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The National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry

The impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and school improvement: an evidence review

Research

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The impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and school improvement: an evidence review

- Audience** Education professionals, researchers and policymakers.
- Overview** As part of the National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry the Welsh Government undertook an evidence review on the impact of teacher professional learning. The review is based on an academic literature review and interviews with key stakeholders in the Welsh education system. It also considers this context in professions other than teaching.
- Action required** The document will be of interest to education policymakers and practitioners.
- Further information** Enquiries about this document should be directed to:
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- Related documents** The National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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1. Executive summary

1.1 This report presents a review of evidence on how the impact of professional learning on educational practitioners, their pupils, and school improvement can best be captured and evaluated. It draws on findings from a systematic literature review, discussions with key stakeholders and educational professionals in the Welsh education system and presents case studies which explore if and how other professions in the UK capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning.

1.2 The **main findings** of the report recognise that capturing the impact of professional learning is a complex and time-consuming process and that if this is to be undertaken successfully the following should be in place:

- A shared understanding of the quantitative and qualitative evidence to be collected.
- Robust methods that will be used to collect this evidence.
- A continuous and critical monitoring and evaluation process that is linked to school self-evaluation and improvement.
- Within and between school collaboration.
- The provision of professional learning opportunities for practitioners to develop their skills in this area, including mentoring support from higher education researchers.
- Support from school leaders to allow practitioners time to undertake this work.
- The use of learner voice as a key evidence source, including support for pupils to develop their reflection and communication skills.
- The use of the Professional Learning Passport to record the evidence collected.

1.3 On this basis the review proposes the following **recommendations** to the Welsh Government and its partners in the middle tier:

- Capturing the impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and schools should be a key aspect of the revised Welsh Government *National Approach to Professional Learning*.
- The NAPL should recognise that undertaking such work is a complex and time-consuming process.
- To this end, key stakeholders in the Welsh education system (Welsh Government, Local Authorities, Regional Education Consortia, Estyn, the National Academy for Educational Leadership, the Education Workforce

Council and Higher Education Institutions), should work together to develop a *Professional Learning Impact Framework*.

- In undertaking this work the findings of this evidence review should be fully considered.

2. Aims and objectives

- 2.1 This report presents a review of evidence on how the impact of professional learning on educational practitioners, their pupils, and school improvement can best be captured and evaluated. It draws on findings from a systematic literature review, discussions with key stakeholders and educational professionals in the Welsh education system and presents case studies which explore if and how other professions in the UK capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning.
- 2.2 Much research highlights the importance of teacher quality and the role of professional learning in developing teaching and learning strategies (for examples, see Hattie 2009 and 2012; [Coe et al. 2014](#)).
- 2.3 Evidence suggests that ‘good’ professional learning is systematic, supportive, collaborative, sustained, intensive and based on sound theory and practice ([Louis et al. 2010](#), [Louis and Robinson 2012](#); [Sebba et al. 2012](#); [Brown and Rogers 2014](#); [Sutton Trust 2015](#); [Cordingley et al. 2015](#); [Egan and Grigg 2016](#)).
- 2.4 However, a recent Estyn Annual Report ([2016: 15](#)) explains, ‘too few schools help staff to make the best of professional learning opportunities, and they do not evaluate whether these activities result in improvements for pupils or staff’.
- 2.5 The review is presented as follows:
 - Firstly, the methodology employed in the evidence review is presented.
 - Next, a literature review explores what professional learning is, what professional learning in Wales looks like and what is meant by the phrase ‘capturing and evaluating impact’.
 - The review continues by presenting findings from discussions with key education stakeholders and professionals in the Welsh education system.
 - It then presents a series of case studies which examine how other professions in the UK capture the impact of professional learning within their sectors.
 - Finally, the review draws together some main findings and recommendations regarding what systems need to be put in place to better capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and school improvement in the future.

Context

- 2.6 Wales’ performance in the 2010 Programme for International Student Assessments ([PISA](#)) instigated a significant change in Welsh Government policy towards educational professional development. Underlying these policy changes were three key reports, which emphasised the importance of building quality in teaching within the Welsh system: the OECD’s (2014) [Improving Schools in Wales](#) report, Furlong’s (2015) [Teaching Tomorrow’s Teachers](#) report, which proposed reforms to teacher education, and Donaldson’s (2015) [Successful Futures](#) report, which proposed curriculum and pedagogy developments.

- 2.7 These reports all highlighted the importance of the role of teacher pedagogy within the school curriculum and aligned with the overarching concept of developing 'self-improving schools'. As such, the Welsh Government made a commitment to the development of a professional learning model.
- 2.8 The 'New Deal for the Education Workforce' was developed as a professional learning model in 2015 ([Welsh Government 2015](#)). It comprised four areas of study, which were referred to as 'modules'. These modules included: effective collaboration, reflective practice, effective use of data and research evidence, and coaching and mentoring.
- 2.9 In 2017, 'Education in Wales: Our National Mission' was established ([Welsh Government 2017](#)). As summarised by Thomas ([2018](#)), the aims of the 'National Mission' depict that new skills and knowledge bases are required for trainee teachers, the existing teaching workforce and for those who will lead them. The aim of the National Mission is to allow schools to identify their own priorities for development they feel is most appropriate to their contexts, practitioners and learners.
- 2.10 Since the implementation of the New Deal and National Mission, the Welsh Government ([2018](#)) has developed the *National approach to professional learning*. This approach identifies eight primary elements that comprise Wales' professional learning model. Each of these elements is divided into categories: school context (individual professional learning journey, schools as learning organisations, professional learning blend); national context (collaborative networks, professional teaching and leadership standards); regional context (pedagogy for professional learning, professional learning offer, accreditation/recognition). This extends the previous professional learning modules by also linking these approaches to the professional standards for teaching and leadership.
- 2.11 In order to facilitate these developments, the Chartered Teacher Programme and the Professional Development Bursaries were replaced by the nationally commissioned and directed Masters in Educational Practice (no longer in practice), [Professional Learning Communities](#), and the [Regional Education Consortia](#), which support school-to-school professional networking.
- 2.12 The professional learning aspects of these reforms were led by [Pioneer Schools](#), who worked with the Welsh Government and the Regional Education Consortia to develop a research-based 'what works' approach to educational practice.
- 2.13 The Pioneer Schools initiative was developed to support the learning and implementation of the forthcoming Curriculum for Wales ([2022](#)), and further Wales model of professional learning and development. These model developments included:
- Revised Professional Standards
 - Action inquiry to establish what is needed
 - Auditing what is known already

- A Career Development Pathway (linked to a 'passport' administered by the Education Workforce Council).
- 2.14 Facilitated by Regional Education Consortia, the aim for Pioneer Schools was to access the professional learning they required to develop their own 'self-improving' systems that the OECD ([2014](#)) report recommended.
- 2.15 Furthermore, in 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government instigated a review of professional development, which resulted in a new Practice, Review and Development (PRD) model. The PRD model links performance management to the elements of professional development, including: coaching and mentoring, reflective practice, action research and professional learning communities ([Welsh Government 2012](#)).
- 2.16 Its core purpose is to encourage evaluation of professional development experiences and their impact on practice. These elements have now been incorporated within the professional learning model through the professional learning passport ([Education Workforce Council 2021](#); discussed further in section 0). The National Evaluation and Improvement Resource (NEIR) has also been produced to support teachers in these areas (see [Welsh Government 2021](#)).
- 2.17 The NEIR has been developed by education practitioners from across Wales, [Estyn](#), the Regional Consortia and local authorities, with additional input from the OECD. It promotes a culture of professional reflection, dialogue and learning (Welsh Government 2021). At the time of writing this report, the NEIR was entering phase 2 of its development.
- 2.18 The resources, all available on [Hwb](#), encourage professionals to use data to look to 'ask questions rather than answer them' (Welsh Government 2021). This is based on the premise that 'it is unlikely that one set of data alone will give a school the 'full story' or enable it to identify precisely what actions may need to be taken' (Welsh Government 2021). The resource suggests professionals think about 'triangulating' data with other evidence, and key facets of this are 'looking at learning and listening to learners' (Welsh Government 2021).
- 2.19 The NEIR promotes a context-based approach to school evaluation and improvement, and part of this means identifying and evaluating the bespoke professional learning professionals require. Examples and case study schools who have been involved with the development of the NEIR can be seen [here](#).
- 2.20 However, evidence suggests that this context-based approach has led to inconsistencies in the engagement, implementation and capturing of professional learning impact across schools in Wales (OECD 2014). A recent Estyn Annual Report ([2016: 15](#)) explains, 'too few schools help staff to make the best of professional learning opportunities, and they do not evaluate whether these activities result in improvements for pupils or staff'.
- 2.21 It seems crucial, therefore, that an understanding of how capacity could be built to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning, at multiple levels

within the Welsh education system, is highly important. Before considering what this capacity may look like, this report defines how the terms 'capture' and 'evaluation' are used.

3. Methodology

3.1 The following methodology was used in producing this review:

- A systematic search of relevant research literature.
- Discussions with key stakeholders and educational professionals in the Welsh education system.
- Case studies of some other professions in the UK.

Systematic evidence review

3.2 A review of the available literature was conducted to explore:

What is currently known about the capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and school improvement and developments in professional learning in Wales.

3.3 The search criteria used for the systematic literature review were:

- What does current evidence suggest is the impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and/or school improvement?
- What practices are or have been in place that attempt to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and/or school improvement?
- What practices are in place that attempt to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on practitioners in other sectors in the UK?
- How could findings from this review be used to inform and develop a sustainable model of impact capture and evaluation in the education system in Wales?

3.4 A systematic review method was used as it aims to summarise large bodies of evidence to help explain findings—similarities and differences—among studies, contexts and evidence on the same question (Cook *et al.* 1997). Taking the above research questions and Cook *et al.*'s (1997) definition into account, this review searched for relevant evidence reports and references from 2000 onwards.

3.5 Where databases allowed, phrase searching was employed to locate literature across the following sources: [British Educational Research Association](#) (BERA), [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD), the [Welsh Government](#) website (including archived pages, professional association outputs and data publications etc.), the [Education Council Workforce](#) (EWC) website, Cardiff University library search, Welsh Government library search, Google Scholar, and the [Education Resources Information Centre](#) (ERIC).

3.6 The selection criteria were guided by the terms of reference for the project and, where possible, assessments about the relevance, quality and strengths of the evidence were made. Key criteria included:

- Relevance to the Welsh context
- Aim and design of the impact strategy
- Quality of data and analysis
- Reliability of claims and associations based on the evidence presented

3.7 It was not always possible to apply all the above criteria to every source. However, a pragmatic approach was taken to assess the quality of the evidence found and its relevance to the report aims based on the information provided in the text. The primary nature of these texts was policy-style documents and/or evidence reports that discuss and analyse the usage, capacity and implementation of professional learning in educational contexts.

Discussions with key stakeholders and educational practitioners in the Welsh education system

3.8 To support findings from the literature searches, informal, semi-structured online discussions with key stakeholders and educational practitioners (headteachers, subject leads and classroom teachers) were conducted. These discussions took place through Teams or Zoom.

3.9 Findings from the literature review were used to prepare key questions/discussions points (see Figure 1). The aim of these interviews was to deepen knowledge about what systems are already in place in different educational settings, and to understand more about specific policies, models, practices and/or the logistics of building the infrastructure required to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on educational practitioners, pupils and schools. The discussions also provided an opportunity to check that no key literature had been missed during the searches.

And/or

Areas for discussion (education)

- ▶ What practices do you have in place or are you aware of that attempt to capture the impact of professional learning on practitioners/pupils/school improvement?
- ▶ Do you have evidence on the impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and/or school improvement? If so, how is this collected/used within your school/consortia?
- ▶ How do you think impact/evidence from professional development could be used to support practitioners in embedding enquiry/evidence-based practice in the long-term?
- ▶ What systems need to be put in place to better capture the impact of professional learning on practitioners/pupils/school improvement.



Figure 1. Example of questions asked in discussions with education stakeholders and professionals.

3.10 Notes and minutes of the meetings were kept to capture key information. No audio/video recordings were taken. Discussion participants included:

- Welsh Government education policy advisors
- Headteachers, subject leads and classroom teachers from schools in Wales
- Regional consortia leads
- Researchers and academics from universities across Wales
- Professionals from Estyn

3.11 The information captured from these discussions was used to conduct additional literature searches and/or to interpret findings from the literature. These discussions also provided key vocabulary and phrases from which I could expand searches of the literature.

3.12 For example, terms/phrases used repeatedly in these discussions included: 'time and space', 'collaborative working', 'evaluative models', 'evidence capture tools', and 'evidence-informed practice'. These terms provided a base from which I could further explore the literature and understand if and how similar terminology was used in other professions. The findings from these discussions are reported on in each of the relevant sections below.

Case studies of some other professions in the UK.

3.13 In order to understand how the impact of professional learning could be evaluated and captured in the education setting, informal, semi-structured online discussions with professional learning leads from other UK work sectors were conducted. These discussions took place through Teams or Zoom.

3.14 As with discussions undertaken with education stakeholders and professionals, findings from the literature review were used to prepare key questions/discussions points (see Figure 2). The aim of these interviews was to understand how other UK-based professions capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning completed by practitioners within the relevant sectors.

Areas for discussion (UK professions)

- ▶ What practices do you have in place (or are you aware of) that attempt to capture/measure the impact of professional learning on practitioners?
- ▶ Do you have evidence on the impact of professional learning on practitioners? If so, how is this collected/used?
- ▶ What systems/support do you think need to be put in place to better capture the impact of professional learning on practitioners in the future?

Figure 2. Example of questions asked in discussions with professionals from other professions in the UK.

3.15 Notes and minutes of the meetings were kept to capture key information. No audio/video recordings were taken. Discussion participants included:

- Social care professionals
- Medicine and healthcare professionals
- Law professionals

3.16 The purpose of these discussions was to understand if and how models or approaches to impact capture and evaluation could be considered and/or adapted to the education sector.

4. Literature Review

- 4.1 In a seminal report which examined how the world's best performing school systems 'come out on top', Barber and Mourshed ([2007](#)) highlighted that the quality of teaching is the single most important factor determining the success of education systems around the world. This report also emphasised that successful education systems placed great importance on developing teacher teaching and learning strategies to ensure a high quality of teaching.
- 4.2 According to Barber and Mourshed (2007), professional learning—whether through high-quality initial teacher education, continued support and mentoring for qualified teachers, the identification of lead subject practitioners and/or collaborative 'problem solving'—allows teachers to work with and learn from one another to develop the high level of teaching quality required.
- 4.3 Reports by Cordingley *et al.* for the Teacher Development Trust ([2015](#)) and the OECD ([2016: 14](#)) suggest that professional learning relies on a 'careful design' which offers sustained resources and commitment, and a 'strong focus on improving student outcomes that have a significant impact on student achievement' (for further evidence, see Marks *et al.* 2002; [Yoon *et al.* 2007](#); Brasco 2008) . Both reports point to the importance of collaborative work, using external expertise, focusing on both generic and subject specific pedagogy, and ensuring that learning is able to quickly impact upon classroom practice.
- 4.4 However, research has consistently shown that schools lack experience, skills and tools to evaluate the impact of professional learning (for examples, see [Goodall *et al.* 2005](#), Bubb and Earley 2007, Bubb *et al.* 2009).
- 4.5 Estyn's annual report ([2016](#)) supports these findings, as it notes that 'the most important factor in how well learners develop and learn is the quality of teaching', and the best school's leaders 'arrange professional learning opportunities to improve teaching' (Estyn 2016: 5). Furthermore, the most 'successful' teachers 'think critically about pedagogy, read broadly about teaching and learning and discuss their work with other teachers' (Estyn 2016: 5).
- 4.6 There is, however, debate in the literature surrounding what constitutes 'successful' or 'good' professional learning. This report continues, therefore, by exploring some of these ideas.

Professional learning

- 4.7 Porritt *et al.* (2017: 77) define professional learning as 'all the opportunities offered for colleagues to [...] learn something new, update their skills, be informed of new developments, explore a new technique or resource, refresh subject-specific knowledge, improve teaching quality, develop more independent learners.' These opportunities can be offered in a 'wide range of ways; courses, workshops, seminars, learning walks, reading articles, visits to other organisations, action research, Masters qualifications, peer observation, collaborative planning' (Porritt 2017: 77).

- 4.8 Regardless of the type of opportunity undertaken (i.e. workshop, course etc.), Eraut (2004) argues that at the core of good professional learning, is critical self-reflection. Eraut (2004) suggests that without critical reflection, the learner (in this instance, the teacher) just ‘mimics’ newly gained professional knowledge without interrogating its relevance to the teaching/learning context.
- 4.9 The aim of professional learning, therefore, is for the learner to challenge the current norms, and interrogate how and when particular knowledge should be used and embedded into professional practice (Eraut 2004: 249). Rather than a ‘quick fix’, Eraut (2004: 249) advocates for a development of ‘tacit knowledge’ that becomes embedded in the professional’s practice through a process of reflection, evaluation and, finally, implementation when they deem appropriate and necessary. For Eraut (2004), this ensures ‘mimicry’ of professional knowledge is avoided and a deeper level of professional understanding can occur.
- 4.10 More recently, Shulman (2005: 59) has extended theories about professional learning to include what he terms ‘signature pedagogies’. These ‘pedagogies’ refer to professional learning that is deepened by an understanding of professional habits, including: action (‘habits of the hand’); evaluation of action (‘habits of the head’); and, their impact on professional values, ethos and identity (‘habits of the heart’). This approach focuses on the cognitive aspects professional learning and argues for the depth and complexity of thinking and engagement.
- 4.11 However, Opfer and Pedder (2011: 376) argue that thinking about professional development in a definitive way has ‘yielded disappointing results’. They suggest that these conceptualisations of professional learning are ‘simplistic’, as they fail to consider ‘how learning is embedded in personal and professional lives and working conditions’; the individual learning practitioner, and the context in which they are situated, are complex.
- 4.12 As such, Daly *et al.* (2020) suggest an ‘ecological conceptualisation’ of professional learning is required. They argue that this approach, which acknowledges the layered complexities of professional learning in the school environment, offers a deepened understanding of the ‘conditions that constitute schools as sites of professional formation’. From this perspective, ‘relations among key stakeholders in school communities – including leaders – are needed in order to realise the potential of such environments as sites of professional learning, both formal and informal’ (Daly *et al.* 2020: 652).
- 4.13 Daly *et al.* (2020: 660) recognise the challenge of navigating these stakeholder-leader-practitioner-school relations, but suggest that placing emphasis on this complex, dynamic relationship, which allows for the ‘continual re-solving of problems as a desirable professional state’ rather than a ‘fixation on finding solutions that cannot endure because of the continuous evolution of components that cannot be made static in a complex system’, provides the opportunity for schools to act as the learning environments teachers need to engage with meaningful professional learning.

- 4.14 Reviews of the literature suggest that ‘meaningful’ professional learning needs to be: sustained, collaborative, subject-specific, practice-based and enquiry orientated (Timperley *et al.* 2007; Wei *et al.* 2009). Furthermore, Cordingley *et al.* (2015) noted that the aligning professional learning activities and experiences with pupil outcome aims was pivotal to ‘meaningful’ professional learning.
- 4.15 However, it is currently unclear how it can be established that professional learning is ‘meaningful’. In order to define or establish ‘meaningful’ professional learning practice, there must be some way of capturing and evaluating the impact of this learning.
- 4.16 There are many models and theories about professional learning and its evaluation. Useful overviews of relevant approaches to evaluation are given by Coldwell and Simkins (2010) and Bubb and Earley (2007) who consider the strengths and weaknesses of various models. However, as Thompson and Wiliam (2008: 3) note, ‘knowing that teachers make a difference is not the same as knowing how teachers make a difference’.
- 4.17 Therefore, in order to understand if and how professional learning supports teachers in ‘making a difference’, the impact of the learning must be captured and evaluated.

Evaluating professional learning

- 4.18 Harris and Jones (2019) discuss this lack of clarity regarding an understanding of what makes professional learning effective. Similarly to Bristow’s (2021) findings on developing an evidence-informed education profession in Wales, Harris and Jones (2019: 1) suggest that collaborative working offers education practitioners the opportunity to evaluate the impact of their professional learning experiences ‘meaningfully’.
- 4.19 Drawing on a large body of evidence, Harris and Jones’ (2010) review of professional learning communities (PLCs) concludes that collaborative PLCs have the potential to provide a much needed infrastructure and platform for the development of professional capital in Wales. However, the success or failure of education development strategies depends upon their ‘strong implementation’.
- 4.20 Furthermore, whilst supporting a collaborative approach to professional learning, Harris and Jones (2010) warn that teachers, or any professional group, cannot generate ‘meaningful and impactful collaboration without some model or some way of working’.
- 4.21 For example, in December 2017, the ‘Education Endowment Foundation’ published an evaluation report on the use of Research Learning Communities. Evaluators concluded that they ‘did not find any overall improvement in pupils’ reading results’ but suggested a potential relationship between teacher

engagement with research, and the attainment of their pupils ([Rose et al. 2017](#)).

4.22 This need for 'strong implementation' and clear infrastructure that allows for the capture of critical reflection and evaluative practices is further highlighted in Brychan *et al.*'s (2019) 'lessons learned' project report on Wales' Masters in Educational Practice (MEP) programme. Brychan *et al.*'s (2019: 13) evaluation of the MEP summarised:

'[...] high quality professional learning that is supported by the creation of an infrastructure that values critical reflection and the time needed to engage in it, which is actively valued by employers 'for better or for worse' and where pathways to learning are clear and overt not only improves the quality of practice but can also extend the retention of excellent professionals in the sector.

4.23 This idea of not only creating space for, but 'valuing' critical reflection, and the time needed for it seems fundamental to any model or approach developed to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning in Wales.

4.24 Earley and Porritt (2013: 123) suggest that when aiming to capture and evaluate impact, it is 'crucial [...] to take the time to be clear about current practice and pupil learning (baseline) and the impact on practice and learning that the school wants to achieve within a desired timescale before engaging in sustained professional learning activity'. It is important, therefore, to plan not only the professional learning itself, but also how the professional learning will be evaluated and impact data captured.

4.25 Whilst the list of definitions of professional learning explored above are by no means exhaustive, the repeated need for infrastructure which allows education professionals to understand how to capture, reflect upon and critically evaluate the impact of professional learning is clearly evident.

4.26 As is explored in section 2.6, Wales has a long history of professional learning strategies and initiatives. However, a clear model for capturing the impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and school improvement in the day-to-day education setting has not yet been developed.

4.27 Therefore, in order to understand how the impact of professional learning could be captured and evaluated at multiple levels of the education system through a 'continual re-solving of problems' and 'continuous evolution' (Daly *et al.* 2020), this report continues by exploring what the terms 'capture' and 'evaluate' mean in this context.

What does it mean to capture and evaluate impact?

4.28 Literature that investigates the evaluation of professional development by school leaders, practitioners and policy-makers suggests the evaluation methods used are 'impressionistic, anecdotal and focused on simple measures' (Earley and Porritt 2013: 112). The impact of professional learning is rarely

evaluated against intended aims or outcomes and there is still a focus on completing a post-event evaluation form (a 'happy sheet') or discussing performance during the appraisal process (Guskey 2000).

- 4.29 Evidence shows that evaluating professional learning and its effectiveness is an important part of the training and development cycle (Bubb and Earley 2007), but it is often thought of as a complex and lengthy, resource-intensive process (Earley and Porritt 2013: 113).
- 4.30 However, in line with Estyn's (2016) recommendations for professional learning in Wales, this report suggests that if approaches of impact evaluation are better understood, established and planned for prior to engaging in the professional learning activity itself, rather than being an after-thought or used only as a measure of accountability, impact evaluation can become a 'powerful tool' for practitioner development, pupil learning and, overall, school improvement.
- 4.31 Earley and Porritt (2013) emphasise that this form of impact evaluation planning requires a clear picture of what current practice and learning are like before engaging in professional learning (the baseline) and a vision of how practice and learning should look after such engagement (the impact). The importance of establishing a baseline and collecting evidence of impact when evaluating is key to understanding the successes and/or shortcomings of the learning experience.
- 4.32 As such, in this report, impact refers to how an aspect of professional learning instigates or influences change(s)—approaches, experiences and/or outcomes for practitioners, pupils and schools—in the education setting. These changes can be on both a micro level—small, but significant changes to individual practitioners' approaches to an element of their practice and/or small steps of progression made by an individual learner as a result of the practitioner's professional learning—and on a macro level. The macro level refers to how each of these micro level changes influence overall school improvement and development plans.
- 4.33 Whilst broad, these definitions link directly to the notion of schools as sites of self-evaluation, which is a process 'by which members of staff in a school reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement in the areas of pupil and professional learning' ([Chapman and Sammons 2013: 2](#)). As Goldstone (2021: 7) summarises, this makes evaluation a reflection an accountability mechanism that is *led by the school* and conducted *for the school*.
- 4.34 In this report, therefore, 'evaluation of impact' is considered the process through which education professionals critically analyse and reflect upon how their professional learning experience stimulate improvement for their own practice, their learners' outcomes and experiences, and the overall development of educational practices within the school. This definition works in line with the 'improvement cycle' depicted in the Welsh Government's National Evaluation and Improvement Resource ([Welsh Government 2021](#); see Figure 3).

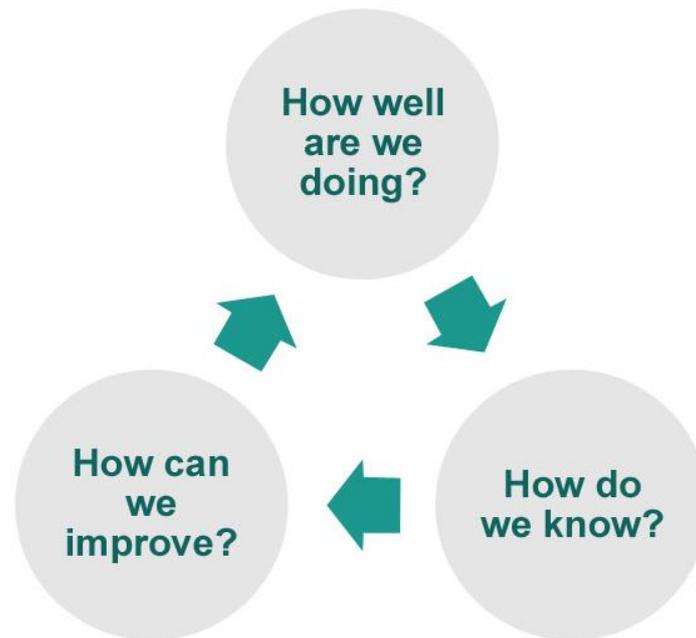


Figure 3. The improvement cycle from the National Evaluation and Improvement Resource ([Welsh Government 2021](#)).

- 4.35 However, a layer of complexity is added to this cycle and definition when consideration is given to the idea of ‘capture’. Before any form of evaluation can take place, evidence about the professional learning itself and the outcomes of the learning need to be captured (recorded).
- 4.36 Previously, and perhaps most commonly, the term ‘measure’ has been used in relation to evaluation and/or impact (see Bernhardt 2017). Whilst ‘measuring’ outcomes can be important, the term ‘measure’ has not been used here as evidence suggests it has multiple complexities attached to it.
- 4.37 Bristow (2021) found that one key aspect of helping practitioners develop their evidence-informed practice was providing support to access and understand academic research vocabulary. Discussions with education stakeholders and professionals for this report, suggested that previous focus on data-driven outcomes has meant that there is a lack of confidence, insecurity and inconsistencies in how the term ‘measure’ is used. Perceptions of the term ‘measure’ seem to be grounded in ideas of statistics or quantitative data.
- 4.38 Whilst capturing and evaluating quantitative data may form an aspect of evaluating the impact of professional learning, as explored in section X, evidence suggests it is not the only way to evaluate impact. Furthermore, the NEIR (Welsh Government 2021) suggests that a school will ‘not gather sufficient information by focusing on just one source, for example by evaluating the effectiveness of its work using examination or test data alone’.
- 4.39 It is important to note that not using the term ‘measure’ does not mean that approaches to professional learning and impact evaluation are not evidence-

based (i.e. rooted in a baseline understanding of an area which requires improvement or development within the school), but rather the outcomes of the professional learning itself are not only considered in relation to whether a higher or lower score or a 'better or worse' result was achieved as a consequence of the learning. Instead, outcomes are considered using a reflective strengths and weaknesses-based approach to impact evaluation.

- 4.40 Discussions with education stakeholders and professionals also suggested that because of its previous usage, the term 'measure' holds a degree of formality that suggests every part of professional learning—e.g. every conversation, piece of reading, reflection writing etc.—needs to be compared to something that is established as 'best practice'.
- 4.41 This idea of 'best practice' is discussed further in section 5 of the report. However, Wales' professional standards and the NEIR support the idea that schools need to understand the impact of professional learning for and within their own setting. The NEIR ([Welsh Government 2021](#)) overview states that evaluation and improvement 'is not a tick list of questions to be asked or jobs to be done. Schools can select the most suitable tools or approaches in the resource, adapt and use them in their own context'.
- 4.42 Therefore, this report uses the term 'capture' to refer to the documenting of reflections, evidence and evaluations about the impact of professional learning.
- 4.43 The term 'capture' allows for a flexibility in approach to understanding the impact of professional learning in the diverse and varied settings of Wales' education system.
- 4.44 It also allows for individuals and schools to employ multiple evaluative tools (i.e. both qualitative and quantitative, see section 5.3 for more detail) that suit the context(s) of their professional learning, their pupils' needs and their school's improvement plans. As is further discussed in section 5, it also takes into consideration education professionals' access to resources, and time and space to engage with these types of activity.
- 4.45 Having defined key terms, this report now continues by presenting findings from evidence reviews and discussions with education stakeholders and professionals on capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on and for practitioners.

Summary

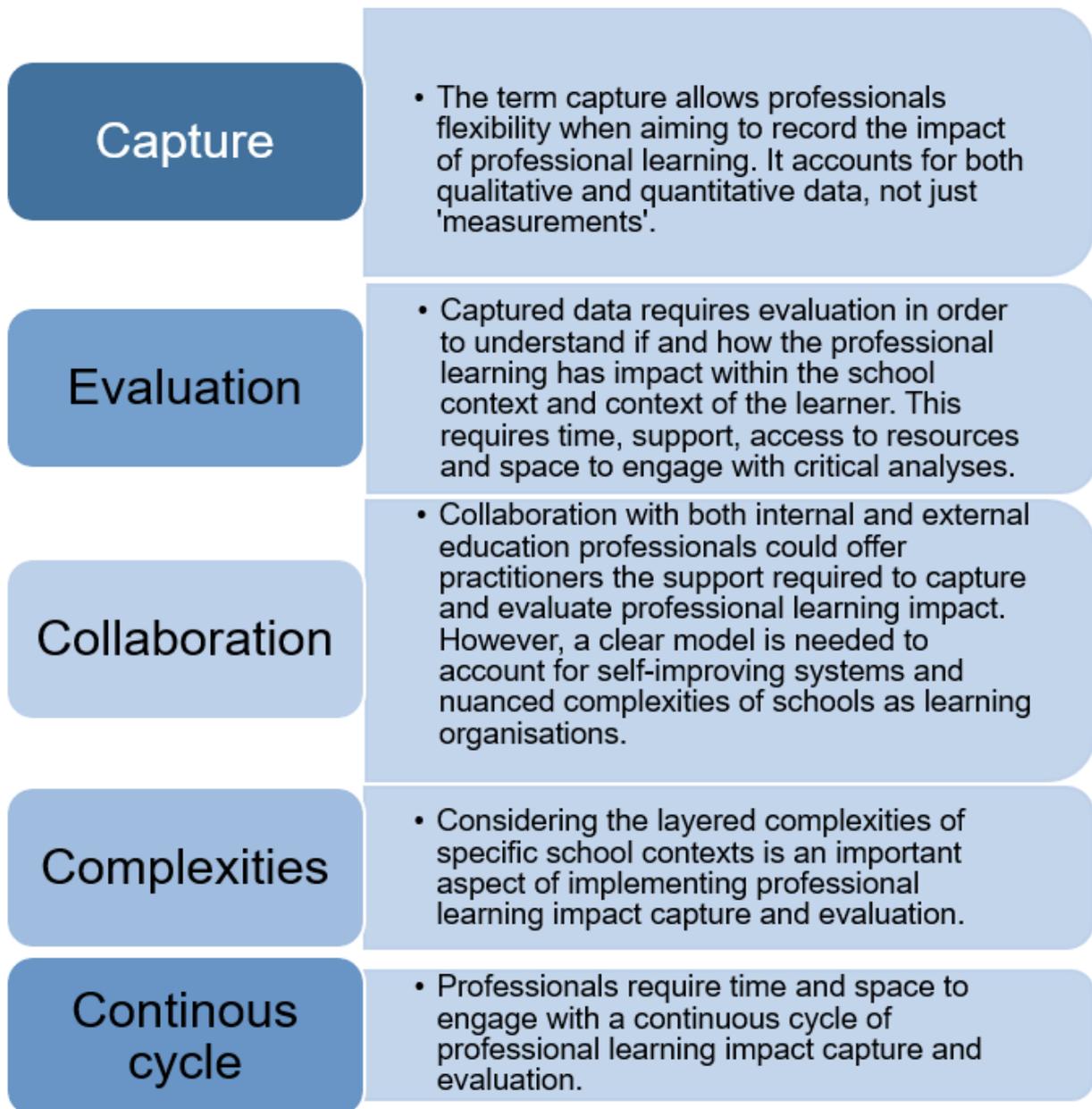


Figure 4. Key take-aways for capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning for education in Wales.

5. Practitioners

5.1 This section of the report presents key findings from evidence reviews and informal discussions with educational professionals regarding the impact of professional learning for practitioners. Figure 5 summarises the key themes that emerged from the review findings.

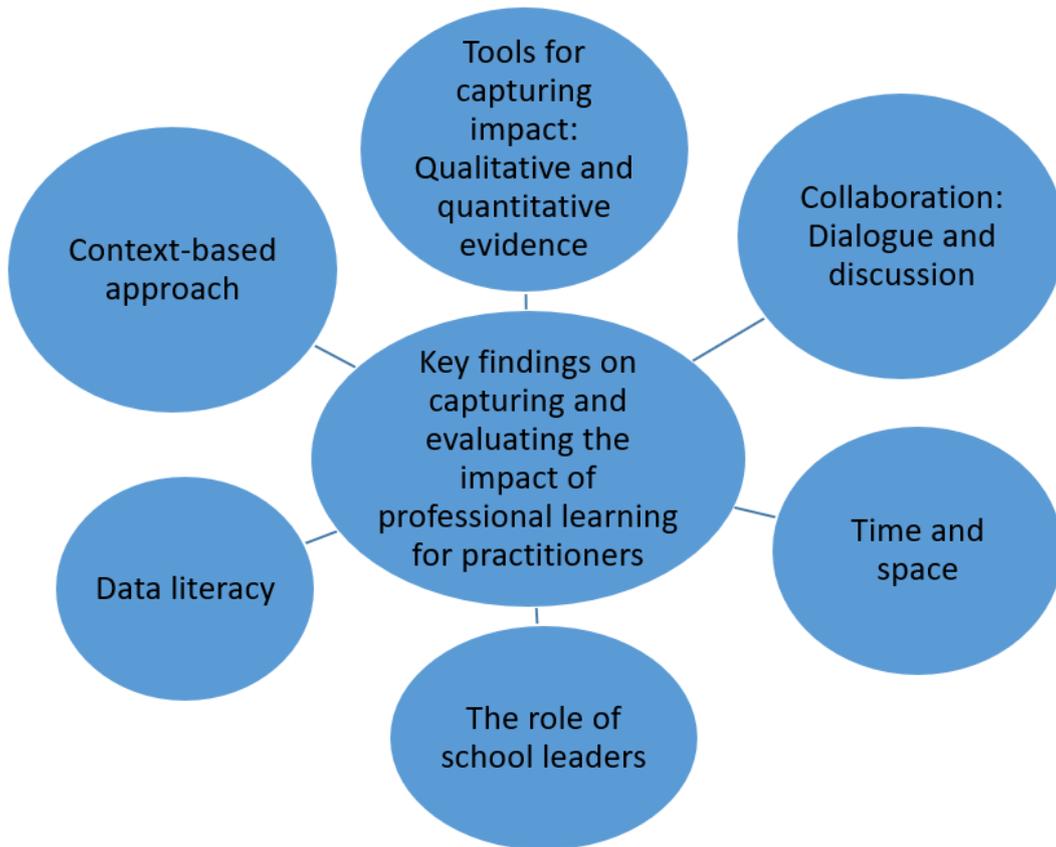


Figure 5. Key findings on capturing the impact of professional learning for practitioners.

5.2 Literature searches and discussions illustrated that each of these factors plays a significant role in capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on educational professionals' practice. This report continues by presenting the findings on each of these factors.

Tools for capturing impact

5.3 Tools from the NEIR and discussions with educational stakeholders and professionals made clear that a multifaceted approach to impact capture and evaluation are required. Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 illustrate some examples found in evidence reviews and shared in discussions.

Table 1. Qualitative professional learning impact capture and evaluation tools.

Examples of qualitative capture and evaluation tools	Explanation of the tool
Storyboards	<p>Some professionals reported using professional learning storyboards to document the implementation of a specific strand of learning. For example, a school may have identified a need to improve the use of digital technology within the classroom. Practitioners undertook professional learning on digital technology and then documented both theirs and their learners' experiences of implementing this learning in the classroom.</p> <p>Both the classroom teacher and, if present, the teaching assistant wrote short, one-paragraph reflections of their teaching and learning experiences, took photos of lesson plans/lesson materials, took photos of pupils using/trying the materials, wrote down verbatim quotations from the pupils about how they were finding the new experience (both strengths and weaknesses), and photocopied snapshots of pupils' work. Each of these elements was recorded in chronological order to allow for practitioners to reflect upon the whole experience at the end of the implementation period and consider what worked well, what may still require improvement, how they would implement this in future lessons etc. Some storyboards were constructed over a six-week period, rather than just one day or week.</p> <p>The story boards helped to capture the teaching and learning experience from start to finish, set professional learning targets, and share the boards with the wider staff body to illustrate experiences and begin professional learning discussions.</p>
Learning walks	<p>Some professionals explained their use of 'learning walks' as methods of evaluating the impact of professional learning. This is a pre-planned form of impact capture and evaluation. Learning walks are not classroom observations, but times when a different member of staff visits a classroom to see a teacher put a piece of professional learning into action and speak with pupils about their experience of that aspect of the lesson to gain informal verbal feedback.</p> <p>Following the learning walk, practitioners have an informal (undocumented) discussion about their teaching/learning walk experiences to consider how an aspect of professional learning</p>

	<p>impacted their practice, the strengths/weaknesses of the experience, how it could be developed in the future and/or whether it worked well and could continue to be used.</p> <p>Learning walks allow for cross-collaboration between different year groups/subject specialists and can be undertaken by teaching assistants, classroom teachers and school leaders. Professionals reported feeling less pressure during learning walks than formal observations because the focus is the informal professional learning conversation, not a gathering of formal performance management data. Furthermore, professionals felt the traditional school hierarchy was less applicable in this situation; regardless of job title, professionals were equal in sharing their experiences within the conversation. As such, learning walks could be considered to offer a whole school, multi-perspective approach to engaging with and evaluating the impact of this professional learning.</p> <p>Following the learning walk and discussion, some practitioners reflected on these experiences in their 'learning journals' (see explanation of learning journals below).</p> <p>Teaching unions provide information on how frequently learning walks should take place and provide guidance for teachers on how these learning walks should be used (National education union 2021).</p>
<p>Staff meetings dedicated to professional learning discussions</p>	<p>Professionals reported dedicating one staff meeting per month to professional learning discussions. In these meetings, practitioners discuss research they have found, articles they have read, their experiences of implementing/adapting a new approach to a specific aspect of their practice, and pupil responses to the approach.</p> <p>Professionals explained that these meetings in themselves had notable impact for professional development. The time and space these discussions provided allowed for a shift in conversation and thinking about professional learning, which in turn, impacted attitudes and approaches towards professional development within the school.</p>
<p>Reflection journals</p>	<p>Some school leaders encourage practitioners to use a professional learning reflection journal which is for their personal</p>

	<p>use and helps them to track, reflect upon and evaluate the impact of a professional learning experience/implementation.</p> <p>The purpose of these reflection journals is to also help the individual practitioner capture 'in-the-moment' experiences. A practitioner can write bullet point notes or very short reflections about their professional learning experience as they implement them in the classroom. Practitioners can collate these notes to reflect upon and analyse their experiences in more depth at a later time.</p> <p>As well as reflecting upon teaching and learning experiences, this method of capture allows practitioners space to reflect on the impact of professional learning on a more personal level (i.e. its influence on their teacher identity), which has been identified by James (2019) as an important factor for consideration in the development of a professional learning model.</p>
Triad working	See Figure 6.

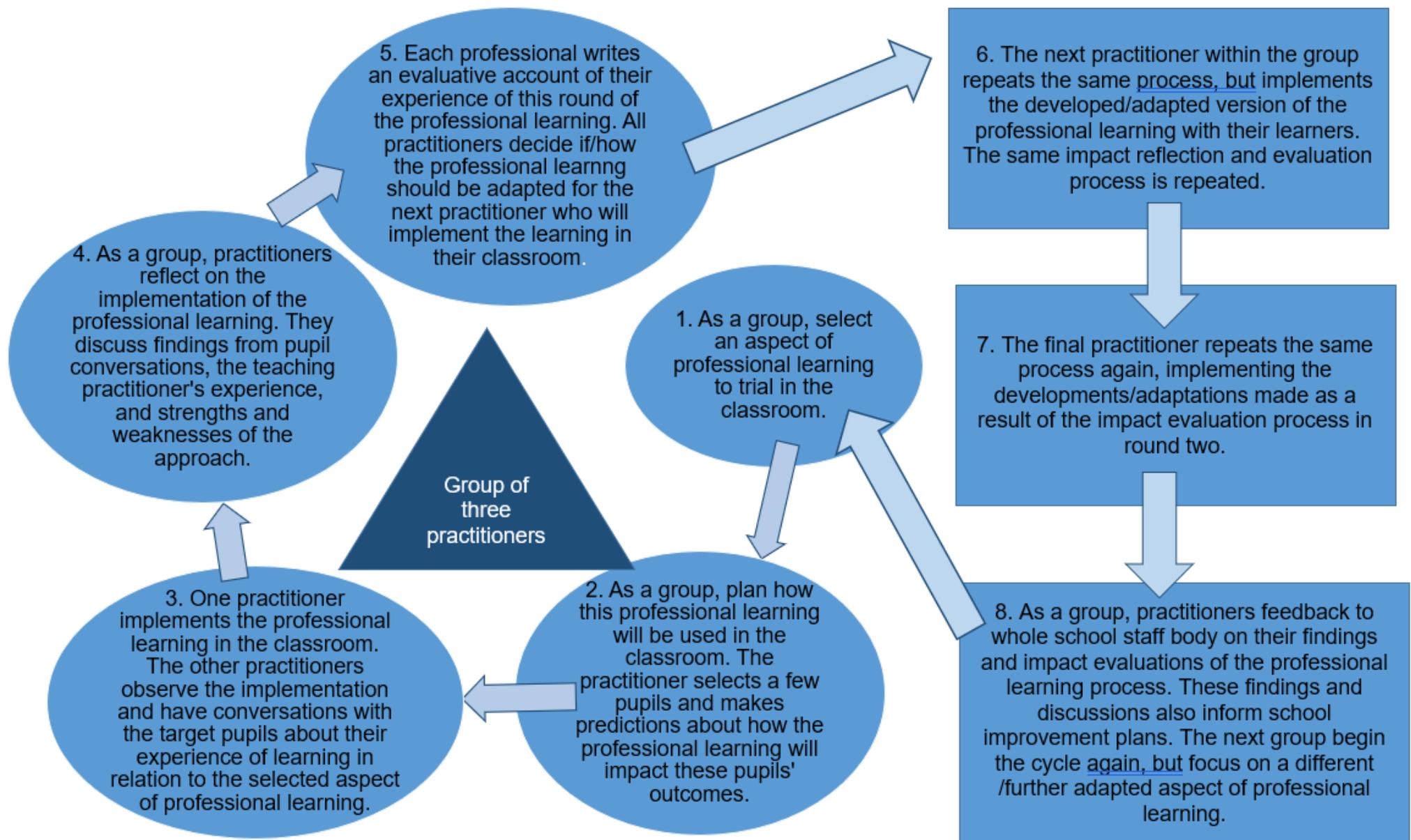


Figure 6. Qualitative impact capture and evaluation tools: triad working.

Table 2. Quantitative professional learning impact capture and evaluation tools.

Examples of quantitative capture and evaluation tools	Explanation of the tools
Questionnaires	<p>A variety of questionnaire frameworks have been and are used to evaluate the impact of professional learning. Some frameworks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estyn’s professional learning questions (Estyn 2016) • Subject-specific feedback questionnaires <p>Many schools use this method to evaluate attitudes towards a certain professional learning area/topic within the school. Practitioners reported filling out questionnaires upon completing a form of professional learning so that attitudes (e.g. confidence about a topic), progress and effectiveness of the training/learning itself could be explored. Some practitioners reported completing pre-learning and post-learning questionnaires so the impact of the learning could be evaluated from beginning to end of the process.</p> <p>This method provides a useful overview of attitudes/experiences at the time. However, few schools seemed to use follow-up questionnaires to track the impact of professional learning over time (e.g. 3 months post-learning, 6 months post-learning etc.). Furthermore, in order for this method to be fully utilised, those who analyse the data within the school need support in being ‘data literate’ to ensure that the evidence collected is as useful for the practitioners/school as possible.</p> <p>Estyn (2016: 22) note that it is important for leaders to ‘invest in the development of staff’s professional skills to ensure that they have the understanding and the confidence to make the best use of data’. Estyn recommend leaders provide one-to-one or small group support sessions to develop finer data-analysis skills and deeper understanding of how to use data to evaluate performance. In turn, this allows practitioners to analyse and reflect on the impact of their own practice, and for leaders to reflect upon school policies.</p> <p>However, evidence from Estyn (2016: 22) suggests that ‘very few schools’ use professional learning activities that focus on professionals becoming ‘data-literate’, making professionals ‘confident to challenge and question school performance data’.</p>

In-school tracking systems	In most schools, practitioners have access to an extensive range of data. Tracking systems usually capture wellbeing data such as attendance rates, alongside pupils' performance and progress data. To a certain extent, this data is already used in schools, but the usage of this data could be expanded to understand the professional learning that may be required on a specific topic and/or how professional learning on one of these topics has impacted teaching and learning practice.
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Table 3. Mixed qualitative and quantitative professional learning impact capture and evaluation tools.

Examples of mixed qualitative and quantitative capture and evaluation tools	Explanation of the tools
Written evaluations/analysis reports	<p>Professionals reported practitioners writing evaluative professional learning impact reports. These reports captured both personal reflections and pair/group observation reflections and evaluations.</p> <p>For example, an observing practitioner would listen to/watch how the other practitioner taught and/or interacted with learners regarding a professional learning focus. They would make observation notes, write down verbatim quotations and/or track the number of times a certain event occurred in the classroom (i.e. questions asked). The observing practitioner would then breakdown and analyse the observation notes according to category/theme etc., reflect on what worked well and what could be developed for next time. The analysis report would then outline the data collected, the next steps, the actions to be taken and the long term aims for embedded practice improvement. This process would be repeated vice versa, results shared to the wider school staff body and follow-up observations/conversations would occur.</p>

5.4 Whilst the examples listed above are not exhaustive or necessarily examples of 'best practice' (see further discussion on this in section X), they exemplify the variety of tools that could be used to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning for practitioners. Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative impact capture and evaluation tools offers the opportunity to understand the impact of professional learning for education practitioners.

5.5 Where previously, impact has been primarily considered a quantifiable 'measure' of outcomes (see Bernhardt 2017), evidence suggests that story

boards, conversations, written reflections etc. could also be considered reliable and valuable sources of impact data. Table 1 exemplifies that qualitative evidence can provide an understanding for the context in which the professional learning took place, experiences of the professional learning itself, the adaptations and developments made as a result of the professional learning, and the impact of the professional learning for that practitioner and their targeted learners. Quantitative data also has an important role in capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning for practitioners as it helps to track changes over sustained periods of time.

- 5.6 By capturing reflective qualitative data in combination with numerical evidence, the *why* of professional learning impact can be understood. The NEIR (Welsh Government 2021) improvement cycle suggests that these *how* and *why* questions—*why* did I undertake and/or implement this piece of professional learning in the classroom? *How* did this influence my learners? *Why* did this aspect of professional learning not work? *Why* did my learners not respond as I expected them to?—lie at the core of understanding how the Welsh education professional standards and principals of the forthcoming Curriculum for Wales (2022) may apply within the context of the specific school.
- 5.7 Additionally, capturing evidence for both the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions allows practitioners to isolate the impact of professional learning on their practice more specifically. Using just qualitative or quantitative data may not provide the space for capturing or exploring additional external factors that may influence an outcome.
- 5.8 This mixed methods approach does not necessarily identify a ‘best practice’ comparison narrative, but rather a ‘good practice’ narrative within the context of the specific school. As Biesta (2007) argues, methods that work for one practitioner may not work for another.
- 5.9 The idea that a ‘one size fits all’ approach would be unsuccessful in understanding the impact of professional learning was highlighted and repeated in numerous discussions. This is an important consideration as education in Wales looks to further capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning for practitioners moving forwards.
- 5.10 It is also important to acknowledge that not every experience or impact of professional learning will be captured. In some instances, the impact of professional learning on practitioners will be fed straight back into the learning system. This does not mean that impact has not occurred. For example, some professional learning undertaken may impact a practitioner’s confidence in teaching a specific topic or aspect of classroom management, but they may not necessarily note or ‘capture’ this shift in practice.
- 5.11 That being said, in order to address the ‘variability within and between providers’ (Estyn 2016: 5), and past criticisms regarding the inconsistencies of professional learning evaluations (OECD 2014), there needs to be some consistencies in the attempts of capturing professional learning impact.

5.12 Wales' Education Workforce Council (EWC) has developed a space which offers the possibility of capturing outcomes from the tools explored above. The [Professional Learning Passport](#) (PLP) is a bilingual online platform that is available to all Education Council Workforce (ECW) registrants. However, discussions suggested that this tool is being used inconsistently across the Regional Consortia and variably from school-to-school. Therefore, the next section of this report explores the possibilities of expanding the use of this tool.

The Professional Learning Passport

5.13 The PLP is an online tool that has a variety of features, such as 'create a post', 'create a reflection', 'create a video', 'take a photo', and 'record an experience', that are designed to support practitioners in capturing, reflecting upon, sharing and planning professional learning (EWC 2021).

5.14 It also contains Welsh Government resources, including performance management documentation for the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership and Further Education (FE) standards are also available. The PLP also provides access to EBSCO education, which gives access to a range of full-text, peer reviewed research, eBooks and journals.

5.15 The tool aims to be accessible to the needs of a diverse variety of professionals and provides a space to capture all professional learning experiences and evaluations of these experiences in one place. It can be downloaded as a smartphone app and connected to Google Drive and Dropbox. See here for more information.

5.16 Discussions suggested that the use of the PLP varies between the regional consortia and varies again from school-to-school. These findings support the Estyn Chief Inspector's findings (2016: 5) that across Wales there is 'variability within and between providers' and this 'remains a prominent feature of our education system.'

5.17 These findings suggest that schools and professionals may require further support with using this tool as a space to capture impact evaluations on professional learning in the future.

5.18 Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 also illustrate that there are other elements to capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning that require consideration for the development of sustained practice in the future. Collaboration, discussion and dialogue, understanding about data, the role of school leaders, and building capacity for practitioners to have the time and space to engage with this level of evaluation are crucial. Therefore, this report continues by exploring each of these factors.

Collaboration: Discussion and dialogue

5.19 Many of the tools discussed in the tables above illustrate that collaborative working is a key aspect of capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning for practitioners in Wales.

- 5.20 As well as corroborating with recommendations in the National Strategy for Education Research and Enquiry in Wales (NSERE 2021), this finding is supported by a notable amount of international evidence which highlights the importance of professional collaboration as a potential catalyst for teaching and learning development (e.g. Vescio *et al.* 2008; Campbell *et al.* 2016; Chapman *et al.* 2016; Harris *et al.* 2017; Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018).
- 5.21 Furthermore, in a report which makes recommendations for the NSERE, Bristow (2021) found that collaboration was key to sustaining the development of an evidence-informed education profession, as it allowed for reflective and evaluative conversations about education research to take place. In their exploration of research school networks in England, Gu *et al.* (2020) also found that collaboration around implementing research-informed practice and professional learning led to more 'positive' impacts on practitioners' understanding of how to use evidence to inform practice.
- 5.22 Findings from a research report by Donohoo *et al.* (2018) also illustrate if carefully planned and fully supported, collaborative working can empower teachers and increase their collective self-efficacy.
- 5.23 When combined with explanations of the capture and evaluation tools explored above, these findings suggest that collaborative working could offer practitioners the support and opportunities required to explore the impact of specific aspects of professional learning on their practice.
- 5.24 In the 2015-16 annual report, Estyn (2016: 11) found that there is 'an emerging culture of collaboration and support around professional learning'. This suggests that there is already some capacity in schools for the 'collective action' Cordingley *et al.* (2015) propose is required for 'impactful' professional learning.
- 5.25 That being said, Porritt (2014: 78) suggests that in order to truly evaluate data captured about the impact of professional learning, dialogue surrounding it must be 'rigorous and, most importantly, teachers themselves need to identify what they and their learners need to learn to promote development and improvement.' Some of the methods depicted in Table 1, such as the 'triad working' approach, encourage the collaborative, continuous and reflective professional dialogue Porritt (2014: 78) argues needs to be constantly 'practised' in order to understand and develop the impact professional learning can have. However, discussions with education professionals made clear that some practitioners lack the confidence and/or knowledge about what is meant by the concept of 'rigorous' dialogue and/or how to engage with it.
- 5.26 It seems fundamental, therefore, that within collaborative relationships, practitioners are supported in developing an increasing understanding of what it means to engage with 'rigorous' reflective and evaluative dialogue; clear communication about a shared vocabulary is required.

- 5.27 Estyn (2016: 5) identify this ‘clarity’ of understanding as an important factor in the development of a positive ‘culture of reflection’. They suggest that this ‘underpins a cycle of improvement’ and in schools that are able to do this effectively, ‘self-evaluation processes routinely focus on the quality of teaching and learning and how professional learning contributes to improving quality’.
- 5.28 However, developing a ‘shared vocabulary’ that is both based around the capture and evaluation of professional learning impact and is critical, analytical and reflective is a complex challenge. Arguably, it is not the role of a classroom practitioner, or necessarily a school leader, to spend time researching and evaluating complex research-based academic terms that form a ‘shared vocabulary’ within the school. Rather, evaluation of previous professional learning initiatives, such as ‘lessons learned’ from the Masters in Education Practice (Brychan *et al.* 2019), and research by Eraut (2004) suggest that external collaboration—for example, with other schools in Regional Consortia, external professional learning mentors and/or researchers and academics from Higher Education Institutions—could offer practitioners the support and guidance required for developing and engaging with ‘rigorous’ capture and evaluative skills, knowledge and vocabulary.
- 5.29 Estyn (2016: 18) propose that in ‘best practice, schools match individual practitioners’ learning needs skilfully to the most appropriate coach or mentor who can help them’. Therefore, as well as in-school collaboration, it is important to consider how capacity could be built to allow for external collaboration around the impact capture and evaluation of professional learning.

The role of the mentor

- 5.30 As is briefly mentioned above, an evaluation of the Masters in Educational practice (Brychan *et al.* 2019) found the role of a mentor to be highly important in the development of professional learning. The MEP was a Welsh Government-funded Masters programme that was led by Cardiff University’s School of Social Sciences.
- 5.31 The MEP began in 2012, and was a collaboration between Cardiff University, Aberystwyth University, Bangor University and the Institute of Education at University College London. It was a part-time, modular professional development initiative for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) that provided Masters level accredited professional learning programme. Usually completed within three years, the MEP focused on classroom practice and was underpinned by the use of educational research and teacher inquiry.
- 5.32 Overall, three cohorts of NQTs participated, with 1355 teachers enrolled from 580 schools across Wales, comprising all Local Authorities and Regional Consortia (Brychan *et al.* 2019: 7). A 2019 evaluation of the programme showed that at the point of publication, 672 teachers achieved the full MEP (180 Masters level credits), with an additional 92 awarded a Postgraduate Diploma Award (equivalent to Masters level 120 credits), and a further 80 teachers achieving the Postgraduate Certificate Award. At this point, 11 teachers were still active on the programme.

- 5.33 The MEP aimed to move away from ‘one-off’ courses and focused on contextualised learning and the development of research-informed practice. The aim was to improve educational outcomes for pupils by improving the quality of teachers and build capacity for school improvement. Evidence from teacher inquiry projects can be seen on the [Education Workforce Council website](#).
- 5.34 The MEP also focused on supporting practitioners in developing a ‘systematic reflective approach’ (Brychan *et al.* 2019: 17). The aims of the programme were to support teachers in becoming a highly skilled reflective practitioners with a focus on improving learner outcomes and raising standards, and ‘to enable newly qualified teachers to develop critically informed analysis of their practice and to use this as a basis to improve and to enhance the learning of pupils’ (Brychan *et al.* 2019: 17).
- 5.35 MEP mentors played crucial roles in providing collaborative learning opportunities by working with practitioners to identify their developmental needs, planning the next stages of their learning, and drawing on performance management priorities which were used to guide their engagement with MEP learning and assessment tasks. Mentors were experienced education experts who worked outside of the practitioners’ schools. The purpose of the mentor approach was to support critical reflection on practice. As is explained in Brychan *et al.*’s (2019: 23) report, this involved various types of professional dialogue, such as:
- identifying progress towards meeting the learning outcomes for each module of the programme, determining ongoing professional learning needs for development and how the programme could best support their individual progression;
 - supporting engagement in professional learning with both teachers and other professionals within the school and the wider school context. The focus was on improving professional practice to impact positively on outcomes for learners;
 - questioning and challenging in order to further develop reflection on what had been learnt and to support them in appreciating how this learning could be used to improve professional practice;
 - supporting reflection on learning outcomes and how the teacher’s practice has impacted on these;
 - supporting the teacher to develop and apply diagnostic skills to identify learners’ needs and progress and select appropriate interventions to ensure successful outcomes;

- applying and further developing the skills of inquiry, and identify, critically analyse and use classroom-based evidence to further improve professional practice;
- identifying what constitutes valid evidence of pupil progress and how this can be used to demonstrate improved teacher practice;
- helping the teacher to analyse the impact of professional practice on outcomes;
- and, undertaking formative assessment of the teacher's progress and providing constructive and timely feedback.

5.36 MEP mentors views on the impact of the programme for practitioners showed that, 'The MEP brought in opportunities for new and continual professional learning. It brought Wales to the forefront of professional learning' (Brychan *et al.* 2019: 51). These collaborations provided space and opportunities for continued reflective processes to take place. Rather than a 'quick fix' or one-off evaluative experience, these practitioner-mentor professional relationships allowed for long-term reflective practices to become embedded within educational practice. This suggests that collaborative approaches could also ensure sustained impact of professional learning for practitioners in the future.

5.37 Practitioner survey responses about the MEP also made clear that this collaboration with external mentors and other practitioners had a positive impact on their professional learning experiences and helped them to develop an understanding of how to capture and evaluate their learning, and implement these evaluations within their schools. For example, one MEP student reported that findings and evaluations of their action research on literacy had been considered an 'effective approach' that has 'now been adopted into the literacy policy' (Brychan *et al.* 2019: 43).

5.38 Although these are individual experiences of the programme, the overall evaluation data showed this collaborative approach to professional learning and evaluative skills development had a positive impact on professional development.

5.39 The above findings illustrate that building capacity for external collaboration and critical dialogues and discussions to occur could be fundamental to sustaining and embedding professional learning capture and evaluation within Wales' education system in the future.

5.40 Overall, discussion of these findings suggests that perhaps more important than the specific evaluative tool chosen (i.e. learning walks, reflection journals, questionnaires etc.), is the opportunity for practitioners to collaborate and reflect with professionals of all experience levels both within and outside the school setting.

5.41 By engaging with these relationships and discussions, the impact of the professional learning can be considered through a 'culture of reflection' which,

in turn, works to embed a continuous and sustained approach to professional development. Through these collaborative relationships and conversations, the impact of professional learning—i.e. practitioner’s understanding of the topic, confidence in the knowledge, ability to share their findings etc.—can also be captured.

The role of school leaders

- 5.42 The above discussions of collaborative approaches and findings presented in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 also suggest that school leaders have a crucial role in supporting and developing capacity for practitioners to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning.
- 5.43 Whilst practitioners have a responsibility to capture and evaluate their professional learning experiences in a reflective sense, school leaders require a ‘bigger picture’ analytical understanding of the impact of professional learning on their practitioners in order to consider school development plans and improvement overall.
- 5.44 Estyn (2016: 11) identify that senior leaders who give professional learning a high profile and priority, set strategic priorities for it, and link impact data closely to the school’s improvement priorities, demonstrate the ‘most successful’ professional learning practice.
- 5.45 However, a recent OECD ([2018](#)) report on developments in Wales, was critical of leadership in Welsh schools. It identified a lack of capacity to lead innovation and insufficient development of collaborative school cultures to support inquiry-focused learning for staff and pupils as a weakness in the engagement and implementation of professional learning.
- 5.46 Estyn (2016) recommend leaders need to work to:
- implement strategies to secure improvement
 - identify and provide the required professional learning opportunities, support and training for staff
 - monitor and evaluate progress
 - hold themselves and others to account to ensure that the required improvements happen
- 5.47 This idea of school leaders using impact evaluation evidence as the basis for becoming self-improving learning organisations is now being addressed as part of policy developments in Wales.
- 5.48 In a report on self-evaluation for school improvement, Goldstone (2021: 3) found that to achieve the self-improving school system the OECD (2014) recommended for Wales, a considerable amount of ‘trust and autonomy needs to be placed in school leaders and ‘top down’ approaches driven by ‘high-stakes’ accountability need to be eschewed’.
- 5.49 This ‘trust and autonomy’ in school leaders also seems important in relation to the approaches taken to evaluating professional learning within the school

setting. The variety of professional learning opportunities available and the number of impact capture and evaluation tools that could be employed means that school leaders need the space and autonomy to ensure the approach(es) taken meet the bespoke needs of their specific practitioners, pupils and schools.

- 5.50 Whilst Biesta's (2007) research focuses on evidence-based approaches to teaching rather than professional learning specifically, his theory of why taking the same 'what works' approach in every school 'won't work' offers important considerations for understanding approaches to capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning.
- 5.51 Biesta (2007: 5) argues that the focus on "what works" makes it 'difficult if not impossible to ask the questions of what it should work for and who should have a say in determining the latter'. He also argues that a 'what works' approach 'denies educational practitioners the right not to act according to evidence about 'what works' if they judge that such a line of action would be educationally undesirable' (Biesta 2007: 5).
- 5.52 This is an important consideration for school leaders when discussing, capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning with their practitioners. Not only do school leaders themselves need 'trust and autonomy' over professional learning in their school, there needs to be space for both school leaders and practitioners to engage with open, critical dialogue that explores the possibilities that not every aspect of professional learning—from the learning itself, to implementation, to evaluation, to outcomes—may not work. The reasons for this may be complex and multifaceted, but space to explore, record and evaluate what does not work is, arguably, just as important as an understanding of what does.
- 5.53 This concept is complex with regard to accountability; it is important for practitioners, leaders and, perhaps most importantly, pupils, that 'things work' some of the time. However, the above findings highlight that moving forwards, it is important to consider how tools for capturing the impact of professional learning provide space for open reflections around both the successful and unsuccessful experiences and outcomes of professional learning.
- 5.54 This idea was reiterated in multiple informal discussions with professionals and the above evidence suggests that whilst school leaders have an important role as 'facilitators' and 'bigger picture analysers' of professional learning, they also require support for things to not work. This support could come from professional relationships within their own school, but also collaborative partnerships school-to-school, through Regional Consortia, and/or external mentors.
- 5.55 In turn, this may allow for classroom practitioners to engage and participate in truly critical reflective, evaluative and open discussions regarding the impact of any professional learning undertaken.

Time and space

- 5.56 Literature evidence and discussions with educational stakeholders and professionals, made clear the need for practitioners to have time and space to engage with, capture, reflect upon and evaluate the impact of professional learning.
- 5.57 Although it can be logistically complex (i.e. to get teachers classroom cover to undertake professional learning courses), discussions made evident that leaders are able to provide some time for practitioners to engage with professional learning.
- 5.58 What is difficult, is providing them with the additional time and space required to reflect upon the professional learning they have undertaken, think about the professional learning in relation to their own classroom/learners, implement the professional learning and then critically evaluate the impact the learning had for them as practitioners, and for their learner's outcomes and experiences.
- 5.59 A number of professionals who took part in discussions explained that they thought practitioners need to spend at least 10% of their time on planning, 5% of their time on professional learning (i.e. reading research articles, taking part in professional learning discussions etc.), and a further 5% of their time reflecting on and evaluating the impact e.g. strengths and weaknesses of the professional learning approach explored/implemented in the classroom.
- 5.60 Collaborative working also adds a layer of complexity to the time and space practitioners require to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning. School leaders do not necessarily have the financial capacity to secure cover for multiple practitioners to have time away from timetabled lessons to undertake these paired/group-based forms of capture and evaluation. This highlights an important consideration as Wales looks to develop professional learning capture and evaluation capacity in the future. Schools may require financial support to develop these aspects of their educational practice.

Summary

Mixed-methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools could lead to a deeper understanding of the impact of professional learning for practitioners.
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Collaboration at multiple levels--within schools, across schools and external mentors/partnerships--can offer support in understanding how impact capture and evaluation tools could be implemented and utilised.Collaborative professional relationships also offer opportunities to engage with critical, reflective and evaluative dialogue about professional learning.
School leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">School leaders are key facilitators of capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning for practitioners.
School context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Considering the specific school context is an important aspect of implementing professional learning impact capture and evaluation.
Time and space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Practitioners require time and space to engage with impact capture and evaluation tools.
Data literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A shared vocabulary and understanding of 'data literacy' is an important consideration for practitioners' abilities when capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on their practice.
Professional Learning Passport	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The PLP offers a space for practitioners to capture a variety of professional learning impact evaluations.

Figure 8. Key take-aways for capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning for education practitioners.

6. Pupils

- 6.1 Exploring the impact of professional learning on pupils is a complex challenge. The available literature on the impact of professional learning on school pupils is limited. However, Earley and Porritt (2014: 112) argue that ‘evaluation of professional development requires a focus on student learning and an evidential baseline to enable practitioners and school leaders to determine the impact of the professional development in which they are engaged’.
- 6.2 Until recently, the impact of professional learning on pupil learning was not often evaluated by schools, and if done so, was rarely executed very effectively (Porritt 2009). Estyn’s (2016) annual report suggests that this was also the case in Wales.
- 6.3 Guskey (2000) has developed an approach to evaluating the impact of professional learning with a significant focus on evaluating it through ‘learning outcomes’ for pupils. Guskey’s (2000) model illustrates impact from professional learning as being achieved at five potential levels:
- participants’ reactions,
 - participants’ learning,
 - organisation support and change,
 - participants’ use of new knowledge and skills, and
 - student learning outcomes.
- 6.4 Guskey (2002) suggests that considering these five levels in reverse can be helpful in professional learning planning. They also provide key questions to be asked of practitioners/learners as the professional learning is put into practice. These questions include:
- What impact do you want to have on pupils? How will you know that you have had this impact?
 - If that is what you want to accomplish, then what practices do you need to implement?
 - What does the organisation need to do to support that; for example, what time/resources do people need?
 - What knowledge do people have to have and what skills do they have to develop?
 - What activities (e.g. training) do people need to gain those skills or knowledge?
- 6.5 These questions provide a useful starting point for capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on pupils, but arguably, they are one-dimensional and do not necessarily address the complexities of professional learning as Milton *et al.* (2020) discuss. These questions rely on a cause, input, outcome line of evaluation; results from A to B are measured by practitioners.
- 6.6 Whilst a pre-professional learning and post-professional learning approach to capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on pupil outcomes can offer important understanding and tracking of development, it does not necessarily capture the ‘bigger picture’ schools require. Pupil voice and pupils’ learning experiences are not accounted for. As Earley and Porritt (2014: 121)

suggest, ultimately, ‘impact is also the difference in the learning and experience of the children as a result of the change in staff practice and the latter becomes possible once there has been impact from PD [professional development]’.

- 6.7 Earley and Porritt (2014: 115) also suggest that previously, the purpose of professional learning has ‘tend[ed] to be explicit only in terms of the needs of adults. It is rare that improvements to the learning of pupils are articulated at the outset as the true purpose of PD’.
- 6.8 However, Frost and Durrant (2003) discuss the need to understand the impact of professional learning on pupils in terms of distinguishing factors such as their enjoyment in learning, attitudes, participation, pride in and organisation of work, response to questions and tasks, performance and progress and their engagement in a wider range of learning activities. Being able to capture and evaluate this information, however, relies on pupils being part of the professional learning conversation.
- 6.9 Including pupil voice as part of understanding the impact of professional learning within a school is complex. Age ranges, academic abilities, communicative abilities (e.g. writing skills, oracy skills etc.), and attitudes to learning are but a few factors which require consideration.
- 6.10 However, reviews of available evidence and discussions with education stakeholders and practitioners suggest that capturing and evaluating pupil voice as part of the professional learning journey is a fundamental aspect of developing school improvement in Wales. Therefore, this report continues by illustrating some of the tools and approaches that could be further developed and used to understand the impact of professional learning on pupils in the future.

Table 4. Tools for capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on pupils

Examples of mixed qualitative and quantitative capture and evaluation tools	Explanation of the tools
Learning interventions	Pupils’ baseline skills or experiences are measured before the implementation of an aspect of professional learning. The professional learning intervention takes place. Pupils’ skills and experiences are re-measured following completion of the intervention. For more comprehensive reviews of using professional learning interventions, see the EEF’s (2021) Teaching and learning toolkit .
‘Book looks’ or ‘book scrutiny’	Following the implementation of an aspect of professional learning, practitioners look at learner books to evaluate and reflect upon the impact the targeted professional learning had on pupils’ learning. This can be done by an individual practitioner or

	<p>as part of a group professional learning exercise (i.e. practitioners from different classes compare and discuss findings). Following the 'book looks', some practitioners reported writing short (one page) evaluative/reflective summary reports about their findings which could be shared with the wider staff body.</p>
<p>Surveys and questionnaires</p>	<p>Professionals reported using surveys and/or questionnaires to capture pupil learning experiences. Sometimes the questionnaires or surveys would be targeted at a specific group of learners (e.g. pupils who receive free school meals). Others would look to capture pupil experiences on a wider or broader scale. Questionnaires and surveys were used to ask pupils to evaluate their academic classroom experiences, as well as their well-being. Some schools used questionnaires/surveys designed by their own staff, others used a mixture of their own forms and brought in external bodies to understand objectively where pupils are.</p> <p>Professionals also reported using a mixture of qualitative 'open comment' questions and quantitative rating scales to understand pupil experiences. This provided an opportunity to understand why a certain response had been provided and these responses could also be used as evidence points for critical reflections, evaluations and discussions.</p> <p>Professionals made clear that for this approach to work within a school, this needs to be regular practice. This prevents pupils being surprised that they are being asked to reflect on their learning and also helps them develop the communicative skills required to share their experiences.</p>
<p>A culture of 'learning to learn'</p>	<p>Some schools reported setting-up a professional learning community (PLC) whose specific focus was developing pupil autonomy and a culture of 'learning to learn'. Multiple practitioners from across the Key Stages and different levels (i.e. middle leaders, classroom teachers, teaching assistants etc.) worked in the PLC to develop reflection charts and questionnaires that captured pupils learning experiences. Pupils would place their learning experiences on a scale (e.g. 1-5) and had the opportunity to write comments about why they had selected this number on the scale.</p>

	<p>‘Learning to learn’ encourages pupils to think about how they learn, what they enjoy in school, what they do not enjoy, how they found specific aspects of a new approach to a certain topic they had been studying etc. Practitioners in the PLC then took results from the first chart/questionnaire to create lesson plans which reflected pupils’ results. Follow-up focus groups, informal classroom discussions and questionnaires were then used to capture and evaluate pupils’ learning experiences after these lessons.</p> <p>This demonstrated to practitioners if and how the professional learning had impacted pupils’ learning experiences. These findings were shared to the wider staff body and if found to be successful, new practices and adaptations were made to teaching and learning approaches. These new approaches would then be reviewed again at a later point to ensure a continued process of evaluation and understanding of impact for pupils. If the approach showed little or no impact on pupils’ experiences, the process was reflected upon, an adapted approach trialled, re-evaluated and the process repeated.</p>
Pupil panels and/or focus groups	<p>Some professionals reported using pupil panels and/or focus groups to open reflective and evaluative dialogue with pupils and capture the impact of specific lines of professional learning within the school. Pupils were supported in developing a reflective vocabulary and were encouraged to be open and honest about their learning experiences. These groups were led by practitioners at all levels within the school and covered a wide variety of topics (i.e. from wellbeing to academic studies).</p>

6.11 The examples listed above are not exhaustive. However, they illustrate the variety of tools that could be used to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on pupils.

6.12 Similarly to findings in section 5, Table 4 illustrates that using both qualitative and quantitative tools could help schools capture the impact of professional learning on pupils. Furthermore, using a combination of these methods could help to sustain and embed the use of pupil impact evaluation outcomes within educational practice.

6.13 There are some important aspects to understanding how to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on pupils that require further consideration. This report continues by examining these factors.

Communication skills

- 6.14 For pupils to be able to participate in professional learning evaluations and reflections, Table 4 exemplifies that it is important they have the communicative skills to share their learning experiences. Developing these communication skills may be a complex process, but it suggests that whichever tools are used by schools need to be carefully considered to suit the needs, ages and abilities of their learners.
- 6.15 Cathro *et al.*'s (2017) 'assessing reflection' study focuses on post-school students on an international communication course. However, to avoid 'variance in reflective ability' Cathro *et al.* (2017: 427) suggest that course educators have a role to play in developing what they term learners' 'reflective competence'.
- 6.16 Reflective competence refers to targeted learners' abilities to meaningfully discuss and analyse their experiences using terminology that allows them to express themselves honestly and openly. This suggests that in addition to a shared vocabulary between practitioners, schools need to support pupils in developing the skills and language they require to reflect upon and discuss their true learning experiences. To do this, schools themselves may require support in developing an approach that supports, enables and empowers the voices of their learners.
- 6.17 That being said, this vocabulary does not have to be complex. Case study schools shared in the NEIR (Welsh Government 2021) and evidence shared in informal discussions with education stakeholders and practitioners illustrate that age and ability-specific language can offer valuable insight into pupil learning experiences.
- 6.18 Furthermore, empowering pupils by supporting the development of these communicative skills gives pupils the opportunity to have autonomy within their learning. Although based on evidence about pupils learning in England, findings from the recent Speak for Change (2021) inquiry suggest that any opportunity pupils have to practice and build confidence in their oracy and communication skills are fundamental to their wellbeing and academic development (see key findings from the inquiry [here](#)).
- 6.19 Additionally, the four principals of the forthcoming Curriculum for Wales (2022) highlight the importance of pupil learning autonomy and voice in impact capture and evaluation, as the new frameworks look to develop young people who are 'ambitious, capable learners'. Some aspects of this core purpose look for learners who can:
- set themselves high standards and seek and enjoy challenge
 - are building up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts

- are questioning and enjoy solving problems
- can communicate effectively in different forms and settings, using both Welsh and English
- can explain the ideas and concepts they are learning about
- undertake research and evaluate critically what they find (Curriculum for Wales 2022).

6.20 These findings highlight a key consideration for capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on pupils. Pupils need to be equipped and empowered with the communicative skills required to participate and reflect upon their learning experiences. These experiences are fundamental in helping practitioners and school leaders develop the professional skills that help them to ‘adequately respond to the individual learning needs of students’ as the OECD (2014: 25) recommends.

Time and space

6.21 In order to support the development of pupils’ communication skills, practitioners need to be able to give pupils time and space to develop their understanding of how to communicate, reflect upon and evaluate their learning experiences.

6.22 Additionally, informal discussions with education professionals suggested that pupils need to engage with these types of reflection practices on a regular basis. A ‘one-off’ reflective experience may not lead to the openness and honesty that could be built into reflections and evaluations over time. This also allows practitioners to implement a cyclical approach to capturing and evaluating their own professional learning (i.e. what they may need to develop next in order to support their learners).

6.23 Capturing and evaluating pupil learning experiences over a sustained period of time not only allows practitioners the time and space to develop, reflect upon and evaluate their practice, but also allows pupils to understand how the process of improvement works. They become part of the professional learning conversation by being able to see and experience how their reflections have been used to develop teaching and learning experiences within the school.

6.24 Consequently, capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on pupils—both through outcomes of evidence-based learning interventions and findings from pupil learning experiences—has a key role to play in determining the next steps of practitioners’ development, but also school improvement plans as a whole.

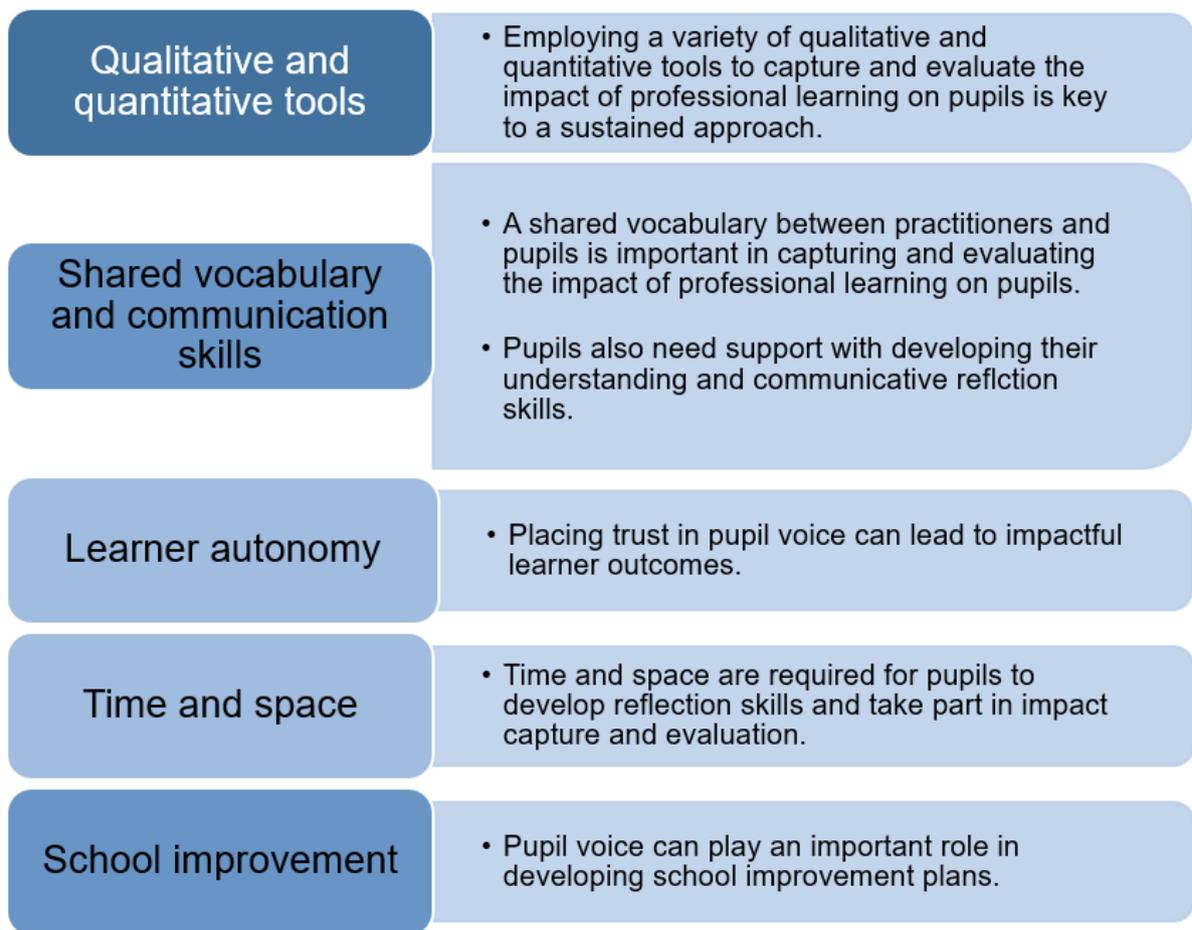


Figure 9. Key take-aways for capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on pupils.

7. School improvement

- 7.1 The above evidence begins to demonstrate that capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on practitioners and pupils is fundamental to helping leaders understanding how to develop school improvement plans. This section of the report aims to extend these initial explorations by considering how the impact of professional learning could be captured and evaluated at a wider school level.
- 7.2 Exploring the whole school level of professional learning impact capture and evaluation is important, as a 2015 report on the Regional Education Consortia ([Estyn 2015](#)) concluded that early attempts to develop a self-improving school-led system (SISS) in a specifically Welsh context were not being well monitored and evaluated in terms of impact.
- 7.3 Estyn (2016) also suggest that in many schools, there is a lack of connection between the impact of professional learning on practitioners and pupils and wider school improvement plans. For example, Estyn (2016) found that leaders do not use the outcomes of self-evaluation to identify priorities for improving teaching at whole-school or individual teacher level.
- 7.4 However, the Inspectorate acknowledge that this involves investing a 'considerable amount of time, energy and resources' (Estyn 2016: 27) into professional learning, but evaluating the impact of this learning is key to becoming a good 'learning organisation'.
- 7.5 Consequently, Estyn (2016) suggest that if schools are to improve their understanding of the impact of professional learning, it is important they consider 'what works well' at a wider school level. Following inspection reports and a thematic survey, Estyn (2016: 15) identified and recommended development in the following key areas:
- creating the right culture and conditions for professional learning
 - building collaborative and supportive professional relationships within and between schools
 - engaging with research evidence and carrying out research
 - using data and new technologies as catalysts for improvement and innovation
 - learning how to lead professional learning and staff development.
- 7.6 Literature review findings and evidence collated from discussions with education stakeholders and professionals suggest that addressing each of the key areas identified by Estyn (2016) is a multifaceted, complex challenge. This report continues, therefore, by examining the factors that require consideration within these development areas.

A multi-layered culture of reflection

- 7.7 Evidence from Estyn's (2016) annual report and discussions with education stakeholders and professionals make clear that in order to capture and

evaluate the impact of professional learning on school improvement, a culture of open and honest reflective dialogue is key.

- 7.8 To develop this type of dialogue, leaders have a responsibility to promote a culture of sharing and reflection. After practitioners have evaluated and captured the impact of professional learning on both their own and pupils' teaching and learning experiences, these findings should be shared with other practitioners, middle leaders and senior leaders to allow for an evaluation of the 'bigger picture' to take place. To achieve this, practitioners at all levels of the school system have an important role to play.
- 7.9 For example, middle leaders have a key role in facilitating departmental reflection meetings, which focus on what practitioner and pupil evaluations show about the impact of professional learning. These meetings need to provide a space in which practitioners can be honest and open about their impact evaluation findings and professional learning experiences, in order to create an ongoing reflective conversation that celebrates what is working well, and what may need further improvement in the department.
- 7.10 Both during and after meetings, middle leaders have a responsibility to 'capture' these findings, by collating individual experiences, reflecting upon them and evaluating them. These evaluations could then be recorded in a short write-up of key findings and discussions that emerged from the meeting. This dialogue and the reports can go forward into line management and performance management meetings to help create 'meaningful' conversations and targets that work to improve school performance as a whole. These reports can also be used to present a departmental level picture to senior management.
- 7.11 This allows senior management to understand how professional learning is impacting practice and experiences in each department. Leaders have an overview of the 'bigger picture' by gaining insight into the strengths and areas for improvement within each department. This puts leaders in a position to support their practitioners' professional learning journey as discussed in section 5.45.
- 7.12 As well as departmental meetings, regular line management and performance management meetings can provide individual practitioners with a space to engage with open and honest critical dialogue about impact evaluation and analysis of any captured findings. Findings from practitioners' work can be used to set targets for the future.
- 7.13 Research by Beijaard *et al.* (2000) and James (2019) has highlighted that professional learning is closely linked to professional identity and retention of practitioners in the profession. Discussions with education professionals made evident that being part of a critical dialogue that contributes to the overall improvement of the school makes them feel valued and respected; capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning allows practitioners and schools to celebrate successes. Furthermore, understanding the impact of professional learning can give practitioners autonomy over their future development within the profession.

- 7.14 Additionally, findings discussed in section 5 and recommendations in Bristow's (2021) evidence report suggest that national and local government have a key role in developing and sustaining ongoing evaluations of professional learning impact. School-to-school networks, Regional Consortia and/or Higher Education Institute academic/research mentors, could help school leaders and practitioners develop an understanding of how to utilise impact evaluation evidence in school improvement plans.
- 7.15 These findings offer key considerations for the development of understanding the impact of professional learning on school improvement in Wales. This bottom-up approach to creating a multi-layered culture of reflection ensures that professionals at all levels in the school make a contribution to self-evaluation and, ultimately, school professional learning, development and improvement plans.

Planning clear professional learning aims

- 7.16 As well as a culture of reflection, practitioners at all levels of a school need a clear and shared understanding of the overarching aims of professional learning. As illustrated in section 0, individual practitioners should have their own aims and reasons for undertaking specific elements of professional learning. However, this does not mean that they do not have a clear understanding of the direction in which the school is aiming to move as a learning organisation.
- 7.17 Estyn's (2016) annual report and discussions with education stakeholders make clear that practitioners need an explicit understanding of how self-evaluation links to wider school improvement. As such, in addition to a shared vocabulary about professional learning (discussed in section 5.28), practitioners need clear guidance and/or documentation that illustrates how the captured outcomes of their self-evaluations align with, and may impact, school improvement as a whole.
- 7.18 Each faction of impact evaluation—practitioner, pupil and school improvement—are intrinsically linked. Professional learning impact evaluation findings from each of these groups influences steps forward for one or more of the others.
- 7.19 This suggests that leaders may need to select a small number of professional learning foci at any one time. These foci should be broad enough that practitioners can undertake the bespoke professional learning required to develop their own practices and meet the needs of their learners, but specific enough that they contribute to moving overarching school practices forwards.
- 7.20 This is a complex challenge. However, evidence discussed above regarding capturing the impact of professional learning on practitioners (section 5) suggests that rigorous planning is the key to overcoming some of these challenges.

7.21 Learning organisations should plan when impact evaluations of overarching, whole school professional learning aims will occur. This allows for schools to track and monitor progress in relation to findings from practitioners and pupils.

7.22 Therefore, capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning at a school level can only occur if and when clear aims are established and clearly communicated with practitioners and pupils. Capturing and evaluating impact is a cyclical process. Figure 9 visualises this process.

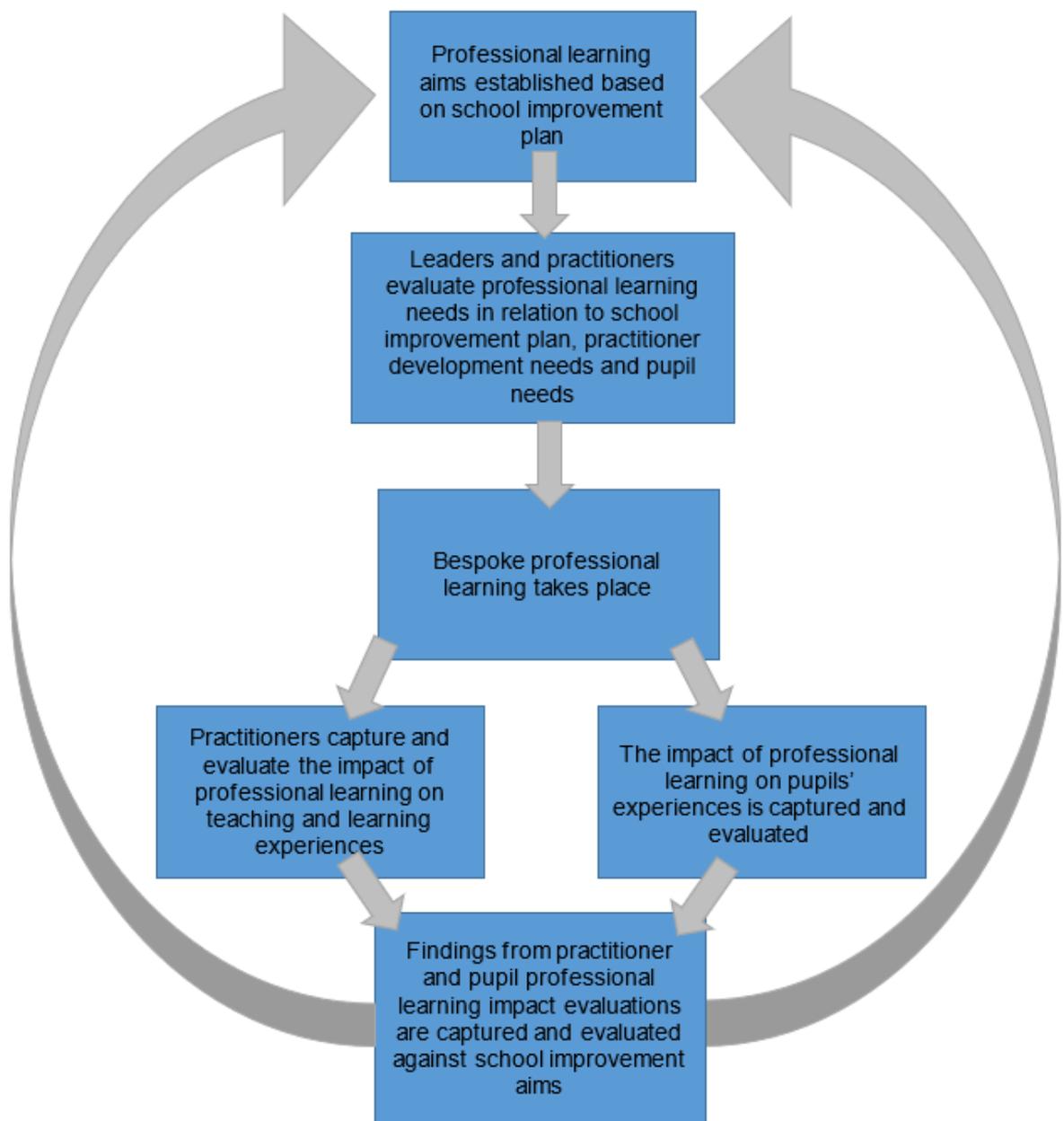


Figure 10. Capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning for schools in Wales: A cyclical model.

7.23 Consequently, these findings suggest that capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning for school improvement relies on a culture of open and honest critical reflection to be built at multiple levels within the school. Additionally, a school requires clearly planned aims, which work to capture, evaluate and utilise findings from practitioner and pupil evaluations that illustrate how professional learning is impacting teaching and learning experiences.

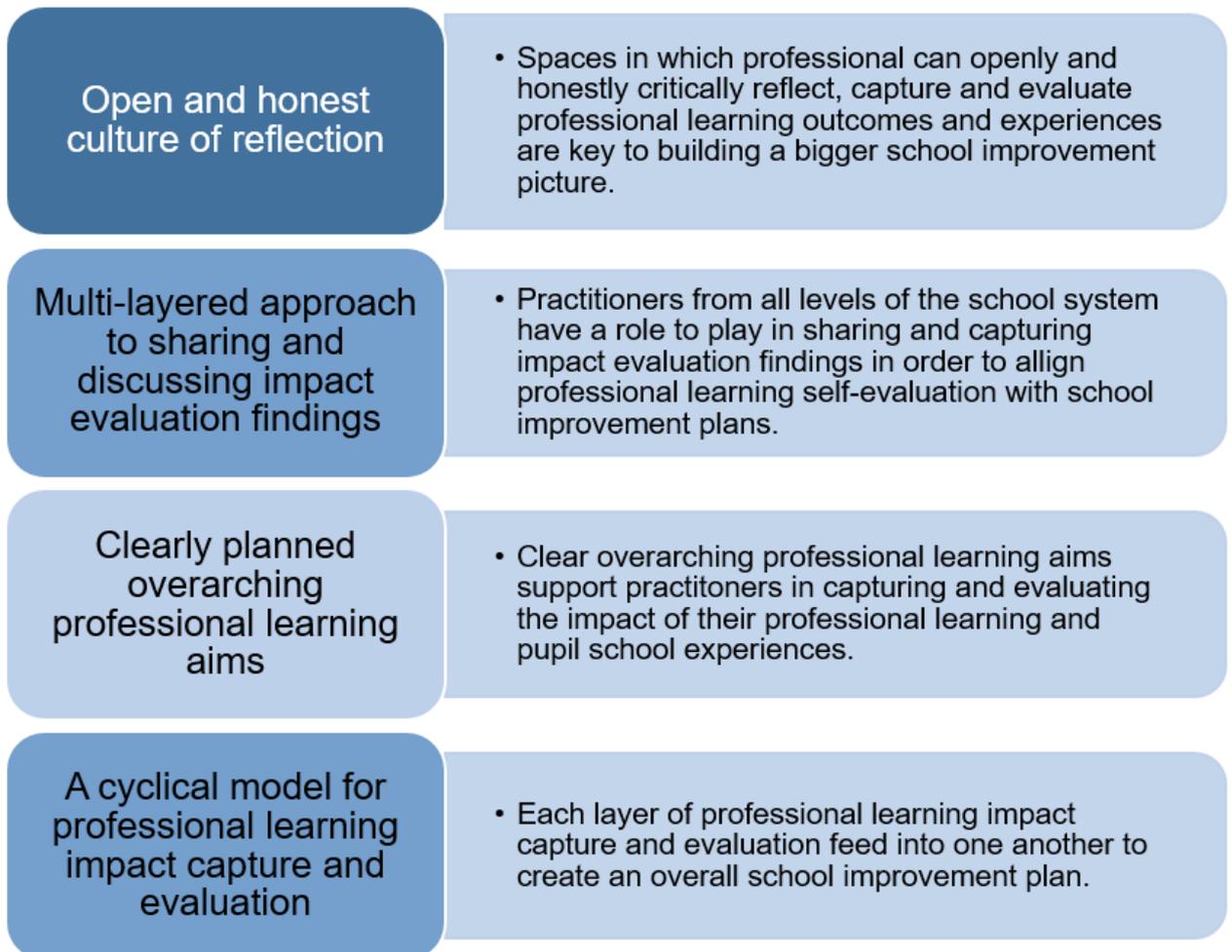


Figure 11. Key take-aways for capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning for school improvement.

8. Professional learning in other sectors

8.1 As well as conducting evidence reviews and discussions with education stakeholders and professionals, literature searches were undertaken and informal discussions conducted to explore the professional learning context within three other UK professions: social care, health and law. This section of the report presents key findings from these searches and discussions. It considers if and how approaches to capturing the impact of professional learning in other sectors could be used and/or adapted to suit the education context in Wales.

Social Care

8.2 Professional learning lies at the core of social care, with D’cruz and Jones’ (2014) pointing to an intrinsic connection between knowledge, research and practice in social work.

8.3 D’cruz and Jones (2014) demonstrate that the social care profession requires a good knowledge of the evidence which underpins practice. Having completed relevant training courses and/or university degree programmes, social care practitioners are expected to continually update and enhance their knowledge by engaging with multiple and numerous professional learning opportunities. These opportunities are provided by key organisations, such as the British Association of Social Workers ([BASW](#)) and [Social Care Wales](#).

8.4 The BASW disseminates professional learning opportunities and research through:

- Webinars and podcasts as part of the CPD programme.
- Conferences
- Occasional ‘think pieces’ and /or research briefings.
- Events and publications are advertised in the bulletin and / or our events calendar.

8.5 Social Care Wales uses the Continuing Professional Education and Learning (CPEL) framework to offer a series of education and training programmes to support qualified social workers as they progress through their careers and take on new roles. It is relevant to social workers in the statutory, third and independent sectors (see professional learning programmes and toolkits [here](#)).

8.6 In Wales, City & Guilds/WJEC are working together to be the sole provider of fundable Health and Social Care, and Childcare qualifications.

8.7 Additionally, [Research in Practice](#) (RIP) and [Research in Practice for Adults](#) (RIPFA) are a leading research and evaluation providers in Children’s and Adults Services. These organisations support social care practitioners with understanding the impact of their services for service users. The aim of these organisations is to help social care practitioners develop an ‘evidence-informed approach’ and how to use, develop and evaluate practitioners’ ‘professional

expertise' and capture the 'views of those with lived experience' ([Research in Practice 2021](#)).

- 8.8 These organisations take a mixed-method approach to evaluation by utilising a variety of evidence collection techniques, such as: interviews, focus groups, observations, case studies, surveys and statistical analysis of administrative data (see [Research in Practice 2021](#)). Their aim is to 'work collaboratively with you [practitioners] to build the parameters of the evaluation, often leaving a legacy of tools and skills to support future internal monitoring and evaluation practice' ([Research in Practice 2021](#)).
- 8.9 Academic articles also offer extensive impact evaluation models that could be used in the social care sector (e.g. [Munro and Hubbard 2011](#)). However, searches of the literature did not make clear to what extent practitioners are able to implement the capture and evaluation tools these organisations and research papers offer and recommend within their own practice.
- 8.10 Instead, discussions with social care professionals made clear that there are some discrepancies between evaluation training offered and the capture and evaluation of impact in practice. Significant reasons for these discrepancies included time and ethical considerations.

Ethical considerations

- 8.11 Due to the nature of the work done in the social care sector, ethically, it can be highly complex to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on anyone other than the practitioner. For example, there would have to be significant ethical considerations for Children's Social Workers to evaluate how an aspect of their professional learning had impacted a child's experience of the care system.
- 8.12 Whilst findings from this process could provide important insight into children's experiences and further the understanding of future professional development required, it may not be ethical to put a social care worker and/or young person in this position. Searches of the literature suggest that the impact of professional learning on social care and/or individual's experiences of the social care sector are conducted by university academics and researchers (see [Mannay et al. 2021](#); [Roberts et al. 2021](#); [Boffey et al. 2021](#); [Mannay et al. 2019](#) for examples).
- 8.13 This finding offers important considerations for capturing and evaluating pupils' experiences in the education sector. It suggests that capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on or about sensitive topics—for practitioners and pupils—may need to be supported and/or led by external researchers and mentors. Furthermore, practitioners may need support with ensuring that impact and evaluation tools that they employ are used ethically.
- 8.14 As such, local and national education authorities have a responsibility to provide practitioners with clear guidance on utilising impact capture and

evaluation tools within the school setting. This is fundamental in protecting the well-being and safety of both pupils and practitioners.

- 8.15 Consequently, in Wales' social care sector, one of the primary methods used for capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on social care practitioners is a self-reflective process conducted through a formal and regulated supervision system.

Supervision and self-reflection

- 8.16 Discussions with social care practitioners suggested that supervision conversations offer the space and time to critically engage with dialogue about professional learning undertaken and the impact this learning has had on practice. In these discussions, supervisors and supervisees discuss findings from the professional learning undertaken, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this learning on the practice and then use these findings to set targets/development plans moving forwards.
- 8.17 The outcomes of these meetings are captured on the individual practitioners' record which is used in subsequent meetings as a starting point for 'meaningful' discussions about professional learning. It is important to note that these meetings are not performance management meetings. In most cases, the supervisor is the line manager. However, these meetings are not official recordings of performance outcomes.
- 8.18 One-to-one supervisory meetings are a regulated element of a social care practitioner's role. These meetings are regular, protected times that allow for critical dialogue about professional learning to take place. Discussions with social care professionals suggested that similarly to those in education, social care practitioners often lack the time and space to engage with and capture the impact of their professional learning experiences outside of these meetings.
- 8.19 Social care networks, such as [Care Network Wales](#), do offer opportunities for practitioners to collaborate with one another on professional development. However, evidence searches did not make clear to what extent these networks provided space for impact capture and evaluation.
- 8.20 Whilst social care's impact evaluation system still requires some development, there are key considerations for capturing the impact of professional learning in Wales' education sector.

Summary

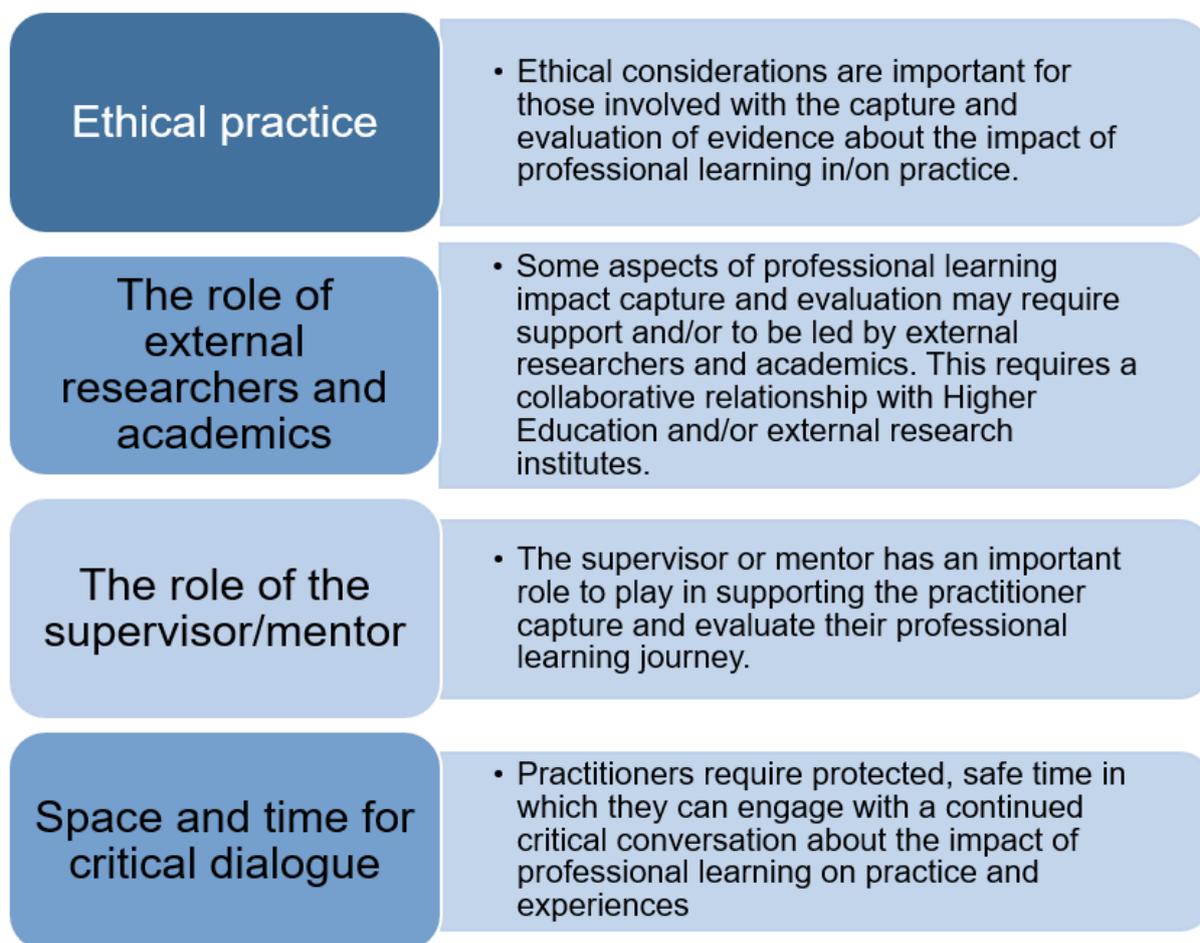


Figure 12. Capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning in the social care sector: Key take-aways.

Medicine and Healthcare

8.21 For this report, informal discussions were held with practising Doctors and Nurses, as well as professionals at Welsh Universities who are responsible for organising and evaluating continued professional learning programmes for medical and healthcare practitioners.

8.22 It is important to note that similarly to the Regional Consortia in the education sector, there is variability and differences in how different health boards in Wales approach professional learning and, subsequently, how different practitioners capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on their practice.

8.23 The informal discussions held for the purposes of this report were primarily with professionals or practitioners based in South Wales. Time and access constraints meant that it was difficult to have discussions with professionals and practitioners from other parts of Wales. That being said, findings from these

discussions illustrated that professional learning underpins all practice from the start of any medical practitioner's career and, therefore, these findings offer important considerations for the capture and evaluation of professional learning impact in education.

- 8.24 The opportunities for undertaking professional learning in medicine and healthcare are vast (for examples, see [NHS Wales](#)). However, this section of the report focuses on if and how practitioners and professionals capture and evaluate the impact of this professional learning on their practice and experiences in the profession, rather than the professional learning itself.
- 8.25 Similarly to the multiple layers of impact evaluation required for a 'bigger picture' in education, capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning in medicine and healthcare is a multifaceted and complex process.
- 8.26 In 2012, a 'bigger picture' study was commissioned by the General Medical Council (GMC). In collaboration with Capita Health, the Academic Unit of Primary Medical Care at the University of Sheffield assessed the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) on doctors' performance and patients/service outcomes ([Mathers et al. 2012](#)). Researchers conducted sixty interviews with professionals from Acute hospital trusts, Mental Health Trusts, Primary Care Trusts, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Royal Medical Colleges and Deaneries (Mathers et al. 2012: 3).
- 8.27 Thematic analysis of the interviews showed that a primary impact of CPD was professionals gaining confidence and knowledge in how to refer patients to other relevant care departments. Whilst this a skill specific to the medical profession, it suggests that providing education professionals with time and space to capture personal development—i.e. confidence—is just as important as capturing professional skill development.
- 8.28 This study also highlighted some significant barriers to professional learning having impact for medical practitioners. Barriers to implementing and evaluating professional learning in practice included:
- Time and workload. Having time to attend CPD sessions, having to leave practice early, or a GP having to come in on their half day to attend sessions affected practitioners engagement with professional learning. Furthermore, as soon as a practitioner returns from any length of study leave they are back on the frontline seeing patients which did not necessarily leave time to engage with or reflect upon learning.
 - Funding issues. Costs incurred for attending courses and/or getting locum cover were cited as key a barriers for professional learning engagement.
 - Tick box mentality. Previously in medicine and healthcare, CPD has not been tied into the appraisal process. Practitioners reported that 'It has been mainly a tick box to ensure you get enough points rather than looking at what CPD you actually did' (Mathers et al. 2012: 8)
 - Idiosyncratic approach to CPD. Trusts regarded Consultants' CPD as their own personal responsibility and as long as they met the Royal College guidelines etc. that was sufficient

- Opportunity to implement learning. Practitioners reported that it is difficult to quantify the impact of the training since the events being trained for are very rare and so it would not be possible to measure a difference in the number of critical incidents.

8.29 These barriers offer important considerations for the development of impact capture and evaluation in Wales. Whilst some of the examples provided in these findings are specific to the medical profession, the overarching themes could also be barriers for education professionals. Findings from Mathers *et al.*'s (2012) study suggest that consideration should be given to education professionals' time and workload, their access to funding for professional learning capture and evaluation, the professional learning purpose and outcome aims, connections between professional learning impact and appraisal processes, and practitioner accountability for professional learning.

8.30 This study also identified key facilitators and methods for overcoming professional learning barriers for medical professionals. Evidence from interviews showed that these methods included:

- Linking professional learning outcomes (e.g. reflections and evaluations) to appraisals
- Providing time for reflection
- Connecting practitioners to Royal Colleges and Deaneries
- Connecting professional learning evidence to the revalidation process
- Providing time and space for practitioners to test new knowledge without fear or failure or exposure. One Consultant stated, 'I think the most valuable thing is the networks you establish in a non-threatening environment, to question your own practice' (Mathers *et al.* 2012: 9).
- Providing ongoing support over and above training
- Using routinely collected data to measure outcomes
- Simplicity and repetition in approaches to professional learning
- Learning with peers

8.31 These findings also offer important considerations for the education profession in Wales. Space and time to reflect and consider 'what works' within the specific setting, collaborating with external mentors and academics, a shared understanding of approaches to professional learning impact capture and evaluation, and connections to overall professional development processes link closely to the findings discussed in section 5 of this report.

8.32 In addition to findings from the literature, discussions with medical and healthcare professionals suggested that there are two forms of impact capture and evaluation engaged with most often: impact surveys run by professional learning course managers; and, critical discussions between practitioners and line managers following the attempted implementation of a piece of professional learning. Therefore, this report continues by exploring the impact surveys used.

Impact surveys

8.33 Professionals reported frequently completing multiple 'impact surveys' following the completion of a formal piece of professional learning. The first survey would be completed on the day the professional learning ends. This survey looks to capture:

- What the professional learning taught/showed the practitioner
- How the practitioner thinks the learning will impact their practice
- The practitioner's predictions for how they will attempt to implement this learning and practice and what they expect the outcomes to be (i.e. improved patient care, different approach to conversations in consultations etc.)
- What the practitioner thinks the strengths and weaknesses of the professional learning are

8.34 As well as feeding this information back to the course/training provider, professionals record their responses in a personal learning journal in order to reflect upon their experiences of implementing this professional learning at a later date.

8.35 Course/training providers also send practitioners a follow-up survey, three to six months after the professional learning has taken place. These surveys aim to capture:

- If and how the practitioner has put the professional learning into practice
- If and how the practitioner thinks the professional learning has impacted their practice
- Whether the practitioner has had to overcome any obstacles and/or make any adaptations about what they learnt in order to implement it in their practice
- Practitioners' reflections on the knowledge they retained
- Practitioners' reflections on the predictions they made in the initial survey
- Practitioners' reflections on the types of professional learning/development they may need regarding this topic in the future

8.36 These surveys provide valuable insight for professional learning trainers and providers, but also for practitioners. The extended timeframe of the follow-up impact survey offers an opportunity for practitioners to capture and evaluate their own reflections of the implementation of the professional learning after a notable amount of time. It provides the space to evaluate their professional learning experiences in relation to their own predictions. Arguably, this offers a more 'meaningful' insight into the impact of the professional learning than the 'happy sheets' (Guskey 2000) critiques.

8.37 Furthermore, this form of self-reflection illustrates to the practitioner their own professional learning journey. Practitioners are encouraged to reflect upon again through critical discussions with line managers and other healthcare professionals they work and collaborate with. In medicine and healthcare, this is fundamental not only to the practitioner's own personal professional development, but also to the wider development of the medical professional community.

8.38 The [Nursing and Midwifery Council](#) (NMC) stipulate that to maintain registration, practitioners must:

- Complete 35 hours of CPD
- Submit 5 pieces of practice related feedback
- Submit 5 written reflective accounts
- Complete a reflective discussion

8.39 Capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on practice forms a fundamental aspect of these professions. This links directly to one of the NMC's 2020-2025 Strategy ([NMC 2020: 39](#)) themes, which depicts that practitioners should aim to be 'Learning from data and research to improve what we do and working collaboratively to share insights responsibly to help improve the wider health and care system'.

8.40 These findings suggest that by capturing the impact of professional learning on practitioners, senior medical professionals, medical facilities management staff, and the professional learning providers, are able to evaluate how and where practitioners may need professional learning input and support in the future.

8.41 That being said, it is important to note that professionals and practitioners reported a high rate of attrition from the completion of the first to the follow-up impact surveys. A lack of time to complete the survey itself and/or a lack of time to implement some elements of the professional learning prevented practitioners from completing the follow-up reflections. This in itself offers an important consideration for capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning in education.

8.42 Professionals need time to engage with capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on their practice. Furthermore, there is a possibility that even with rigorous processes in place, not every impact of professional learning will be captured and evaluated. Sometimes, the impact of the professional learning will be fed straight back into practice, rather than captured and/or evaluated.

8.43 As is illustrated in findings from Mathers *et al's* (2013) study, there may be barriers which prevent the implementation of professional learning experiences. Arguably, these moments should still be captured; being unable to implement an aspect of professional learning could be considered an evaluation of the learning in itself. This also correlates with findings discussed in section 0 from Biesta's (2007) research, which recommends that it is important to consider that 'what works' may 'not work' in every situation or setting.

8.44 Additionally, despite extensive searches of the literature, it is unclear if and how medical and healthcare professionals capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning that is not a bespoke professional learning course. Other than Mathers *et al.'s* (2013) large-scale study discussed above, it seems that course providers still lead the way on capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on and for practitioners. For example, I was unable to

locate literature that discussed how professionals capture and evaluate the impact of reading academic or research articles on practice or the impact of clinical observations on practice. This was also not brought up in informal discussions.

Capturing and evaluating patient experience

- 8.45 As with capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on pupils' school experiences, capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning on patients' experiences in medical and healthcare settings is complex.
- 8.46 Discussions with professionals illustrated that there are attempts to capture and evaluate patient experiences. Patients are asked to fill in surveys about their experiences. However, the results from these surveys would appear to lack objectivity as the practitioner gives the survey to the patient themselves when the professional feels the patient experience has been positive.
- 8.47 Professionals also suggested that it is highly complex to define exactly 'what' impacts a patient's experience. Whilst a practitioner may be aiming to capture and evaluate the patient's experience of an aspect of professional learning they have implemented in the patient's treatment, unless explicitly told and asked about this aspect of the treatment, the patient will not know what the professional learning implemented is. As such, they could provide responses for a multitude of other reasons. For example, the practitioner's communication with the patient could influence the patient's responses to questions asked, rather than the practitioner's implementation of the professional learning.
- 8.48 This too could be said of pupils in the education setting. It suggests that if practitioners aim to explicitly capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on a patient/pupil, this individual needs to be part of the professional learning discussion. Any questions asked must make explicit exactly which element of their experience the practitioner is aiming to capture and evaluate.

Summary

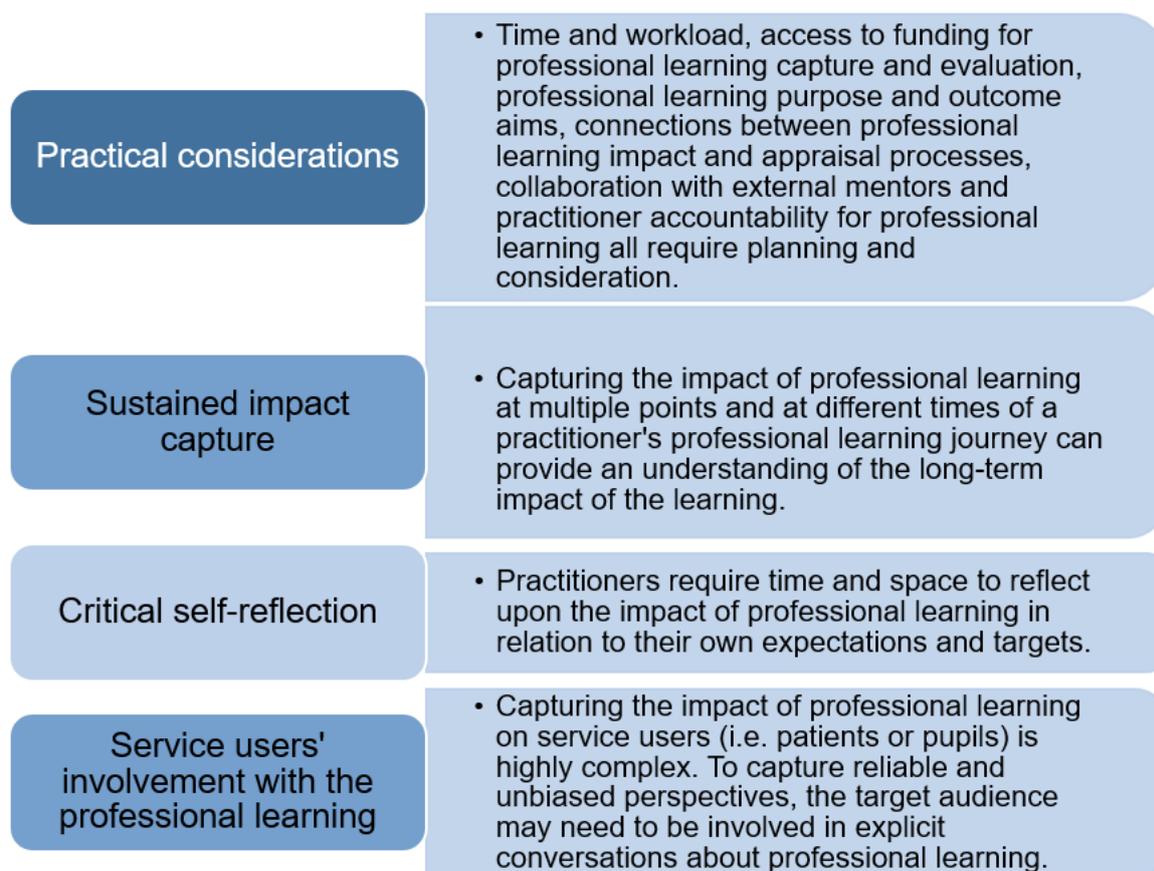


Figure 13. Capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning in the medical and healthcare sectors: Key take-aways.

Law

8.49 Similarly to education, social care and medicine and healthcare, professional is fundamental for professionals working in legal professions. The [Bar Standards Council](#) (BSB) and the [Solicitors Regulation Authority](#) (SRA) stipulate that undertaking professional learning is a requirement of practising Law, as professionals must keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date. As in the other professions explored in this report, there is a multitude of professional learning opportunities Law practitioners can engage with (for examples, see [Cardiff University's CPD programmes](#)). However, this section of the report looks to explore if and how professionals in the legal sector capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning.

8.50 Despite extensive searches of the literature, it was difficult to ascertain the methods used to capture and evaluate the impact of professional learning on Law practitioners. Discussions with legal professionals confirmed that other than measures of successes of failures of case outcomes, the impact of professional learning on practice is infrequently captured or evaluated. However, these discussions also illustrated that a reason for this may be that a

notable amount of professional learning takes place ‘on-the-run’; practitioners undertake and implement aspects of professional learning as legal cases unfold (see Gold *et al.* 2007 for further explanation of this concept). The fast paced and bespoke nature of the profession means that often, practitioners have to learn and think as they are working on a specific job.

- 8.51 As such, if impact is captured, one way in which this is done is to record short ‘action stories’. These ‘stories’ are notes made by the practitioner which record the strengths and weaknesses and/or benefits and limitations of implementing an aspect of professional learning in real-time. Professionals reported that capturing the impact of professional learning in this way allowed them to reflect upon and consider their knowledge development at the time, providing direction for any further required professional learning (i.e. research or reading they needed to conduct), but also reflect on their overall experience of implementing an aspect of professional learning at a later time.
- 8.52 Whilst the evidence regarding impact capture and evaluation in the legal profession is not extensive, this does offer important considerations for education in Wales.
- 8.53 As Thomas (2018) notes, teaching and, subsequently, professional learning is not a ‘static skill’. It is one that ‘needs to adapt as pupil profiles, technological advancements and greater global awareness shape and inform attitudes towards existing and future knowledge bases, driving our desire to ensure that our pupils are given the best possible opportunities to develop into well-rounded, well-informed individuals’ ([Thomas 2018: 5](#)).
- 8.54 In other words, whilst overarching aims and intended outcomes of professional learning are fundamental and necessary to overall school improvement, teachers also need some flexibility to be able to implement and capture professional learning evidence ‘on-the-run’. The ‘non-static’ nature of the profession means that not every aspect of professional learning implementation, capture and/or evaluation can be planned.
- 8.55 Findings from discussions with legal professionals illustrate that this does not necessarily mean that professional learning impact cannot be captured. Rather, in some instances, adaptations to the method of capture need to be made to allow for busy teachers to record and document as much evidence about the impact of the professional learning on their practice and pupils as is possible at the time. Reflection and evaluation of what occurred in practice can occur at a later point.
- 8.56 This finding highlights the need for education practitioners to have flexibility in approaches to capturing the impact of professional learning, and the need for school leaders to consider the accessibility of any methods and tools selected for this process.

Summary

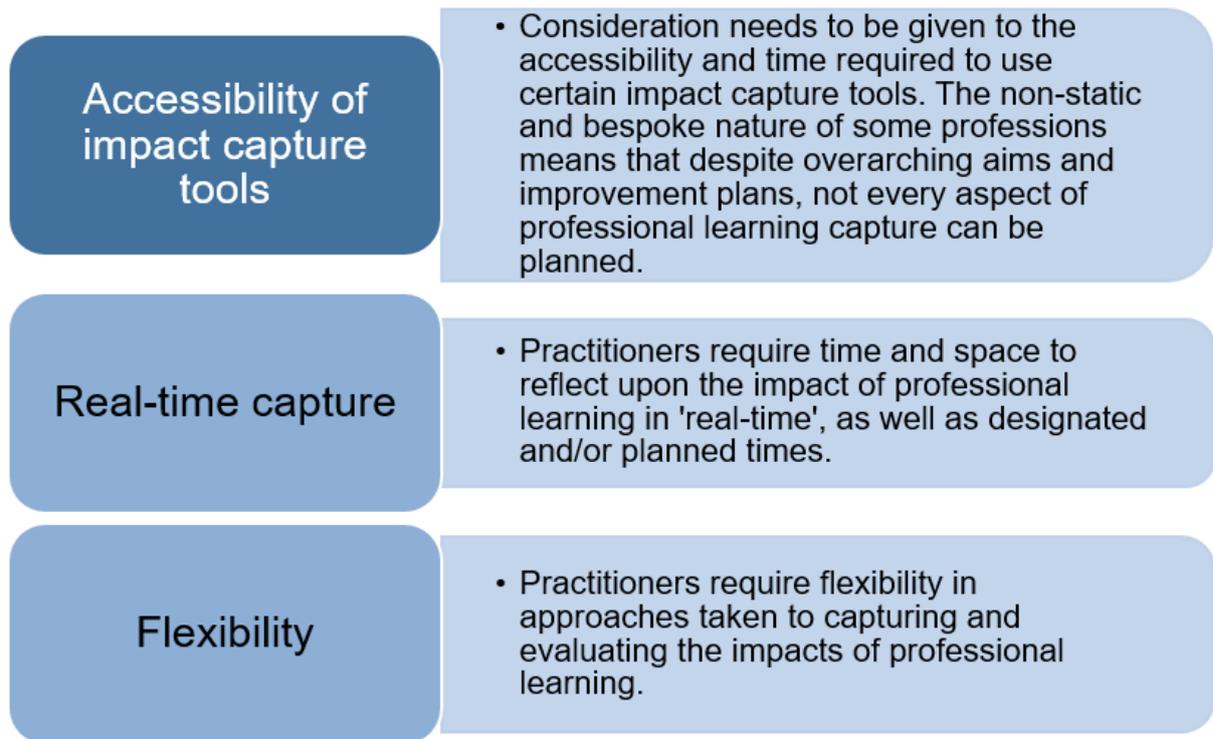


Figure 14. Capturing and evaluating the impact of professional learning in the Law sector: Key take-aways.

9. Main findings

9.1 Capturing the impact of professional learning is a complex and time-consuming process.

9.2 If this is to be undertaken successfully the following should be in place:

- A shared understanding of the quantitative and qualitative evidence to be collected.
- Robust methods that will be used to collect this evidence.
- A continuous and critical monitoring and evaluation process that is linked to school self-evaluation and improvement.
- Within and between school collaboration.
- The provision of professional learning opportunities for practitioners to develop their skills in this area, including mentoring support from higher education researchers.
- Support from school leaders to allow practitioners time to undertake this work.
- The use of learner voice as a key evidence source, including support for pupils to develop their reflection and communication skills.
- The use of the Professional Learning Passport to record the evidence collected.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 Capturing the impact of professional learning on practitioners, pupils and schools should be a key aspect of the revised Welsh Government National Approach to Professional Learning.
- 10.2 The NAPL should recognise that undertaking such work is a complex and time-consuming process.
- 10.3 To this end, key stakeholders in the Welsh education system (Welsh Government, Local Authorities, Regional Education Consortia, Estyn, the National Academy for Educational Leadership, the Education Workforce Council and Higher Education Institutions), should work together to develop a Professional Learning Impact Framework.
- 10.4 In undertaking this work, the findings of this evidence review should be fully considered.

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