



South West and Mid Wales Consortium
Consortiwm De-orllewin a Chanolbarth
Cymru

Making Connections
Creu Cysylltiadau

South West and Mid Wales Consortium

Making Connections

Executive Summary and Conclusions

June 2007

A project supported in part by funding from the Welsh Assembly
Government's Making the Connections Improvement Fund

Executive Summary

This project report brings to a positive conclusion the work of the South West and Mid Wales project Making Connections supported by the funding from the Welsh Assembly Government Making Connections Improvement Fund. The outcomes of the project validates the model developed of Consortium working, which provides means for the six authorities in the South West and Mid Wales Consortium to work together to seek improvement in pupil and school performance. It also provides a vehicle for the introduction of more effective and efficient ways of working.

1. The Making Connections Project

The South West and Mid Wales Consortium (swamwac) is a successful, efficient and collaborative organisation made up of the local Education authorities of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Powys and the City and County of Swansea. Within the South West and Mid Wales Consortium there are 635 schools and teaching services which is 32% of the schools in Wales and 28% of the pupil population. 48% of the schools are Welsh medium or bilingual and 52% of the schools are English medium with Welsh as a second language. A strength of the Consortium is this balance between urban and rural schools, smaller and larger schools, schools in affluent and socially deprived areas and Welsh and English language schools.

The six authorities have worked together as a Consortium since 2000. It began small in that its remit was limited to a few areas but as the positive outcomes of Consortium working have been realised the remit has been extended. Positive outcomes from Consortium working have been achieved in areas such as Threshold Assessment of teachers, Performance Management of teachers and headteachers, Workforce Remodelling and Continuing Professional Development. The benefits of Consortium working are recognised by all authorities within the Consortium and all are committed to the further development of Consortium working.

In 2006 the South West and Mid Wales Consortium successfully bid for funding from the Welsh Assembly Government Making the Connections Improvement Fund to explore the potential for the further development of Consortium working. The grant received together with contributions from each of the six authorities has funded the Making Connections Project.

The South West and Mid Wales Consortium is proposing to build up a new transferable model as a part of tri-level reform. This model is based upon the principle of close collaboration (rather than commercial outsourcing) to address key issues, sponsor innovation and improve efficiency. The Consortium's achievements to date suggest that it could provide a model for regional collaboration and partnership working which accords with the distinctive character of Welsh Education Policy, and could be applied across the country.

There is a clear context in which the Consortium is operating. Consortium working will need to be responsive to both current and new developments which include the objectives set out in The Learning Country:- Vision into Action; the requirement for A Single Plan for Children and Young People; Raising

Standards and School Improvement; Beyond Boundaries (The Beecham Report); Making the Connections; Delivering Better services for Wales; and the Tri-level Reform Agenda.

2. Consultation and Communication

Effective communications has been of high priority within the project. However, managing communications with all stakeholders has been a challenge. A range of communication strategies has been established and this has included written reports, scheduled meetings, facilitation of internal communication within authorities and the development of the website.

During the project there was a commitment to the widest possible consultation. This included initial consultation on attitudes to partnership working including benefits and barriers. Throughout the project there was on going dialogue between stakeholders and Operational Groups. There was wide consultation on the draft project outcomes. Throughout the project documents and communications were facilitated bilingually and are available on the Consortium website.

3. Research to support the Action Plan and Structure

A range of research and developmental work was undertaken. From this research a number of priority areas for Consortium working were identified; these form part of the Outcomes of the project.

Key areas for action were identified through the research on pupil, school and LA performance. These areas were identified as ones that will contribute to raising standards of school performance across the Consortium and were included in the Action Plan. They included:-

- Uptake of Modern Foreign Languages in swamwac very low in relation to All-Wales
- Standards of Teaching, Training and Assessment in schools are 5% lower than the All-Wales average for primary schools.
- Standards of leadership and management are 4% below the All-Wales figure in the sample of primary schools inspected.
- School self-evaluation is well below the All-Wales figure in the sample of primary and secondary schools inspected. Secondary school self-evaluation judgements were lower than primary schools.

Other areas of improvement identified included the potential to improve service delivery, and provide cashable and non-cashable savings, by a critical examination and adjustment of delivery mechanisms including auditing current expertise available in advisory teams, including succession planning, utilising options available for Consortium working, joint procurement/delivery e.g. for supply systems and HR support to schools.

The research in respect of the governance and structure highlighted a range of potential options, assessed how they might support the further development of Consortium working and the implementation of the Action Plan, and recommended a developmental option which obtained the agreement of all parties.

Following research Consortium working was defined as the coming together in a range of ways of some or all services where each authority in the Consortium retains the responsibility for statutory delivery and standards of the service. The work of the Consortium is determined and supported by the six authorities.

The development of Consortium working is guided by a model comprised of different forms of working together, from networking to full integration. Our belief is that not one way of working together fits all situations and the continuum of Consortium working provides the necessary flexibility to accommodate a range of situations and solutions.

The authorities examined each area of service delivery/function considered the opportunities for Consortium working and challenges faced and then decided what if any is the most useful way to work together so that Consortium working can add value to the work of each authority. Thus in some areas a high level of integration provides the best way to secure improvements in efficiency and effectiveness whilst in other areas networking is more suitable.

The Continuum of Consortium Working

Full Integration	This is where Consortium working delivers a common service across the participating authorities. The authorities pool budgets and resources to provide the service
Collaboration	This is where the authorities work together on specific initiatives, sharing resources and sharing responsibilities, risks and rewards.
Cooperation	This is where the authorities work together to solve problems, remove barriers and broker solutions
Coordination	This is where the authorities align policies and procedures, and develop consistent approaches
Networking	This is where the authorities share information, discuss approaches and identify best practice. They also build trust and positive professional relationships

For each function, all those involved in Consortium working, and particularly the Strategic Group, are developing ways to lead and manage each of the different forms of joint working more efficiently and effectively. This is part of a strategy to build the systems, skills and values needed to shape the future of Consortium working and translate vision into practice. Consortium working provides the opportunity for the authorities to work together innovatively.

The leadership and management of Consortium working has been identified as a key element to the success of the project to date. Just as innovative means of securing pupil improvement will be piloted in 2007 / 2008 and beyond, gaining experience of a full understanding of the different management issues which need development, will also be a key element for the development of the Consortium.

4. Project Outcomes

The outcomes of the Making Connections Project

The project focussed in particular on school improvement and Additional Learning Needs Services with three key outcomes.

The three outcomes establish Consortium working that is focused on improved standards in terms of pupils' attainment and that achieves:-

- **efficiencies** through sharing costs and avoiding duplication including improved service delivery and financial savings
- **innovation** by redefining the range of advice and support needed to raise standards in terms of content and expertise, developing a methodology of advice and support that can sustain the children services agenda, developing new arrangements for delivery of services to include shared functions, collaborative functions and functions specific to each authority and developing joint commissioning for services that are specific to each authority
- **partnership** through engaging other education providers and partners, establishing appropriate and flexible networks, being responsive to service users by seeking their views, reflecting local context and needs
- **Continuous Quality Improvement** by establishing the governance model, an inclusive review and monitoring process, a process for measuring the impact of joined up working using benchmarking data, a flexible service that responds positively to change and reflects the needs of the partners

Summary of Outcomes

The three outcomes are briefly summarised below.

Summary of Outcome 1:- Action Plan

The Action Plan sets out the actions that will be undertaken over the next three years through Consortium working. It is incremental and reflects both the continuum of Consortium working and the overarching themes. The Action Plan has two parts a Thematic Action Plan and a Developmental Action Plan

- **The Thematic Action Plan**
This plan summarises proposed Consortium working in each thematic area for the three years. (see pages 59-60)
- **The Developmental Action Plan**
This provides a detailed breakdown of proposed Consortium working over a three year period. Year 1 is the most detailed and it is recognised that Years 2 and 3 are dependent upon the review of the preceding year's outcomes and new developments.
In the Developmental Action Plan each function identified as suitable for Consortium working has been placed on what is considered to be the most appropriate level of the continuum. (see pages 61-71)

Summary of Outcome 2:- Consortium Structure

To deliver the objectives of the Action Plan a model and structure for Consortium working has been developed that achieves an inclusive and flexible organisation which will be responsive to new circumstances and that supports the best possible outcomes for all children and young people.

There are two key elements to the structure; the governance model and the organisation and management structure. Both elements are necessary to enable the delivery of efficient and effective Consortium working that will achieve the outputs identified in the Action Plan.

The proposed Governance Model is a continuation of the present Consortium arrangement with a Lead Authority for management and administrative purposes and the addition of a joint committee with member representation from partner authorities for scrutiny purposes.

Scrutiny	Elected Members Group			
Corporate leadership direction and monitoring	Directors Group			
Strategic leadership planning and monitoring	Strategic Management Group		Headteacher Group	
Operational planning Implementation evaluation	Operational Consortium Coordinator			
	Delivery	Facilitation	Brokerage	COGs (Consortium Operational Groups)
Support	Support To provide support to all areas of Consortium working			

Summary of Outcome 3:- Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan sets out the process by which Outcomes 1 and 2 of the swamwac **Making Connections** project, the Action Plan and Structure, will be implemented, (pages 58-76)

The implementation involves the use of existing professional staff to identify objectives set by each Authority delivered by authorities acting collaboratively.

Key principles underpinning the Implementation Plan

1. To make the child (the citizen) the centre of the improvement agenda and this will primarily focus on school and pupil improvement
2. To deliver a set of locally agreed objectives, set out in the Action Plan, based on local need including innovative ways of working which also link in to the National agenda as articulated in a range of national documents
3. To allow the local shaping and management of services which are efficient and effective in achieving 1 and 2 above, including the opportunity to create efficiencies and implement service change

The six authorities in the South West and Mid Wales Consortium, working together across the continuum of Consortium working based on a formal agreement, means there will be:-

- a bottom up approach involving all stakeholders in a full consultative process
- strategic management and leadership that is proactive in the development of education in the region

- a managed Consortium team of permanent staff and secondments with the capacity to facilitate change and achieve agreed objectives in the Action Plan
- a different way of working to achieve the delivery of quality services that meet the challenge of innovation and the creation of efficiencies
- authorities working as a Consortium to enhance current provision in each authority
- schools playing a strategic role in the delivery of the Action Plan
- authorities making a commitment to provide resources to develop and sustain Consortium working

5. Conclusions and the Way Forward

The project outcomes highlight the work the Consortium will pursue during 2007-2008 as means of achieving the overarching outcome of improved pupil standards. The outcomes also recognise that the potential for efficiencies in terms of cashable and non-cashable savings.

Through the implementation of the Action Plan and Structure we will gain experience of the scrutiny and monitoring role and the strategic issues arising from Consortium working. We believe that the model developed is an example which is compatible with tri-level reform, where all concerned have the common goal of improving outcomes for children and young people.

Consortium working will enable innovation and efficiencies through the empowerment of staff and authorities to collaborate to do things differently.

The actions required to achieve the desired outputs from Consortium working have been prioritised. Each authority is committed to the development of Consortium working and have pooled resources to fund the prioritised actions as outlined in the output plan.

However it is recognised that to fully implement the Action Plan further start up funding will be required and progress will be limited without such funding. The need for this additional resource will form the basis for continuation funding to the Welsh Assembly Government Making the Connection Improvement fund.

Section 5: Conclusions and the Way Forward

5.1 Has the project achieved what the PID set out?

The desired outcome of the project was the development of a Consortium strategic education and lifelong learning service that is fit for purpose to support Single Education Plans and the Children Act. It was envisaged that there would be incremental improvement on and increase in Consortium working over at least three phases of the project.

It was envisaged that Phase 1, in 2006-07 would have three specific outcomes, an Action Plan, a structure and governance model, and an implementation plan. Implementing the findings of the project, encapsulated in the Action Plan. Other further phases would achieve improved services and outcomes for children and young people.

Each of the three Phase 1 outcomes has been achieved and are included in this report. Subsidiary factors for each of the outcomes were defined in the PID and the table below indicates whether these factors have been met.

Achieving the Outcomes

Outcome 1:- An Action Plan which	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Is developmental and seeks to achieve an inclusive organisation that is flexible so that it can be responsive to new circumstances and meet the needs of our service users	Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Places each function of the area of work on the continuum of 'joined up working'	Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Adheres to the principles of Making the Connections, improved standards, efficiency, innovation, partnership, continuous quality improvement	Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Outlines a monitoring and evaluation process for each function that will measure the impact of the joined up working using benchmarking data in existence	The monitoring and evaluation process is outlined in the Implementation Plan, the Action Plan includes specific actions to ensure that the process is undertaken
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Respects the ethos of each authority	Yes

Outcome 2:- Structure	
● A governance structure, including a legal model	Yes
● A management and organisation structure	Yes
● A financial model including details of Gershon efficiencies and income	The financial model is included in the Implementation Plan
● A personnel model including succession planning over 5 years	Succession Planning research has been completed resulting in actions included in the Action Plan to enable further development
● An operational model that allows for the wider geographical area	Yes
● Functions that will be fully integrated	Yes
● Functions where the Consortium will supply a strategic lead	Yes
● Functions that will be networked and the extent to which common approaches will be expected	Yes
● Benefits for schools in the six authorities	Yes
● A change programme for local authority management and employees	The Implementation Plan specifies development of a change programme, with timescales
● Expected links with partner organisations, including higher education providers	Yes
● Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) structure and process	Yes
● Bilingualism	Yes
● Other additional areas identified in the Action Plan	Yes
Outcome 3:- Implementation Plan containing	
● Method of dissemination of the plan	Yes
● Implementation strategy	Yes
● Time-scale	Yes

5.2 Lessons Learned

During Year 1 of the project, several issues arose which delayed progress towards the outcomes within the agreed and published timelines. Whilst the project has met its outcomes, it is important to learn from such issues so that subsequent years can proceed with increased efficiency and confidence. A number were process issues, but others are perceived to be important to address if Consortium working is to progress further and if the joint working is to produce a valuable contribution to improved outcomes for children and young people.

5.2.1 Project Team and processes

Issue	Action
It was recognised early in the process that project support was recruited too late. Ongoing support is vital for continuity and progression.	This has been addressed in the next phase of the Project with a review and development of the support role.
	Project management techniques are useful but 'light touch' is considered sufficient for this type of project.
Scope creep resulted in the project losing focus and incurring time pressures.	This required the Project Team, Strategic Group and senior management to adhere to project outcomes and timescales.
Due to time constraints insufficient time for consultation was allocated.	This will inform decisions on consultation periods in future.
Managing change has not been formalised and resourced as much as needed to support the programme.	As a result a change management programme is to be developed and implemented as an integral part of the Implementation Plan.
Detailed plans needed to be formulated earlier.	This is being addressed within the Implementation Plan
The academic year needs to be used for planning timescales and deadlines.	The Implementation plan and project plan is based on a September 2007 start.
It is important to have a multi-disciplinary Project Team of officers and advisers to provide a broader perspective in developing the Project.	This is addressed within the Implementation Plan.

5.2.2 Data Analysis

Issue	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different data is held in the authorities and is held in varying formats making comparisons difficult. ICT systems are not compatible across the authorities which is a barrier to data analysis and progress towards several actions. 	A review of ICT systems is in the agreed Action Plan and its commencement is identified in stage 1 of the Implementation Plan.
Concerns over sharing of school and pupil level data.	These concerns were resolved with an agreement on a protocol.

5.2.3 Operational Groups

Issue	Action
Groups are at different levels of maturity, there are varying levels of commitment and attendance. Some officers are on several groups and have limited time. There are too many groups which has stretched project resource to provide clear facilitation and direction.	The implementation plan identifies the reorganisation of Operational Groups, the development of agreed targets for the groups and specific job descriptions for facilitators.
The organisation of groups and terms of reference need to be established. Some groups have not operated strategically and have not focussed on outputs.	Terms of reference for the groups which are already developed to be reviewed and re-issued to groups.
There are several Groups that are well advanced and are capable of being self sustaining in taking the Project objectives forward.	All groups will be subject to the review of terms of reference and composition set out in the Implementation Plan, but the value of existing expertise and commitment is recognised.

5.2.4 Governance

Issue	Action
Political involvement is required to give the project support and visibility. There are potential legal and procedural issues associated with member involvement and scrutiny in bringing together the six authorities.	The implementation plan identifies actions to support the introduction of the structure and governance arrangements.
Senior Management need to demonstrate clear commitment for partnership working and strategic direction.	The Action Plan contains a number of strategic actions to address commitment and strategic direction issues.
Management needs to focus on outcomes but these are not easy to measure. Those outcomes may not necessarily result in cost savings.	The Implementation Plan has targets and success criteria to support strategic direction and capacity building. An identification of both cashable and non-cashable efficiencies is being developed
There is a need to organise and schedule meetings in advance across the six authorities.	Actions to schedule annual meetings are identified both in stage 1 of the implementation plan and the 'output planning' report.
The Headteacher Focus group needs to represent the views of Headteachers and to feedback to them.	A target and success criteria for Headteacher meetings is contained in the 'output planning' report.
The project has been a catalyst in bringing together various stakeholder groups (e.g. Headteachers, Elected Members, etc.) across the Consortium.	This will need to be a priority in the next phase.

5.2.5 Research

Issue	Action
The appointment of a School Data Operational Group late in the process held back their involvement in the decision making process and subsequent communication.	It is now identified that the group has a key role in the effective working towards school improvement across the Consortium and will be developed further.
The credibility of the performance data was undermined by its reliance on teacher assessment data.	This has been addressed in the next phase of the project by identifying strategies to ensure consistency in teacher assessment across the Consortium.
The importance of the Fischer Family Trust data has been identified.	Strategies are being put in place to utilise the information in a range of ways.
It is clear that some elements of the research have their validity questioned e.g. Review of Estyn Inspections, Audit Commission's Perception Survey.	Those issues were made clear at the beginning of each report and the outcomes from those pieces of research have not been used in isolation to inform future planning. In some cases data will become more useful for comparison purposes if response standards are agreed by all authorities as proposed in the Action Plan and Implementation Plan.
The outcomes of the research have shown that there are inconsistencies in the level of provision in advisory services across the six LAs and that school performance is variable.	This information has informed future planning.

5.2.6 Partnership Working

Issue	Action
Building and maintaining trust is vital for the project to proceed and for partnership working to realise benefits.	The Implementation Plan will foster this via the effective use of facilitators at Operational Group meetings, and within the structure and governance arrangements.
Communication both between the Project Team and authorities and within the authorities has not always been effective	The communications strategy will be revised and further developed to support action 1.1 of the Action Plan.

5.3 Strategic Outcomes and Emerging issues and themes

5.3.1 Redefinition of Overall Outcome

In working towards the overall outcome - the development of a Consortium strategic education and lifelong learning service that is fit for purpose to support Single Education Plans and the Children Act - it became apparent that this needed to be redefined, reviewed and clarified to provide that the contribution of school and education staff ensures that:-

1. Every child is supported to engage, achieve and attain to meet their full potential
2. Services are centred on the child
3. School Standards continue to improve

And these key outcomes are encapsulated in the Prioritised Output Plan (page 93) within the Implementation Plan

5.3.2 Governance and Structure, Partnership working and the Continuum of Consortium Working

The governance and structure, and the partnership working model agreed as a result of the research development in the project is easily understood, and is transferable to other services.

It has become clear that what is being developed is 'Consortium working' rather than 'the Consortium'. A Key element of effective development is the understanding that Consortium working involves all stakeholders and is a Continuum of partnership working.

The value of partnership working is becoming more widely accepted within the 6 authorities, and by others, as a result of the work carried out over the last year. However, it is clear that there are still many barriers and management issues to overcome, including suspicion over potential loss of 'control', financial issues, geographical issues. A key feature of the swamwac model is that it recognises and addresses the issue of authorities retaining responsibility for and ownership of services, whilst extending partnership working where it can add value.

5.3.3 The Action Plan and Implementation Plan

A significant number of actions were identified, firmly based on the research undertaken, where Consortium working could add value and it became apparent that there were a number of distinct themes into which these fell. These themes were defined and became the substance of the Thematic Action Plan, (pages 59-60) a useful tool against which targets can be set to measure progress in Phase 2.

The three themes are:-

- Strategic Direction and Capacity Building

- Workforce Development
- Advice Support and Challenge

Against each theme a statement of intent and key actions has been developed. The Output Plan within the Implementation Plan identifies how progress to achieve key actions will be measured, and in what timescale.

5.3.4 Strategic Direction

Clear and effective strategic direction is an essential element in developing cohesive and efficient Consortium working. The project benefited from a committed Strategic Group acting as the Project Board, providing the overall strategic direction for the Project and the development of Consortium working. The Strategic Group have scrutinised the developing outcomes and help shape the new structure and governance for Consortium working. The Directors Group provided scrutiny and monitoring in the wider corporate context in which the project has developed. This arrangement for providing strategic leadership and management has ensured has ownership of and influence on the development of the outcomes of Consortium working.

During the projects first year the scrutiny role was augmented by reports to the Regional Board. This further improves communication between the work of the Consortium and the wider corporate perspectives.

The establishment of a Headteacher Focus Group that will contribute to the strategic direction of Consortium working will ensure that the views of schools are central to the strategic planning and monitoring.

The strategic element will be enhanced by the inclusion of the portfolio holders group who will undertake a high level of monitoring and scrutiny role for Consortium working and on behalf of their respective authorities.

We believe that this model is an example of tri-level reform in action, where all concerned have a common goal of improving outcomes for children and young people.

5.3.5 Innovation

Consortium working is now defined and the developing continuum will contribute to efficient and effective achievement of outputs and improved outcomes. Consortium working is about enabling and empowering individual staff and authorities as a whole to 'collaborate to do things differently' rather than 'collaborating to do more of the same'. Consortium working has the potential to provide innovative approaches to achieving the planned outputs and the potential to achieve higher standards.

5.3.6 Efficiencies

Consortium working has potential to achieve efficiencies. Efficiencies can be demonstrated through an improved or extended service for the same resource (non-cashable, additional outputs) and financial savings (cashable, same outputs for reduced outputs or resource).

The most important potential efficiency that can be obtained from Consortium working is the raising of pupil attainment since at the heart of Consortium working is improved outcomes for all children and young people. The raising of pupil standards is the focus of Consortium working.

Efficiencies in terms of improved outputs that can be achieved through Consortium working include sharing practice, agreeing common outcomes, common policy agreement, joint provision particularly in areas of low incidence and low demands and increase productive time.

However it also recognises the potential for achieving efficiencies through financial savings. Consortium working offers the potential to achieve this through such things as shared development and procurement costs, joint staffing and training, and pooled budgets.

5.4. The way forward

All authorities are committed to Consortium working and support the view that Consortium working is not something that is a “nice to do” it is a “must do”. A wide range of benefits and efficiencies have been identified within this project and there is already evidence of the positive benefits that have been achieved through Consortium working.

The opportunities identified are exciting yet challenging and the South West and Mid Wales Consortium is committed to seizing these opportunities and achieving the actions set out. The six authorities have already committed funding to progress Consortium working. The actions that can be achieved within this funding have been prioritised. However, to achieve the key actions within the desired timescale and to embed Consortium working as part of the “day job”, will require additional start-up funding. Thus the funding for the Implementation of the Action Plan and Structure, the outcomes of our Making the Connections project will form the basis of the bid for continuation funding from the Welsh Assembly Government making the Connections Improvement fund