

POLICY TO PRACTICE: Challenges for college leaders and staff for implementing government policy.

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Summary

This study aims to critically evaluate theory and practice, with the aim of examining how an education policy is translated into practice. The research also explores how a further education institution its leadership and staff team respond to and implements the policy for Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship.

The study considers policy levers such as measuring, monitoring, inspections and funding which are used by the Government to inform and provide directives for educational institutions. However how the institution reacts to these directives is dependent on a number of factors. Some of those factors have been explored within this study and found to be, leadership, organisational culture and personal motivation. They have provided a theoretical background for the research project.

The research focused on a contemporary policy currently being driven by the Welsh Government namely ESDGC. The methods of enquiry were carried out by using a case study model; the researcher interviewed key actors within a Further Education Institution.

The conclusions recommend that for policy implementation to be effective within FEIs there needs to be clear direction and open consultation from the government department directing the policy to College leaders and Principals. Leaders need resources to implement policies, particularly policies such as ESDGC which can require a change to the college's culture and mission. The lack of understanding and purpose of policy created a barrier to practitioners for implementation. Informed and adequately resourced leaders of educational institutions will provide opportunities for them to guide and challenge their staff to embed the ESDGC policy into their practice.

The researcher acknowledges the studies limitations and the need for further research.

1. Introduction

Legislative transformation occurs when multiple pressures from interested groups and political conflict result in the government committing to an agreed set of goals and values (Bush, 2006) these goals and values then emerge as a new policy. There is an expectation from the government and interested parties that the new policy will bring about change in a particular field of work, service or in society as a whole.

The desire to explore the challenges to policy implementation in Further Education Institutions (FEIs) has arisen in part to address the experiences of organisations adapting to the imposed changes required by the Welsh Government to implement Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) within their practice. Bush (2006) suggests that the transformation of policy to practice is not in the hands of the policy-makers but successful implementation lies with the practitioner. "Governments have the constitutional power to impose their will but successful innovation requires the commitment of those who have to implement these changes" (Bush, 2006, p.4). The policy for ESDGC is recognised within educational settings as a key theme which must be embedded throughout the whole school or college.

The use of the education sector as a policy lever to address policy priorities is widely recognised by researchers, Keep (2009) would argue that the education and skills sector is just a facade used by

policy-makers to imply social concern. Lack of policy involvement of professionals within the field may negate any form of change and may be seen as a tokenistic attempt to pacify the tax payer. “Education and skills provide a policy lever for giving the appearance of tackling economic problems and social equalities” (Keep, 2009, p.35). Policy-makers may be forgiven for assuming that embedding ESDGC within the curriculum is seamless, this is particularly true within schools where pupils spend more time and the opportunity for cross curricular delivery is enhanced. FEIs’ have a bigger challenge for embedding with less funding and more focus on specialist subjects, also students may only spend a few hours a week within the college environment.

Despite the obvious differences the same policy levers are used to check that the Government’s agenda is being implemented. An obvious policy lever is the common inspection framework (CIF), where institutions are inspected by government agents to evaluate their performance in relation to policy implementation such as basic skills, ESDGC and specific to Wales; Welsh culture.

The research is a study of the relationship between policy and practice, through the eyes of college staff. Looking at how leadership and organisation culture impacts on practice. As well as documenting the attitudes of staff to ESDGC issues, whilst exploring their understanding of ESDGC as a subject and how it is interpreted and translated through the policy process.

1.2. The research aims

- 1.2.1 To critically examine, through a literature review, key factors affecting policy transformation.
- 1.2.2 Investigate the impact of personal motivation on policy directives.
- 1.2.3 To consider the extent which organisational culture influences practice.

1.3. The research questions

- 1.3.1. What are the attitudes and experiences of college staff to implementation of policy directives? Does motivation play a part in effective implementation of policy?
- 1.3.2. What are the differences if any between individuals who are personally motivated by ESDGC issues and those that are not; how does this impact on practice.
- 1.3.3 How does organisational culture influence the ability for staff to embrace new policies and change?

1.4 The research Objectives

- 1.4.1 To review theoretical perspectives on policy, organisational culture and Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC).

1.4.2 To describe and critically evaluate key factors for policy transformation. To explore, through interviews and survey questions, the experience and views of key individuals of policy processes and ESDGC.

1.4.3 To summarise findings by assessing the extent to which leadership can contribute to effective policy implementation.

4.4 Summary of findings

In summary, the further education college which this case study focused on is attempting to comply with government policy and embed ESDGC within all aspects of the college's work and pays particular attention to both learners and tutors (Estyn, 2011). This is evidenced with their commitment to appointing and training an ESDGC champion who is then able to filter the theme of ESDGC throughout college literature and provide awareness training for college staff.

- The findings from the youth work tutors (online participants) suggest that as tutors of the college they feel informed of policy and in particular ESDGC. Within their main job (as youth workers) the majority have opportunities to participate in the policy process from initial concept through to implementation. They are fully aware of the government's agenda for ESDGC and are confident

in transferring this to youth work practice and their teaching role for the college. The college benefits from this knowledge and understanding when the tutors are delivering the youth work curriculum and therefore implementing the college's ESDGC policy.

- However, the data from the part time tutors (paper-based questionnaires) suggests that the college is not always successful in transferring the policy information to part-time peripatetic staff. Findings from the full time staff (interview participants) suggests that although policy is circulated to all members, the initial policy is usually written by the college leader or an individual staff member then presented at SMT which does not set aside time for consultation by all staff.
- Motivation and understanding of ESDGC is dependent on individual values and interest of the subject. With all interview participants, understanding the concept of ESDGC and most personally motivated by the subject. But any real embedding within the college environment is down to staff members who are motivated by the issue in both work and personal life. Part time tutors had limited personal motivation and inadequate knowledge of the policy or theme of ESDGC.

- The culture of the organisation is one of strong leadership and inclusivity although inclusion is usually confined to full time staff members. There is little resistance to change although relevance and understanding of the policy has been identified by staff as an important factor for implementation.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The research encompasses an investigation of the challenges for further education colleges in implementing policy and in particular the WG's policy for ESDGC. The research approaches have allowed the researcher to attempt to address the research aims and provide well-founded conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings.

The scope of this case study afforded little time to fully explore the subject of policy and policy transformation; however it does highlight some key areas that pose as barriers for staff and the college that could be improved during the policy transformation process. It can be inferred from the findings that there are a number of barriers for policy implementation within the college.

For example,

1) **Participation in policy development:** knowledge of the new policy and involvement in the consultation has been identified as important factors to consider when translating policy to practice. Lack of participation in policy translation impacted on knowledge and

understanding of the relevance to practice which in turn influenced behaviour and implementation.

2) **Motivation:** Other barriers identified were lack of motivation due to other drivers, ESDGC was low on the college's priority list, and this was particularly true of members of the leadership team who were driven by other WAG priorities which were linked to funding. Although, the findings also highlighted that regardless of a person's position within the organisation, if they were motivated by the concept of ESDGC they would transfer that motivation to promote and embed the policy objectives within their work practice. This suggests that personal motivators are key instigators for individuals' engaging and implementing policy.

3) **Leadership and Culture:** the leadership and culture of the organisation impacted on the opportunities for participation in the policy process with the SMT being the main developers of policy. Failure to include part time tutors in any consultation impacted on their ability to articulate the subject of ESDGC which then affected their ability to transfer to their teaching practice. The crucial point here is the loss opportunity to influence learners of the social responsibility society has to our environment.

A variety of successful methods are currently being employed within the college to inform and engage with staff on the ESDGC policy. Although it was noted that some participants indicated that they were unaware of the college's ESDGC policy. This may indicate that the

college does not always communicate fully with all staff members and in particular the part-time peripatetic staff.

Understanding the reason for implementing a new policy and being part of the transformation process can only help individuals take ownership and see the relevance to their professional practice. Effective leadership with a clear message of policy levers and their impact is critical for policy transformation, whilst an inclusive culture to policy development will ensure successful implementation.

The Welsh Government has made a commitment to a long term ESDCG programme which is a key theme throughout the majority of their policy documents. Although funding has been cut and resources are limited to some guidance documents. Strong arguments are provided for more resources and funding to supplement knowledge and training; whilst short explanatory literature would be of benefit to both the WG and practitioners in understanding the ESDGC agenda and translating policy into practice.

The research findings also indicate that organisational culture can impact on the individual's motivation to participate in policy implementation. Providing opportunities to participate in the process is determined by the college leadership and funding restrictions.

The college's strengths lie in its strong leadership and learner ethos (Estyn, report 2006; 2011). The challenge is to, where appropriate, genuinely consult and involve leaders, administrative and teaching staff in the policy process.

6. Recommendations

The researcher makes the following recommendations

1. The Welsh Government invests in accessible training for all Principals and leaders of Further Education (FE) institutions, to enable college leaders to fully understand the policy directives and have confidence to lead the policy process. This could be achieved on a regional basis where leaders could share knowledge, understanding and good practice.
2. During the consultation period for new policy development the Welsh Government factor in time to develop clear non-jargonised guidelines of the policy and its relevance to the sector.
3. The college plans time within the year for ongoing policy development and review, enabling staff at all levels to input into the process.
4. The college to develop an organisational culture of participation, consultation and ownership across the staff team, through the establishment of small task and finish groups.
5. The college use the success of its newsletter and online services to promote knowledge awareness of policy transformation.
This could be achieved using video diaries, face book, twitter, online quizzes or mobile phone applications/notifications.
6. The college establish themed CPD training for its part time tutors to encourage participation in college driven objectives.

These recommendations are not exhaustive and the researcher would anticipate that many more ideas would be generated during the implementation of the above processes.

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