

Comparisons with other regions

Several different working groups have started working on an inter-regional collaborative level to compare strategies, learn from one another and produce regional positive outcomes. Some of these groups include Successful Futures, Research, Leadership Outcomes and Reducing Teacher Workload. The aim of these groups is to improve regional outcomes and over time secure better value for money. These groups are all at varying stages of the collaborative process.

Some groups like Successful Futures can showcase a mature, interconnected relationship between the four consortia and other external stakeholders. They are working across consortia, and with Welsh Government in order to develop Areas of Learning Experience for the new Welsh curriculum.

Specifically to finance, the regions have met up on two occasions to discuss structures, resources and funding models in comparison to the regions size / categorisations to identify best practices. The information is still in the preliminary stages but from initial findings there is a confidence that working together across the four consortia can provide excellent opportunities to maximise value for money going forward by the dissemination of practice worth sharing.

The meetings have also been utilised to collectively pre-empt future legislative changes that affect the consortia. By seeking a common approach, ERW and the other consortia are better equipped to tackle upcoming legislative change, such as HMRC regulation changes. The sharing of best practice and formation of a common framework has ensured that the consortia can maintain an effective attitude towards change whilst minimising the individual use of resources. An added impact is that this collective understanding is limiting duplication between consortia. ERW arguably gains the most from this financial area of collaboration as the other regions are operating with significantly more capacity and centrally allocated resources, and the ERW Senior Accountant and ERW Business Manager receive positive professional development from these interactions.

The appointment of a Consortia Project Manager has also impacted positively on ERW's ability to compare with other regions and work collaboratively. By securing a dedicated position for the monitoring of project progress, ERW and the other consortia can now ensure a more systematic approach to their collaborative work. As the Project Manager is funded by all four of the Consortia, the financial costs are shared.

An added advantage to ERW comparing itself with the other regions is that it facilitates a greater level of consistency when dealing with Welsh Government. Particularly in areas like finance, where subjects like the awarding of grants heavily feature communication with WG, the ability to compare and contrast experiences between all four consortia is invaluable. This ensures that not only can the consortia demand a high level of consistency in communication from Welsh Government, but can also ensure that they are all themselves consistent when communicating or dealing with Welsh Government and are working from commonly established frameworks.

Moving forward, the aim is to continue to secure regular meetings where ERW and the other consortia meet as a group with Welsh Government officials, as this is prevailing as the most efficient, streamlined format to accelerate progress. An added value to this plan is to schedule meetings like Finance Team Meetings to coincide with existing directors meetings, in order to maximise the economy of time. Other time efficiencies include making meetings two days long to minimise unnecessary travel, pre-planned papers and work to supplement agendas, and the sharing of documentation between meetings to inform and develop discussion.

While much comparative work between ERW and other consortia is in the developmental stages, the initial findings and conversations are extremely promising. It is increasingly clear that there are tangible benefits in terms of securing better Value for Money as a Consortium from working alongside the other regions.