

Include timing on turnaround of the final report and information on how you will ensure smooth turnaround (e.g. once you have received comments on the first draft from the Welsh Government).

This section should also provide information on how you will meet contract monitoring requirements as outlined in the specification.

A risk assessment should be provided covering the main risks to the project and how these risks will be managed. This should also note any dependencies, e.g. feedback from Welsh Government officials on research materials and reports that would be needed in order to undertake and complete this project and the implications if this support is not obtained/timely. The tender should also outline how you will mitigate for risks to delivery associated with COVID-19 during the course of the evaluation.

**Word Limit: 2,500**

*\*Please note the timetable and risk assessment are not included in the word limit for this section.*

**Supplier Response**

**Project Timeline**

The first deliverable will be preceded by an Inception Meeting. The other three deliverables will be accompanied by a presentation to the Steering Group and other relevant stakeholders. The table below shows the schedule for deliverables and meetings with the Steering Group.

ACER understand that this project is due to commence on 18 October 2021 and to conclude on 29 March 2022. We further understand that the project includes few key deliverables:

- Inception Report (28 October 2021)
- Bilingual research instruments (November 2021)
- Draft Report (English only) (March 2022)
- Final Report (March 2022)
- Workshop with joint NPEP group (Date to be confirmed)

The first deliverable will be preceded by an Inception Meeting. The other deliverables may be accompanied by a presentation to the Steering Group and other relevant stakeholders.

The table below shows the schedule for deliverables and meetings with the Steering Group.

	O	N	D	J	F	M
<b>Inception Phase</b>						
Inception Meeting						
Project Scoping						
Submission of Inception Note and Report						
Inception Report signoff						
<b>Draft bilingual research instruments</b>						
Submission of research instruments						
Research instruments sign-off						
<b>Data Collection and Analysis</b>						
Literature Review						
Documents Review						
Consultations						
Data Analysis						
<b>Contract meetings</b>						

Meeting to review emerging findings									
Meeting to review draft evaluation report									
Meeting to review final report/ recommendations									
<b>Draft Report</b>									
Submission of Draft Report									
<b>Final Report</b>									
Submission of Final Report									
<b>Workshop (TBC)</b>									
A facilitated workshop on emerging findings									
<b>Progress updates</b>									
Fortnightly updates via Teams or emails									

**Monthly Breakdown**

Month	Activity
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inception Meeting</li> <li>• Project scoping</li> <li>• Preparation, submission and signoff of Inception Report</li> <li>• Review of policy and planning documents</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inception report signoff</li> <li>• Research instruments</li> <li>• Sampling</li> <li>• Scheduling consultations</li> <li>• Literature review</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultations with stakeholders</li> <li>• Transcribing</li> </ul>
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultations with stakeholders</li> <li>• Transcribing</li> <li>• Data analysis and synthesis</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data analysis and synthesis</li> <li>• Review draft report</li> <li>• Translation</li> </ul>

March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Revision, submission, signoff and publication of final report with an executive summary and a SWOT analysis</li><li>• Workshop</li></ul>
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### Project Management

ACER note that the project will take place in a period of time in which there is significant potentials for lockdowns to take place. We equally acknowledge the high level of stress that all educational stakeholders are under due to the complexities caused by the Covid-19 vaccine.

In this context, we will adopt an approach to project implementation that both assures that timelines are met and also enables a degree of flexibility in consultations with stakeholders. We will utilise:

- 1) An experienced project manager, backed up by a deputy project manager, both of whom have been successfully implementing research projects for many years and have been able to steer current projects through the Covid-19 period.
- 2) The implementation of ACER’s tried and tested ACER PRINCE2® Project Management Framework, a tailored version of the widely recognised Projects in Controlled Environments project management methodology.
- 3) A virtual and distanced approach to consultations and meetings that will ensure that all stakeholders are able to participate in this project from a location convenient to them, while avoiding the risk team members could spread Covid-19 during travel.
- 4) Offering flexible ways for stakeholders to participate in the project – primarily via video conferencing but also through responding to online correspondence, submitting digital documents and via telephone conversations.

The ACER PRINCE2® Project Management Framework provides principles (manage by exception, learn from experience, defined roles and responsibilities, manage by stages, focus on deliverables and tailoring), best practice, and project life cycle steps (start up, initialisation, product delivery and closing), with an emphasis on dividing each project into manageable, controlled phases. This methodology will enable the ACER team to control timeframes, manage risk, assure the quality of deliverables, and control costs, whilst delivering the project. We will ensure that the Client is kept updated about progress through a series of regular meetings to be agreed at the start of the project.

Our approach includes a suite of quality assurance procedures and documents that will enable staff to manage the various stages of the project. ACER research staff frequently manage several research projects at any one time and are highly skilled in project management, including client relationship management, team management, budget management, scheduling project activities and quality assuring project deliverables. They will apply this experience to successfully manage the project.



### **Quality assurance of deliverables**

The ACER team understand the need for the deliverables to not only incorporate the desired elements but also to appear professional, to include a range of communication devices including figures, tables and other graphics, and to be suitable for the range of stakeholders that will refer to them. We will also utilise our ACER UK's in-house Graphic Designer to ensure that both language versions of the report are professionally presented and accessible.

In order to achieve a high standard, we will utilise the skills of ACER UK's in-house Corporate Communications Manager to proof-read all deliverables. We will use one or more professional translators recommended by the Welsh Government for translations and utilise a reverse method (English to Welsh and then Welsh to English) to ensure that Welsh language versions are accurate. To ensure that Welsh language versions meet similar quality standards as those in English, our consultant, **[information redacted]**, will quality assure Welsh language translations.

When responding to feedback from Welsh Government, we will tabulate responses to recommendations and requests to ensure that they can be easily reviewed.

The Senior Staff identified for this project will contribute to the development and finalisation of deliverables and will ensure that each one meets its key objectives. ACER note that in addition to the report, a number of other elements of the project will be delivered. These include notes from meetings, draft research tools, regular email updates, and contract meetings as detailed in the specification.

### **Risk management**

We recognise that risk exists in different aspects of a project such as this, and we take seriously the potential impact of risk on outcomes. ACER's project management approach has in-built risk minimisation strategies that are adapted on a project-by-project basis. The approach taken focuses on understanding client objectives and expectations. Our processes are designed to ensure expectations are defined at the outset of a task and that ongoing communication enables the development of project outcomes that match expectations. This approach ensures risks are identified early and plans actioned to minimise impact.

To manage risk in the project, we will continually identify, assess and control risks, maintaining a risk register throughout the project. In the table below we identify risks that we anticipate for this evaluation and our proposed mitigation strategy. This will be updated in the Inception Report.

Identified Risks	Proposed Risk Mitigation
The Covid-19 pandemic will lead to continuous or occasional lockdowns at the national and local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will undertake all consultations with stakeholders virtually, utilising a combination of video conferencing, email and telephone.</li> <li>• Steering Groups meetings will only be held face-to-face if it is possible to travel without exposing any parties to additional risk of contracting Covid-19.</li> </ul>
Key stakeholders are unavailable to participate in consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will offer flexibility in the timing of consultations.</li> <li>• We will seek alternative participants with a similar area of expertise.</li> <li>• We will ensure that any consultations are as efficient as possible.</li> </ul>
Stakeholders are concerned about being identified publicly if they participate in consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will provide all potential participants with detailed information about the project, their role and their rights in participating and/or withdrawing.</li> <li>• We will not collect or identify any potentially identifying information without the explicit permission of participants.</li> <li>• If we consult with any stakeholders who – due to their professional position – could be identified in deliverables, we will make this clear to them and have them sign a consent form to acknowledge this prior to their participation.</li> </ul>
Stakeholders feel that we have not accurately recorded their perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the permission of participants, we will audio-record all consultations and will send notes from each consultation to participants for them to revise if desired.</li> </ul>
Some stakeholders are more comfortable participating in the Welsh language than in English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All consultations will be undertaken in Welsh if this is preferable to participants.</li> <li>• All research tools (including focus group protocols, interview questions, plain language statements and consent forms) will be made available in both Welsh and English.</li> </ul>
Response rates from headteachers and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will oversample to take into account possible low response rates.</li> </ul>

<p>teachers are extremely low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will request support from intermediaries (including Local Authorities and our education contacts) to identify sufficient number of participants.</li> </ul>	
<p>Insufficient information is available to identify data sources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will utilise our existing strong links to those who hold educational data, and other relevant data, to negotiate access to the desired information.</li> </ul>	
<p>External factors cause delays in project activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will maintain regular communications with the Welsh Government Project Manager and will inform them of any anticipated delays.</li> <li>• We will negotiate adjustments to timelines to account for any delays.</li> </ul>	
<p>Feedback on deliverables from Welsh Government officials is delayed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will confirm the timelines for the availability of draft deliverables, review windows and the revision based on feedback in the Inception Phase.</li> <li>• We will offer sufficient time for review to officials.</li> <li>• We will adjust the timeline for subsequent project activities if they are dependent on delayed feedback.</li> </ul>	
<p>The quality of English to Welsh translations is poor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will utilise the experience of our consultant in securing high quality translation services that are known to be reliable.</li> <li>• We will have reverse translations undertaken to check accuracy.</li> <li>• Our native Welsh-speaking team member will quality assure the translations.</li> </ul>	
<p>Key team members become unavailable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will ensure that suitably qualified and experienced replacements are made available.</li> </ul>	

**Marking Scheme and Evaluation Guidance**

Capability	Evidence Provided	Score	Remark
Bidder is likely to be able to meet the needs of the Authority.	Evidence is consistent, comprehensive, compelling, directly relevant to the project in all respects and highly credible (by being substantiated by independent sources where possible.)	<b>100</b>	<b>Absolute Confidence</b>
	Evidence is sufficient (in qualitative terms), convincing, and credible.	<b>80</b>	<b>Confidence</b>
Small risk that bidder will not be able to meet the needs of the Authority.	Evidence has minor gaps, or to a small extent is unconvincing, lacks credibility or irrelevant to the project.	<b>60</b>	<b>Minor Concerns</b>
Moderate risk that the bidder will not be able to meet the needs of the Authority	Evidence has moderate gaps, is unconvincing.	<b>40</b>	<b>Moderate Concerns</b>
Significant risk that the bidder will not be able to meet the needs of the Authority.	Evidence has major gaps, is unconvincing in many respects, lacks credibility, or largely irrelevant to the project.	<b>20</b>	<b>Major Concerns</b>
Bidder will not be able to meet the needs of the Authority.	No evidence or misleading evidence.	<b>0</b>	<b>Not acceptable</b>