Developing Social and Emotional Skills

Education policy and practice in the UK home nations

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Developing social and emotional skills

Education policy and practice in the UK home nations

Executive summary

- Policy in the four UK home nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) privileges certain social and emotional skills (SES) – which are largely seen as individual 'competencies', such as building and managing relationships, resilience, influencing and negotiating skills, taking the initiative, teamwork and leadership abilities, being creative, innovative, flexible and resourceful.

- Schools across the UK also said they interpret policy on SES from this individual competencies perspective, privileging these kinds of individual capacities such as self-regulation and interaction with others.

- There is generally a high level of awareness about SES policy across different parts of the UK according to teachers surveyed here, but England has the least reported awareness. English schools also reported being less likely to use policies from their jurisdiction and were less likely to say they found them helpful in developing and guiding their provision.

- Scotland and Wales have developed innovative curricula that take an integrative approach to embedding SES within their statutory curricula – whereas England and Northern Ireland rely more on a disparate set of 'stand-alone' policies.

- While the new curricula of Wales and Scotland proved helpful in guiding teachers, the large number of disparate English policies could be causing a lack of clarity and coherence in England.

- Schools reported interpreting policy as taking a broad view on the 'spaces' within school where skills should be developed, spanning all aspects of children's daily lives – within the curriculum; outside the curriculum but within the school day; and outside the school day.

- In delivering activities, schools across the UK said they took a 'whole-school approach', but slight differences were also evident between home nations. Those in Scotland delivered activities within the curriculum; Wales both outside the curriculum, but within the school day and outside the school day. England and Northern Ireland generally delivered activities outside the curriculum, but within the school day.

- The kinds of activities schools across the UK perceived to be effective included social and emotional learning programmes, mentoring programmes, behaviour interventions, careers and employability programmes, and, to an extent, sport participation activities.

- Schools said they either design activities themselves or develop them alongside a partner, with little delivery of activities by providers alone.

- Effective providers were felt to be those able to empathise and communicate with children, deliver innovative, creative and original activities, and ensure activities are properly adapted and contextualised to the needs of pupils in their school.

- Schools across all nations of the UK reported that they have good access to all the information they need to develop activities.

- Informal information sources – such as personal experience, suggestions from peers and the local authority – were those most often said to be used by teachers to develop activities, as opposed to more 'hard' sources such as academic research and reports from charities.

- Schools in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland reported being more confident in their ability to measure the impact of their provision than was the case for teachers in England, who said they were less confident in comparison.

- The informal information sources – such as teacher observations and feedback, as well as student self-report surveys – are also those teachers reported to rely on the most to measure the impact of their provision, but schools are also open to more validated forms of measurement.

- The biggest barrier to measuring the impact of activities was said to be a lack of time, with a high proportion of teachers also noting a lack of expertise and funding (especially in Northern Ireland) as key barriers.

To enhance policy and provision for SES in the UK, we put forward **seven key recommendations** targeted at policy-makers, programme providers and funders:

1. **Government in England should provide greater coherence and clarity in the area of social and emotional skills policy.**

2. **Schools should be afforded greater time, space and resources to develop their social and emotional skills provision, drawing on the latest evidence.**

3. **External providers of activities should work in partnership with schools to devise and deliver adaptable activities.**

4. **Policy-makers, funders of programmes, and programme providers should continue to emphasise the value of a 'whole-school approach' in developing social and emotional skills.**

5. **Programme providers and their funders should promote the value of a broader range of evidence-based activities to develop social and emotional skills.**

6. **Funders and governments should encourage the development of longitudinal research to generate robust evidence on what pupils need, and the effectiveness of school-based provision.**

7. **Policy-makers should adopt a broader understanding of social and emotional skills; accounting for the socially situated nature of these skills as well as their ethical and identity-based dimensions.**

1 Introduction

This report addresses the role education plays in developing children and young people's social and emotional skills (SES) across the four UK home nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). It provides a comparative analysis of secondary education policies on SES across these four different education systems, as well as evidence on how schools interpret and respond to these policies, including how they make use of evidence in determining provision.

The issue of children's SES is at the forefront of contemporary debates within education and wider society. Young people are increasingly lamented as unable to cope with what are considered 'everyday realities of life', while the changing nature of work and workplaces increasingly place an emphasis on 'soft skills' alongside academic qualifications. It is an issue which has led to successive governments across the UK home nations to direct policy attention to this area, devising new policy initiatives. Yet, there is a lack of knowledge on differences in policy approaches between the four UK education systems – including points of convergence and divergence between them – and crucially, how school-based provision differs according to the kinds of education policy they are subject to. This research sought to address this gap in knowledge.

Research questions

1. How do system-level secondary education policies on SES compare across the devolved UK systems?

2. How do state secondary schools in each home nation interpret and respond to policies on SES?

3. To what extent do state secondary schools engage with evidence when selecting and planning provision?

4. What factors influence their choice and selection of provision (both in and out of the curriculum)?

Social and emotional skills: towards a broader definition

This section sets out our definition of SES (the scope and breadth of what we understand this term to mean) as well as our theoretical framework (the tool we use to help analyse our data collected – especially policy texts). Our definition and theoretical framework both build upon, and extend further, previous research in this area.

Previous research that has addressed SES has largely seen them as individual competencies, drawing on dominant and well-recognised psychological theories alone. In the UK, two of the most recent studies have been carried out by the Early Intervention Foundation, the Cabinet Office and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (Goodman et al 2016,[1] Clarke et al 2015[2]). Internationally, the OECD (2015)[3] undertook a large-scale comparative study into which types of SES drive young people's future social and economic prospects. While following slightly different taxonomies of respectively five (Goodman et al 2015; OECD 2015) and seven categories (Clarke et al 2015), all follow a competency perspective, which interprets SES purely as individual and functional skills that can be nurtured in the individual. These could be divided in three categories: 1) cognitive or thinking skills, such as self-and social awareness, problem solving and decision making; 2) affective or 'emotional' skills, such as emotional awareness, emotional stability, and managing feelings; and 3) behavioural competencies such as interpersonal relationship skills and leadership skills. These competencies are approached from an individualistic perspective, which downplays the social or environmental mechanisms that may support or demand SES, such as family support, or local opportunities to connect with others and participate in society.

While the novelty of our framework is elaborated in the following section, it is important to identify that our definition of SES builds upon these existing frameworks recognising the important SES they refer to, but also encompasses a broader understanding. Indeed, our framework is novel in the sense that it adds further overlooked dimensions to conceptualising SES.

Definition of SES

We see SES as the competencies, values and resources needed to function, identify and connect with others, and to find our place in the world around us.

It goes beyond merely individual functioning and 'performance' to recognise the importance of SES for society – both the individual and collective gains which social and emotional skill building provides. In line with our broad definition, SES is conceptualised from three different perspectives: 'competencies', 'morals/ethics', and 'identity/capital' (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Theoretical framework

1.   Competencies – nurturing capabilities of the individual child

The competencies approach draws from the psychological literature and understands SES as 'capabilities' or 'competencies' to be developed and nurtured in the child.[4] There are in general three key 'types' of competencies; behavioural, (i.e. turn-taking, teamwork skills); emotional (i.e. self-control, self-confidence, coping skills) and cognitive or 'thinking' skills (i.e. decision making, problem solving). From this perspective while schools should help students build these skills, they ultimately rely on the child's willingness and ability to master them. Competencies are understood to be an achieved state of being which can be discerned and measured – in other words, mastery of an ability to do something (physical, emotional, or mental) that individuals may have varying levels of.

2.   A values perspective – moral and ethical conduct

A 'values' perspective concerns the identification and instilling of key values that underpin SES (e.g. tolerance, respect, 'good behaviour') which can be approached in two ways – 'moralistic' and 'ethical'. Our review of the literature distinguishes between two discrete values-based perspectives. The 'moral' perspective[5] sees morality in terms of a set of universal human traits or value positions that transcend social, cultural differences. This position reflects a somewhat rigid blueprint of what constitutes the specific desired principles of self-conduct that schools are to nurture in the child, for example, SES such as motivation, honesty, and high aspirations. In contrast, an 'ethical' values approach[6] rejects a universal understanding of morality – instead, there may be different views and perspectives of the way society and people should operate, which may change according to social and cultural context. While a morality approach emphasises universal moral principles to be instilled in the child through schooling, an ethics-based approach values a more active and free-thinking individual, with associated SES such as the appreciation and respect for cultural diversity and difference of opinion.

3.   Capitals/identity

From this sociological perspective, SES are linked to the resources that young people have available to them. The key 'capitals' upon which SES depend are economic resources, the impact of poverty, opportunities to expand their horizons, social and cultural capital,[7] and connectedness to valuable resources and experiences. This recognises the varying value that different emotional and social resources assume within schools, and that there is a hierarchy in terms of what SES are valued in the classroom (in other words, competencies and moral/ethical values are not neutral). From this perspective, a key SES is a positive sense of social or 'learner' identity – the belief that you are a valued part of the community and that you belong. Identity (often referred to as a sense of citizenship or connection with others) is understood as a resource that schools can best build by strengthening the child's sense of connection with others and sense that they are a valued member of that community. While a competency and a morals-based perspective sees the role of schooling to be about building the same SES in all children, a capitals-based approach targets children seen to be most in need of support. This involves increasing the resources required by disadvantaged groups in society (e.g. children in poverty, girls, ethnic minorities) but also in seeing value in the social and emotional norms, and identities of marginalised groups.

The value of a broader lens on SES

The competency perspective has been the dominant lens through which SES have been understood, which has been helpful in terms of further understanding the personal and individual skills needed for individual achievement and success. The drawback to a perspective that only sees SES as competencies, however, is in missing the moral-ethical dimension to SES, which relates to how the young person sees themselves as part of the immediate, as well as wider, social world around them. This relates to young people's understanding and awareness of social, political, environmental and economic issues on a local, national and global scale (e.g. Brexit, refugee crises, climate change, COVID-19) as well as the will, resources and skills to address them. A competency only approach also deflects attention from the SES needed to connect with others and generate a sense of belonging at school (learner identity), in the community (cultural/social identity), or in wider society (sense of citizenship and national identity). Looking at SES in these ways highlights young people's accumulation of, and access to, qualitative forms of capital, such as cultural and social capital which underpin social interaction.

The unique contribution of a review that includes a competency, morals/ethical and identity/resources perspective, is that a broader range of SES can be identified from educational policies that extend beyond personal gains, to recognise the collective and social gains of building young people's SES. For example, in the next chapter we identify 'language competency in English and Welsh', which can be seen as SES for the policy objective they are seen to fulfil, which is in building a sense of identity and belonging on a local, national and global level (as opposed to a policy objective only of academic achievement). A broader focus also enables us to see the building of young people's SES as having economic gains. For example, while work skills have been identified in the previous reviews, i.e. Goodman et al (2015) identify critical thinking as central to planning/problem-solving competencies and leadership skills, and Clarke et al (2015) recognise social skills – our extensive review of labour market policy, (in contrast) enables us to capture employability skills such as 'entrepreneurial thinking', 'interview skills' and 'occupational awareness'. This recognises that being 'work ready' goes beyond personal organisation and interpersonal skills, in requiring an understanding of the local/national/global environment in terms of economy, community relations and work opportunities.

The earlier reviews conflate values with competencies, meaning that values are only seen to be important for personal gain (e.g. in school or the workplace). For example, values-based SES such as 'aspirations' or 'empathy' were recognised only in order to achieve the co-operation and teamworking to assert leadership (Clarke et al 2015) or achieve personal goals (Goodman et al 2015). In taking a moral/ethical lens we could identify SES as values that have a social and ethical function. In the next chapter we identify SES within the pastoral policy domain such as 'a sense of fairness and justice', and values such as 'tolerance and respect of difference', 'courage', and 'understanding of rights and responsibilities' that underpin healthy relationships and facilitate the historical and cultural understanding, and opinions required to contribute to, and participate in, an inclusive society.

Lastly, by including an identity/resources perspective, our review is original in identifying policy and practice efforts to build SES in terms of 'personal', 'cultural' and 'nation' identities as valued forms of SES in the labour market preparation policy domain. We were also attuned to an identity/resources lens in the educational inclusion policy domain, in identifying the policy objectives of enabling young people with SEND to 'participate in society and the community, including having friends and supportive relationships'. In reflecting this lens we were also able to identify the resources this policy area promoted to achieve this SES, such as personal networks in the community (through community 'mentors' and 'role models') and the economic and human resources needed to build young people's SES, such as 'specialised' and 'flexible teaching arrangements', and a 'safe and secure environment'.

The value in taking a broad lens, however, is not only in applauding policy efforts to promote building young people's SES, but crucially, it also enabled us to identify that despite the exceptions highlighted above, educational policy is still overwhelmingly competency focused. In the final chapter we will reflect upon the implications of this narrow framing, and the recommendations needed to develop a broader lens on SES.

Methodology

Our research and data collection was carried out between January 2020 – July 2020.[8] It involved three key stages, incorporating a policy analysis (stage 1), a nationally representative survey from each home nation (stage 2), and qualitative interviews (stage 3).

Policy analysis (stage 1)

Analysis was carried out on 26 documents from across the four UK home nations (see Appendix 1 for the full list of documents). In selecting these documents, we were conscious of the fact that policy is not only found in 'official' policy texts issued by government departments, but is carried through a range of documents, artefacts and instruments that go beyond these official texts. Taking account of this broad view of policy, we selected documents across bodies responsible for curriculum development, government departments of education, professional development bodies and other arm's length organisations working at the secondary level of education. Thematic analysis[9] was conducted on the selected policy texts, guided by the following questions: How do the different home nations conceptualise SES? What do they believe are the gaps in skills provision? In what ways do they seek to build SES in their respective domiciles? What do they believe the schools' role to be? What is the nature of any solutions they propose and how do they envisage they should be delivered?

Nationally representative survey (stage 2)

Our own independent survey was developed in order to identify patterns within and between home nations in how state schools themselves interpreted policies, as well as how they 'enacted' them in terms of their provision of activities (including their use of evidence). Given that this was a self-reported survey it must be noted that data collected was teacher views on their practices – not necessarily reflective of their actual practices.

The samples were selected from sampling frames based on the data provided by the websites of the government agencies responsible for secondary education in each of the home nations.[10] All the state schools delivering secondary education were included in the sampling framework and the sample for each home nation was selected using systematic random sampling with probabilities proportional to size (i.e. number of students). The final sample consists of 156 schools (49 in England, 36 in Northern Ireland, 37 in Wales and 34 in Scotland), resulting in a margin of error for the full sample of ± 6.5 at the 90% confidence interval. In other words, the statistics reported here are estimated to be within 6.5 percentage points of the real population value 90% of the time.

Schools were approached via email and were sent individual links to answer an online questionnaire with 36 items organised in four main sections (demographics; interpretation of policies; implementation of policies; and the role of evidence). The survey was answered by headteachers (60.4%) and other staff members with responsibility for SES development (39.6%), who on average had five years of experience in their current role and 21 in the teaching profession. The most common age range among the respondents was 41–50 (46%), the sample was evenly split between men and women (without anyone perceiving themselves as non-binary). Two sample weight variables were created and used in our analyses, one for the total population across the UK and one for the population within each home nation. Each weight was created with a base weight reflecting the probability of selection followed by calibration to known characteristics of the target population. For each home nation, weights were scaled to sum to the size of their population, and the UK weight was scaled to ensure an equal contribution by each of the home nations in the analyses across the UK.

Qualitative interviews (stage 3)

The views and experiences of school leaders and teachers were captured through qualitative interviews in order to understand the meaning that lies beneath their understandings of policies they are subject to, as well as their experiences and realities of enacting these policies. A total of eight school staff from across the four home nations were interviewed (Wales - four, England - two, Scotland - one, Northern Ireland - one), including both headteachers as well as those teachers with leadership responsibility for an area aligned to social emotional skills. A loosely structured interview guide was developed in order to elicit responses from school leaders and teachers, covering three main topics: 1) understandings/interpretation of policy within their home nation, 2) provision within their school, and 3) how schools are supported to deliver policies, and what role (if any) evidence plays in this process. Analysis was carried out taking a thematic approach with coding used to sort, organise and interpret the qualitative data collected into categories and groups of different levels.

2 Education policy on social and emotional skills

🔑 Key points

- Scotland and Wales have developed new education curricula that integrate and embed SES across all curricular areas – unlike England and Northern Ireland, which rely more on a disparate set of 'stand-alone' policies.

- England has produced the most extensive and comprehensive guidance and statutory policies to schools.

- In the area of pastoral policies on personal, social and health education (PSHE), skills around 'building and managing relationships' feature prominently across all four home nations. Wales and Northern Ireland appear cognisant that an awareness of economic capital is a necessary SES, for example in understanding the unequal distribution of wealth and resources. While England and Scotland perceive the individual child as the key beneficiary of relationship skills, Wales and Northern Ireland see social cohesion as the key aim.

- In terms of behaviour policy, there is a distinction between England which promotes building individual competencies (e.g. self-conduct/self-discipline, comply with assigned work, belief in control), and other home nations which recognise first and foremost the importance of school culture to promote good behaviour.

- Highly prescriptive competencies are evident in the policy domain of labour market preparation across all home nations (e.g. influencing and negotiating skills, taking the initiative, teamwork and leadership abilities, being creative, innovative, flexible and resourceful).

- More than any other policy area, educational inclusion places the strongest recognition on the resources needed for building SES, such as social capital, autonomy and belonging, that requires support and investment from the school and community over and above individual effort.

Introduction

This section examines what policy on SES looks like across the four nations of the UK. In analysing policy material from each nation, we have examined the four key policy domains where SES are present: (1) personal, social and health education; (2) behaviour and discipline; (3) labour market preparation; and (4) educational inclusion. Each of these areas of policy has distinctive aims and intended outcomes, but draw on various notions of SES in their delivery. In each of these domains, policy documents and materials were examined that refer to SES in some way (see Appendix 1 for full list). We compare here SES across the UK nations spanning these different policy domains.

Policy domain 1: Pastoral policies on personal, social and health education

Summary

Broadly speaking, personal, social and health education (commonly known as PSHE) refers to the role of schools in the non-academic aspects of children's development. A number of educational programmes and agendas fall under this umbrella category including: character education; citizenship education; relationships and sex education; and health education (in which there has been a recent emphasis upon mental health in some nations).

Within this policy domain, the common SES promoted across all four nations concerned 'an ability to form positive relationships' and 'respect for others'; however the policy objectives by which schools were tasked with building these SES differed. England and Scotland placed emphasis upon young people's responsibilities in promoting individual gains (i.e. 'character' in England) to enable young people to be self-sufficient, and responsible citizens (Scotland). In Wales, however, there was more emphasis upon rights (i.e. nurturing cultural and historical understanding with Welsh language and identity a key priority), while in Northern Ireland it was often for social cohesion.

Table 1: National comparison of SES in the personal, social and health education policy domain

		England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Behavioural competencies	Communication skills	x*	x*	x*	x*
	Resilience	x*	x	x*	
	An ability to form positive relationships	x*	x*	x*	x
	Perseverance	x*			
	Permission-seeking and giving	x*			
	Turn-taking/knowing when to assert own views	x*		x*	
	Language competence – Welsh and English		x*		
	Ability to work with others			x*	x*
Thinking competencies	Planning skills	x		x*	
	Reflective capacity	x			
	Self-efficacy/self-esteem	x*			x
	Being creative			x*	x*
	'Good' decision making	x*		x	x*
	'Concept of personal privacy'	x*			
	Entrepreneurial thinking		x*	x*	x*
	Critical thinking		x*		x*
	Managing information				x*
	A belief in achievement	x*		x*	
Emotional competencies	Self-respect	x*		x	x
	Self-worth	x*		x	
	Emotion management skills	x			
	Self-control (or self-regulation – the 'ability to delay gratification')	x*			x*
	Good coping skills	x			
	Social confidence	x		x	x
Morals-based	'Kindness'	x*			
	'Integrity'	x*			
	'Generosity'	x*			
	'Honesty'	x*			
	'Respect for others'	x*	x*	x	x*
	'Courage'	x*		x	
	'Trustworthiness'	x*	x*		
	'Humility'	x*			
	Consideration	x		x	
	'Good manners'	x			x
	Habit of service	x	x*		
	Courtesy	x			x
	High aspirations		x*		
	Positive attitudes		x*		
	Moral framework		x*		
	Understanding of rights and responsibilities	x	x*	x	
	Empathy		x*		
Ethical	Cultural understanding, values, history and heritage		x	x*	
	Understanding of history and heritage		x	x*	
	Sense of fairness and justice over wealth and resources		x	x*	x*
	Develop opinions about exploitation and poverty'		x		
	Free-thinking skills		x		
	Skills to challenge injustice, prejudice and discrimination		x		x
	Tolerance and respect of difference		x		x

Note: Emboldened skills denote those that are embedded within the curriculum, and non-emboldened refer to stand-alone policies not embedded within the curriculum. Asterisk (*) represents those skills that derive from statutory policy documents, with no asterisk referring to those that are non-statutory.

England

Character education

One of the key policy developments in England is the *Character Education* policy (DfE 2019a). The assumption that there are universal aspects that constitute 'good' character, and that it is schools' task to instil these, is itself an implicit value-laden assumption, reflective of a morals-based perspective. *Character Education* is first and foremost seen as part of schools' requirement to nurture children's spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. The lens used to understand SES here is overwhelmingly morals-based, where schools are tasked to 'promote' key attributes, also termed positive 'character traits' (p.5) or 'virtues' (p.7).

According to this document, morals-based SES are:

- Consideration
- Respect
- Courage
- Honesty
- Integrity
- A 'habit of service'

There is also a cross-over between a competency and morals-based understanding of behavioural skills (p.5):

- Good manners
- Courtesy

A competency-based perspective on SES is also evident in terms of emotional skills:

- Social confidence
- Self-control (or self-regulation – the ability to delay gratification)
- Good coping skills (part of being able to 'bounce back')

Finally, cognitive or thinking SES are present:

- 'The ability to make points or arguments clearly and constructively' (p.7)

Universal approach: poorer children may lack SES but shouldn't be targeted for special treatment

While schools' responsibility to 'create a sense of pride, belonging and identity' (p.4) is recognised, this is secondary to building competency in the child in the *Character Education* document. For example, the 'opportunities' schools are tasked with in building school/civic identity are seen to be the responsibility of the child (pp.5–6). A universal model is promoted meaning that schools' responsibility towards building SES is seen to be essentially the same for all children despite that those in poverty are seen to lack social responsibility; 'the poorest households [are] much less likely to [participate]' and therefore 'less likely to have formed 'a habit of service' (p.9).

Relationships, sex and health education

English schools must now deliver statutory *'Relationships (and Sex) Education and Health Education'* (RSHE) from September 2020 (DfE 2019b). This follows an individualistic competency view that schools' role in the teaching of these curriculum areas is to 'give [children] the knowledge and capability to take care of themselves' (p.4) in order 'to become successful and happy adults' (p.5, p.35).

These policy objectives are understood to be achieved through building specific areas of SES, understood through an individualistic competency and morals-based perspective. While the 'morals-based' SES are emphasised in the *Character Education* policy, in the statutory curriculum there is an emphasis on knowledge-based, behavioural and emotional 'competencies'.

Competencies in 'knowledge': A key aspect of this document is to build young people's 'knowledge'. In this English policy, 'knowledge' is understood as a competency-based set of skills, for example, in order 'to understand the normal range of emotions that everyone experiences' (p.32) or to 'explore political and social issues' (p.39). There are 20 references across the document.

- Self-efficacy.

- 'Well-founded', 'sound' or 'good' decision making

- The 'concept of personal privacy'

- A belief in achievement

Behavioural competencies: Identified behavioural skills reflected a somewhat paradoxical combination of active initiative and passive compliance in the child:

- A 'growing ability to form strong and positive relationships'

- Perseverance (despite set-backs)

- Permission-seeking and giving turn-taking

- Courtesy

Emotional competencies: These were connected to personal emotions as opposed to those of others:

- Self-respect

- Self-worth

- Self-control

- Self-regulation

The second way in which schools in England are to reach the policy objectives of children's welfare and contribution to society, is seen to be through the fostering of what are termed 'attributes' or 'virtues' for which there are ten references across the document. 'Attributes' refer to SES from a morals-based perspective:

Morals-based SES named 'attributes' or 'virtues':

- Kindness

- Integrity

- Generosity

- Honesty

- Respect for others

- Courage

- Trustworthiness

- Humility

There was clear connection between the understanding of SES aimed to be fostered through relationships, sex and health education, with those identified under *Character Education*. Indeed, these 'attributes' were also described as indicating 'good character' in the RSHE policy (e.g. p.5, p.20, p.21, p.25).

Resilience: an overarching social and emotional skill

The social and emotional skill of 'resilience' deserves special mention as an overarching competency that featured largely in both the *Character Education* and PSHE English policies. The term 'resilience' was understood as the ability for children to 'take care of themselves' (DfE 2019b:35) understood as 'overcoming and persevering through, and learning from, setbacks' (DfE 2019a:7) as well as to 'participate in their communities and contribute to society through service' (DfE 2019:35). It is seen to be the sum gain of achieving the knowledge-based, emotional, behavioural and values-based skills discussed above.

Recognises parents, children and the local community as key stakeholders in developing SES

Unlike the English behaviour policies (discussed later) there is a clear recognition for the role of parents both as educators of children's social and emotional development, and as valued 'consultants' in schools' PHSE curriculum. There is also recognition for the importance of the child's voice and the 'local community (p.41). Despite this, the content of the curriculum areas themselves, while stating the flexibility to adapt to local context (p.42) are nonetheless prescriptive in the key learning objectives to be covered.

■ Wales

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) within a holistic over-arching curriculum policy document

Curriculum for Wales 2022 (Welsh Government 2019) is a new curriculum strategy outlining the government's position on PSHE. Like Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* (discussed below) Wales intends its new curriculum to be underpinned by a common framework of four key 'purposes of the curriculum' (p.6), three of which aim to foster the child's sense of citizenship and contribution towards society at a local, national and global level. It is strongly moral values orientated in the underpinning view of SES, but also aligns with the competencies perspective. However, different curriculum areas see SES through different lenses.

Relationships and sexuality education

The relationships and sexuality education section of the *Curriculum for Wales 2022* policy understands SES in terms of competencies and moral values.

Behavioural competencies:

- Skills to form and maintain a range of positive relationships

- Resilience (general competency)

Morals perspective:

- Trust

- Respect

- Empathy

Welsh and English language

The curriculum focus on Welsh and English sees linguistic 'competence' as fundamental to developing the SES of national identity and cultural understanding ('moral' and 'ethical' perspective). This is in contrast to the English government's view of language as a purely academic skill.

Competencies perspective:

- Communication skills (thinking competence)

- Linguistic competence in English and Welsh (behavioural competence)

- Resilience (understood here as the sum of emotional, mental and behavioural competence)

Ethical perspective:

Welsh and English languages are seen as key to:

- Understanding 'values, rights, culture and sexuality'
- 'An understanding of the diverse histories, cultures, values, and heritage of modern Wales'

Morals perspective:

The schools' role in identity building is understood in terms of shaping children's aspirations as opposed to through recognising the differential power and recognition afforded to different groups of children (by socio-economic, cultural background, gender or 'ability'):

- Instilling a sense of service: 'the contribution they can make to their communities…'
- Aspirations: 'provide the means by which to imagine both Wales' future and their own roles in its unfolding story'

Citizenship education: A holistic approach

Wales, in contrast to England, has a greater focus on citizenship. In *Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship* (ESDGC) (Welsh Assembly Government 2008) the view of SES takes a competency, moralistic and ethical perspective. This is evident in the seven key themes that underpin the strategy which align with PSHE, especially 'emotional well-being' (p.12) through the theme of 'health' (p.14); and social inclusion through the theme of 'wealth and poverty' (p.14). The responsibilities for building these skills and attributes are not reduced to individual learners, as with many English policies, but rather includes 'parents, carers, governors, visitors, non-teaching staff' (p.6) school leaders, school managers, teachers and learners, [and] the community (p.9).

Competency perspective:

Despite recognition for the collective responsibility for building SES in these terms, the competency perspective is dominant as indicated through 57 references to skills across the document. This includes at key stage three (secondary school education):

- 'Thinking skills' or 'entrepreneurial thinking'
- Decision-making skills
- Communication skills
- Critical thinking skills

There is also a strong values-based framing of SES, as illustrated by 27 mentions of 'values' across the document. This includes moral, but particularly an ethical perspective:

Morals perspective:

- Attitudes (seven mentions of attitudes across the policy)

- Development of an individual moral framework

- [An ability to] 'evaluate their [teachers' and learners'] own values and attitudes'

- An understanding of the role of learners within the community, their rights and responsibilities' (p.12)

- 'Learn to value non-material things as well as material goods'. (p.34)

Ethical perspective

The ethical emphasis is indicated by ten references to social justice and within key stage three (secondary school) themes which include 'active citizenship', 'choices and decisions' and 'wealth and poverty'. Specific aims to build SES include:

- 'Develop a sense of fairness and justice about the access to resources and wealth'

- 'Develop opinions about exploitation and poverty'

- 'Gaining skills … which will enable them [learners] to make up their own minds and decide how to act' (p.7)

- 'Develop skills to challenge injustice, prejudice and discrimination (p.4)

An ethical appreciation for 'other' cultures is secondary to an appreciation of Welsh culture

Despite the ethical emphasis upon understanding social justice in society and globally, there is little focus on learners' inequality within the community and school. For example, under the 'choices and decision' key theme, the first specific aim for key stage three is for young people to be given opportunities to (among other things) 'participate in the school and wider community in order to change things'. However, there is not recognition that learners at the school may be differentially positioned to do this, nor are there targeted resources signposted in which to achieve this. This misses the importance of capital as a resource for achieving SES. The same can be said for identity-building which is seen as a key purpose for the curriculum aim, but where non-dominant cultures are 'othered'.

◼ Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, while there are not the same kind of extensive policy documents in this area as is the case in England (and to some extent Wales), the statutory curriculum refers to the same sorts of SES which schools are required to teach, seeing these as 'competencies' to be developed in children. The key competency emphasised being communication skills, which assumes a special prominence throughout. Communication skills (see Box 1 for the full range of communicative abilities specified) are considered central to the whole curriculum and are presented as one of the three cross-curricula areas (alongside ICT skills and mathematics).

Box 1: Required communication skills in Northern Ireland (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment 2020)

- Communicating meaning, feelings and viewpoints in a logical and coherent manner

- Making oral and written summaries, reports and presentations, taking account of audience and purpose

- Participating in discussions, debates and interviews

- Interpreting, analysing and presenting information in oral, written and ICT formats

- Exploring and responding, both imaginatively and critically, to a variety of texts

Instilling skills for personal development as 'prerequisites for life and work'

Across key stages 3 and 4, the statutory curriculum has a component titled 'personal development and thinking skills' which contains skills and competencies children are expected to master. Schools are expected to develop in children the skills of:

- Managing information
- Thinking, problem solving and decision making
- Being creative
- Working with others
- Self-management

A major area of the statutory curriculum relating to personal, social and health education is contained within the 'learning for life and work' component. The statutory curriculum requires schools to offer access to at least one course which leads to a qualification in this area, which includes those relating to academic subjects (such as business studies) specific occupations (such as construction), as well as personal development, referred to as 'preparation for adult life' (including knowledge in the domains of citizenship, employability, health and wellbeing).

Building knowledge of healthy relationships and sexual health

Relationships (and sex) education has been a long-standing statutory requirement in Northern Ireland, with a similar emphasis placed on developing children's knowledge of healthy relationships to that evident in England and Wales. Within their circular to schools on this issue, they refer to the importance of:

- The opportunity to develop the skills to build healthy and respectful relationships, stay safe, and develop their own moral thinking and value system; and

- Up-to-date, accurate and accessible information about reproduction, sex and sexual health matters.

(Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment 2020a)

A strategy for improving young people's lives through social and emotional development

One of the most substantial articulations of Northern Ireland policy-making around personal, social and health education is contained within their recently developed *Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027* (Northern Ireland Executive 2016), which builds upon their previous ten-year strategy that ran from 2006–2016 (OFM and ODFM 2006). This document sets out a strategic plan for improving the lives of young people living in Northern Ireland, responding to what are considered some of the key stated challenges of mental health, child poverty, safety, and obesity. Given the context of Northern Ireland, safety here refers to violence and inter-faith community-based relations. In this sense, it explicitly recognises important differences in available resources. The strategy is underpinned by what are considered eight key interconnected factors that contribute to young people's wellbeing (see Box 2).

Box 2: Factors contributing to wellbeing in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Executive 2016)

- Physical and mental health

- Enjoyment of play and leisure

- Learning and achievement

- Living in safety and with stability

- Economic and environmental wellbeing

- Positive contribution to society

- Respect for their rights

- Promotion of equality and of good relations

It is interesting that factors such as physical and mental health, and learning and achievement that may relate to broader goals (such as academic achievement) are seen in this context as contributing to children's social and emotional development. The presence of community relations can be clearly seen here, as three of the stated factors contributing to wellbeing relate to issues around identity, difference and relationships, with a strong emphasis on its co-production, working across communities of parents, guardians, carers and young people themselves. There is a considerable emphasis within the strategy of young people's social and economic conditions and how these impact on wellbeing. For example, in terms of enjoyment of play and leisure, there is recognition of the economic barriers here which can mean disadvantaged groups are unable to reap benefits.

In this sense, rather than 'instilling competencies' there is an onus here placed on the root causes of poor wellbeing in the particular context of Northern Ireland. While there is mention of specific skills such as 'self-confidence' and the development of 'skills which will enable them [young people] to deal effectively with significant life changes and challenges' – they are presented in a way which accounts for why they are under-developed for disadvantaged children in Northern Ireland.

The strategy also looks at citizenship and in particular the importance of belonging (feeling valued/respected, able to freely express views) for generating a sense of citizenship. Throughout the strategy there is an emphasis placed on the importance of connectedness to others, relationships, tolerance and respect of difference – likely to be more pronounced in the context of Northern Ireland because of past and present conflict. This reflects an ethics-based understanding of SES because it is culturally sensitive to the specific context, rather than applying universally held moral values.

Scotland

Curriculum for Excellence and *Getting it Right for Every Child*

The Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence* is the most explicit articulation of Scotland's policy-making in the area of PSHE. The stated purpose of *Curriculum for Excellence* is to help children and young people to become:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors

In this sense, like other UK nations, there is an implicit 'competency' framing to their PSHE policy. Even when reference is made to the availability of resources/capitals, it is made in connection to individuals instilling capacities and skills. *Curriculum for Excellence* prescribes a series of specific skills required for 'learning, life and work' (see Box 3) with associated 'experiences' and 'outcomes' detailed.

Box 3: Skills required for 'learning life and work' (Scottish Government 2009, p.10)

- Literacy, numeracy and associated thinking skills

- Skills for health and wellbeing, including personal learning planning

- Career management skills

- Working with others, leadership and physical co-ordination and movement skills.

- Skills for enterprise and employability

While the first skills set is academic, it is interesting that the other skills are all SES, which reflects a policy assumption that SES are more important skills for being prepared for the labour market even than academic excellence. A crucial policy in *Scotland is Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC) which is an over-arching strategy for children's health and wellbeing that brings together a range of services, programmes and guidance (Scottish Government 2017). To guide a common understanding of what wellbeing means for Scottish young people, eight indicators are used: safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included (taking the acronym SHANARRI). The framework includes a 'my world' triangle which includes three key dimensions of children's wellbeing: 'how I grow and develop', 'what I need from people who look after me' and 'my wider world'. In terms of 'how I grow and develop', seven attributes are mentioned: 'being healthy', 'learning and achieving', 'confidence in who I am', 'being able to communicate', 'learning to be responsible', 'becoming independent, looking after myself', 'enjoying family and friends' (see Box 4 for further details). In taking account of their 'wider world' there is acknowledgement here of differences in available resources, signally a capital-based perspective. Other resources are also present, including a 'resilience matrix' which helps practitioners to understand how to guide and assess children's resilience (Scottish Government 2017).

Box 4: Extract from 'how I grow and develop' (Scottish Government 2017)

Confidence in who I am: resilience; self-esteem; knows views are listened to; ability to take pride in achievements; confidence in managing challenges, opportunities; sense of identity; skills in social presentation

Learning to be responsible: sense of right and wrong; consideration for others; ability to understand what is expected and act on it

Becoming independent, looking after myself: engaging with learning and other tasks, acquiring skills and competence in social problem solving, getting on well with others, moving to independent living skills and autonomy

Enjoying family and friends: develop skills in making friends; to take account of the feelings and needs of others, and to behave responsibly

Individual responsibility to form a sense of belonging and citizenship

In advocating a focus on connectedness and belonging, Scotland's curriculum policies do so in a way that emphasises the individual's responsibility and as such reflects a morals-based values framing. However, it also aligns with the collective ethics-based framing in that the child's moral obligation is to learn about collective concerns; education is thus seen as instilling a capacity for the individual to 'develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it', 'evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues', and to 'develop informed, ethical views of complex issues' (Scottish Government 2009, p. iii).

A prescribed set of competencies to master

Evidence of the competency thinking on SES is also clear in the emphasis afforded to working with others and for children to have '...the courage of their convictions, knowing when and how to assert their own views' (Scottish Government 2009, p.14). The requirement for students to acquire leadership skills is a further competency young people are expected to master, which is argued will be necessary across different dimensions of their future lives.

Forming good relationships to ensure self-esteem, confidence and resilience

There is a strong framing of individual responsibility in the Scottish Government's approach to policy-making around relationships, sexual health, and parenthood:

'...equipping children and young people with the knowledge, skills and values to make informed and positive choices about forming relationships. It can assist with making safer decisions about their sexual and emotional health and wellbeing in a responsible and healthy manner, as an important part of preparation for adult life.'

(Scottish Government 2014, p.1)

Individualistic and competency-based perspectives are used to frame the health and wellbeing agenda, which is orientated around forming 'good' relationships, that are in turn linked to self-esteem, confidence, and 'resilience'.

Policy domain 2: Behaviour and discipline

Summary

This policy domain refers to both managing learners' behaviour and meeting their needs, as well as the disciplinary systems for regulating pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher interactions. These policy aims are achieved through encouraging the development of SES, to ensure the 'right' kind of behaviours and discipline is observed within schools.

Of all the policy domains, behaviour and discipline is the most explicitly competency framed with 'good behaviour', promoted across all four nations and 'social-skills' and 'self-esteem/worth' promoted across three. However, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland put more emphasis on the importance of school culture than England, and Scotland demonstrated a unique focus on the involvement of families and the community in supporting building core competencies. At the same time, the competency emphasis on compliant behaviour, social skills and self-esteem diminishes the responsibility of all members of the school, and community in building a positive and valued sense of identity as foundational SES upon which individual competencies can be built.

Table 2: National comparison of SES in the behaviour and discipline policy domain

		England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Behavioural competencies	Communication skills			x	x
	An ability to form positive relationships	x	x		
	Skills to prevent bullying	x*			
	'Good' behaviour	x*		x	x
	Comply with assigned work	x*			
	Respect for authority				x
	Ability to work co-operatively with others to resolve problems/conflict				x
	Social skills and sociability (including connectedness to others)	x	x	x	
	Self conduct/self-discipline	x*			x
Thinking competencies	Executive functioning skills	x			
	Planning skills	x			
	Reflective capacity	x			
Emotional competencies	Self-respect	x		x	
	Self-worth/esteem	x		x	x
	Self-control and emotion regulation skills	x*			x
	Belief in control	x			
	Resilience	x	x		
Morals-based	'Respect for others'	x			x

Note: Asterisk (*) represents those skills that derive from statutory policy documents.

England

Statutory behavioural policy

In England, guidance on behaviour and discipline is directed to headteachers and school staff (DfE 2016). This document lays out schools' statutory requirements to provide a behaviour policy which must include 'rewards and sanctions'. The guidance follows a mainly competency perspective that good behaviour can be taught and learned (p.6), and emphasises somewhat passive and compliant competencies.

Emotional competencies:

- Self-regulation
- Self-discipline

Behavioural competencies:

- Comply with assigned work
- Prevent bullying
- Good behaviour
- Self conduct

Morals perspective:

- Respect for others

Behavioural measures tailored for children with SEND and other special needs

While the guidance promotes consistent 'whole-school' behavioural policies for the majority of students, key vulnerable populations are identified for tailoring disciplinary interventions: '[schools] should…consider whether continuing disruptive behaviour might be the result of unmet educational or other needs… [whereby disciplinary measures] may vary according to the age of the pupils, and any other special circumstances that affect the pupil' (pp.7–8).

Non-statutory behavioural policy

Non-statutory guidance has been recently developed in England 'to help schools to support pupils whose mental health problems manifest themselves in behaviour' (DfE 2018a, p.3). While reinforcing the importance of a consistent whole-school approach for behavioural standards and consequence systems, this document elaborates on circumstances where an 'individualised graduated' response is required.

'Resilience' is achieved through mastering thinking, behavioural and emotional competencies

Resilience is understood as a general social and emotional skill to be achieved through mastering these competencies, which schools are to teach:

'Schools have a central role to play in enabling their pupils to be resilient and to support good mental health and wellbeing. It is important that schools promote good mental wellbeing for all pupils. Education about relationships, sex and health can be important vehicles through which schools can teach pupils about mental health and wellbeing.'

(DfE 2018a, p.4)

The key SES competencies seen to contribute to behavioural resilience in English policy are:

Thinking competencies:

- Executive functioning skills.
- Planning skills
- Reflective capacity

Behavioural competencies:

- Forming trusting relationships
- Social skills and sociability

Emotional competencies:

- Emotional management skills
- Belief in control
- Self-esteem

Scotland

In contrast to England, Scottish policy-making around SES in relation to behaviour and discipline places an emphasis on school culture in producing a sense of belonging and connectedness to others (Scottish Government 2018). There are not the same behavioural competencies (e.g. 'respect for authority') apparent in Scotland as was the case in England.

This approach to understanding the drivers of behaviour moves away from a focus on individual actions (and blame), responsibility and monitoring of own behaviour. The policy advocates that staff capacity, in terms of 'skills and resources' (Scottish Government 2018, p.2), needs to be improved to ensure that the kind of school and classroom climate put forward here is promoted and achieved. The Scottish Government considers there to be five priority actions necessary to ensure schools have the right kind of 'culture' (see Box 5).

Box 5: Action points to develop school cultures (Scottish Government 2018, pp.5–6)

- All local authorities and schools have a relationships and behaviour policy

- All local authorities and schools have a strategy or programme for providing professional learning to support the implementation of the policy

- A programme of professional learning and support is developed for support staff in schools

- Parents and carers are actively engaged in the development and implementation of policies and approaches to develop relationships and behaviour within a positive ethos and culture

- Children and young people will be given opportunities to participate actively in policy-making and approaches to develop relationships and behaviour within a positive ethos and culture

These actions are at the level of leadership within individual schools taking a school-wide approach. There is a belief in the importance of relationships and connectedness to others, 'being accepted, respected and bonded to the school environment' (Scottish Government 2018, p.3), resonating with the Scottish Government's wider *Curriculum for Excellence* policy:

'In order to create this environment for effective learning and teaching there should be a shared understanding of wellbeing underpinned by children's rights and a focus on positive relationships across the whole school community.'

(Scottish Government 2018, p.3)

In this sense, the policy-making in Scotland around behaviour is approached from an ethical values perspective (i.e. building all learners' identity within the school, region, nation, and respecting difference) as opposed to the individual responsibility (and blame) that is apparent in England.

Wales

Similar to Scotland, in Wales there is recognition of the importance of a school-wide approach to behavioural competencies, as evident in the 12 references to 'whole-school and holistic approach' across the policy guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010). The policy stipulates a focus on general behaviour management methods that can be employed for the whole student population. There is a dedicated sub-section on training for 'social-skills' understood as:

'A set of complex interpersonal behaviours associated with social behaviour and social competence.'

(Welsh Assembly Government 2010, p.101)

Here, there is a strong competency-based perspective that social-skills can be taught and learned in schools, where barriers to the achievement of social-skills are seen in individual terms; 'Maturity; exposure to [and] the understanding and importance the pupil places on these experiences' (p.101).

Accordingly, the guidance to build social-skills reflects a psychological understanding of behaviour change, where the young person must be supported to recognise their lack of social-skills is a problem, believe that they have the capacity to change, and the desire to make those changes (p.102).

Five strategies are identified to develop young people's social skills:

- 'Modelling' which involves, 'showing the desired behaviour being carried out and to then discuss' (p.102)

- 'Alternative coaching' where the coach works with the pupil, to identify issues and solutions to behavioural challenges

- 'Supporting the pupils' application of new skills/behaviours [whereby] the teacher provides feedback to enhance them' (p.106)

- 'Celebrating the pupil's success in achieving change' (p.106)

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland behaviour policy, SES are embedded within the school ethos and culture which is seen as a conduit for driving pupil behaviour; as 'policies designed to promote good behaviour are at the heart of building relationships in school and with the home' (p.6). In establishing this culture of good behaviour, the policy refers to specific skills which schools ought to be developing, including the promotion of 'self-discipline and respect for authority', 'good behaviour and respect for others', and the securing of 'an acceptable standard of behaviour among the pupils' (p.4), as well as other competencies (see Box 6).

Box 6: Behavioural competencies in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Executive 2001, p.13)

- Enhancing pupils' 'self-esteem'

- 'Self-respect and respect for others'

- Developing pupils' 'independence by accepting the need for self-discipline and self-control and taking responsibility for their own behaviour'

- Developing 'interpersonal skills and their ability to work co-operatively with others to resolve problems and potential or actual conflict'

When preparing a behaviour policy within school, the government policy document further suggests to articulate 'desirable and undesirable behaviour' (p.20), which signals the need for specific competencies and skills to be instilled. Suggestions are put forward for what might be commonly regarded as 'desirable' behaviour, which include competencies such as 'demonstrating a positive self-image', 'showing respect for the views, ideas and property of others', 'adhering to the accepted conventions of courtesy and good manners' amongst others (p.26).

It is for the school, in consultation with others, to develop their own behaviour policy tailored to the particular context. The policy document is largely concerned with helping schools to build what is considered the positive school culture required for promoting good behaviour (of which a behaviour policy is one element). In addition to the school environment, the policy makes consistent reference to the home, and parental attitudes towards behaviour, with reference to 'good' parenting and the instilling of appropriate behaviours at home.

Policy domain 3: Labour market preparation

Summary

This policy domain includes policy in the areas of careers guidance and strategy; lifelong learning and work; and employability education. The sorts of SES brought into play here are often those which are said to be privileged by employers, further and higher education institutions, as well as wider government thinking more generally about what constitutes a 'skilled workforce'.

In this area of policy-making, we see a strong orientation to competencies and moral values in developing SES. 'Teamwork skills' were the only SES common across all nations, while Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales all promoted 'creativity and innovation' and 'recognition for the relevance of their studies to their life and work' – underlining that England seems less attuned to the processes by which young people apply contextual knowledge to their learning pathways. Wales was unique in promoting identity building as a key aspect of SES here. The Gatsby Benchmarks underpinning England's approach are laudable in emphasising the importance of building social capital through community, and particularly local employer, involvement in 'raising aspirations'.

Table 3: National comparison of SES in the labour market preparation policy domain

		England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Behavioural competencies	Teamwork skills/working co-operatively	x*	x*	**x***	**x***
	Commitment	x*			
	Practical know how (confidence to compete in the labour market)	x*			
	Employability skills	x*			
	Interview skills	x*			
	Attentive listening and the ability to respond helpfully		x*		
	Skills to consider their own and other people's ideas		x*		
	Leadership skills			x*	
	Resilience		x*	x*	
	Communication skills		x*		x*
Thinking competencies	Occupational awareness (understanding of what work is available in the region)	x*	x*		
	Recognising need, opportunity and career planning capabilities			x*	x*
	Recruitment skills (how to get a job)	x*			
	Organisational skills		x*		
	Decision-making skills		x*		
	Goal setting, meeting roles and expectations		x*	x*	
	Entrepreneurial skills	**x***	x*		x*
	Critical thinking		x*		x*
	Problem solving		x*		
	Evaluating/taking risks			x*	
	Planning and organisation		x*		
	Creativity and innovation		x*	x*	x*

Table 3: National comparison of SES in the labour market preparation policy domain (continued)

		England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Emotional competencies	Personal effectiveness	x*			
	Self-awareness			x*	
	Confidence	x*			
Morals-based	High aspirations	x*			
	Broad horizons/open mindset	x*		**x***	
	Motivation	x*	x*	**x***	
	Attitudes and values required for employability		x*		
	Recognition for the relevance of their studies to their life and work		x*	**x***	**x***
	Sense of responsibility for work and adult life (including personal development)		x*		**x***
Thinking competencies	Honesty		x*		
	Reliability/trustworthiness		x*		
	Helpful and respectful attitudes to others		x*		
	Flexibility		x*	**x***	
	Willingness to work in a team		x*		
	Willingness to be innovative		x*		
	Self-discipline		x*		
	Perseverance/determination		x*	**x***	
	Readiness to overcome fear		x*		
	Readiness to go on learning/view learning as a lifelong process		x*		**x***
	Personal identity		**x***		
	Cultural identity		**x***		
	National identity		**x***		
	Expanding personal networks (social capital)	x*			
	Access to new/useful information	x*			

Note: Emboldened skills denote those that are embedded within the curriculum, and non-emboldened refer to stand-alone policies not embedded within the curriculum. Asterisk (*) represents those skills that derive from statutory policy documents, with no asterisk referring to those that are non-statutory.

Scotland

In Scotland, there is an implicit competency-based framing in the way that *Curriculum for Excellence* understands SES for labour market preparedness. It is about instilling within the individual the 'right' skill-set that is required to enable them to fit into the labour market and employment opportunities available. The policy goes as far as prescribing seven sets of skills, capabilities and aptitudes that are deemed necessary in modern labour markets (see Box 7).

Box 7: Skill-sets required by Scottish pupils for the 'modern labour market' (Scottish Government 2009, p.18)

- Recognising need and opportunity and influencing and negotiating with others to take ideas forward

- Evaluating risk to inform individual and collective decision making

- Taking the initiative, working with and leading others

- Being creative, flexible and resourceful with a positive attitude to change

- Self-awareness, optimism and having an open mindset

- Having a modern world view and showing resilience, adaptability and a determination to succeed

- Discussing, setting and meeting roles and expectations within a working environment

Many of these skills are tailored towards labour market functions, while others embody certain dispositions that are clearly value-laden. For example, 'influencing others' is premised on competition and individual success. Overall, the onus here is on individual responsibility in self-governing behaviour that relates to specific labour market goals of employment. It is the schools' role to facilitate access to these skills which are considered valuable commodities in accessing labour market opportunities and succeeding in careers.

Curriculum for Excellence Key Stage 4 makes clear the onus is on the individual to have the competency of evaluating their own educational performance and to formulate 'realistic' career plans around this. For example, schools are advised to think about:

'How can you design activities with young people and partners which will enable them to develop personal learning planning and career management skills?'

(Scottish Government 2009, p.14)

From an individualistic perspective on SES, the key thinking competencies to be developed here in Scotland are to critically asses one's own abilities, achievements etc., understand what careers may fit (and not fit) as well as produce a plan for how to achieve these career goals.

England

In the DfE's (2017) statutory *Careers Strategy* guidance for schools, the SES relevant to the labour market are seen from a competency and moral-values-based perspective, and as central to social mobility. While this policy is universal in its applicability for all young people, it is also targeted to key groups in line with other DfE policy:

- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Children with special educational needs and disabilities
- Children in need
- Looked after children
- Care leavers
- Girls

However, the barriers for vulnerable groups identified for targeted support are seen as due to a lack of specific competencies and values, as opposed to a consequence of material, economic or material barriers:

- Low confidence (emotional competency)
- Low aspirations (moral-values)

SES are identified as 'soft skills' or 'employability skills' and comprise:

Behavioural competencies:

- Teamwork skills
- Commitment

Moral-values:

- High aspirations
- Broad horizons

The DfE in England has also provided more detailed statutory guidance for school governing bodies, leaders and teachers which further reinforces a competency and moral-values-based approach to SES termed variously 'employability skills', 'life skills', and 'transitional skills' (DfE, 2018). Three references are made to the primary objective, which is to build in young people the knowledge and skills to achieve these skills, and include moral-values ('broad horizons', 'high/raised aspirations'), behavioural competencies ('practical know how'), emotional competencies ('confidence to compete in the labour market'), and thinking competencies ('entrepreneurial skills'). In order to build these skills, the guidance signposts the eight Gatsby Benchmarks[11] of good practice in schools' careers

guidance which schools are expected to meet by the end of 2020. Key activities schools are to provide involve creating 'meaningful encounters' defined as the 'opportunity to learn about what work is like or what it takes to be successful in the workplace' (p.8):

- An annual 'meaningful encounter' with an employer

- At least one experience of a workplace by age 16 and one further experience by age 18.

- One meaningful encounter with providers of the full range of learning opportunities by age 16

- At least two visits to universities for those interested in going on to study at higher education

- Guidance interviews with a careers advisor

In England, the emphasis on individual competencies is evident in the influential Careers and Enterprise Company (CES) that produced the Gatsby Benchmarks for schools' careers advice, and their 'Transition skills' document (The Careers and Enterprise Company 2017). The latter guidance is significant in defining the term 'transitional skills' which is signposted in the statutory schools guidance policy.

Transitional skills are broken down into five key areas. Three of these reflect competency-based skills:

Emotional competencies:

- Personal effectiveness.

- Confidence

Thinking competencies:

- Occupational awareness

- Recruitment skills (such as managing applications)

Behavioural competencies:

- Employability skills

- Interview skills

There are two SES that reflect a social capital understanding, reflective of the resources-based lens to SES:

- Expanding personal networks

- Access to new and useful information

There is only one skill that reflects a morals-based lens:

- Motivation to study harder

Northern Ireland

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, the policy domain of labour market preparation is entrenched with a view of SES as competencies to be developed in the individual. For example, *Learning for Life and Work* (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment 2007) lists competencies to be nurtured in the child, which include the behavioural, thinking and morals-based competencies of:

- How to learn and to think for themselves and to view learning as a lifelong process
- How to be creative, innovative and empathetic thinkers in their response to problems and how to utilise the full potential of information and communications technologies
- How to apply what they are learning to life and work-related situations for the common good
- How to take greater responsibility for their own personal development.
- Career planning
- Skills and qualities for work
- Enterprise and entrepreneurship

Later on, they continue with further competencies to develop:

- Managing information
- Critical thinking for problem solving
- Creativity
- Working with others
- Improving personal learning
- Communication

There is an overt emphasis on the need for these skills in order to develop Northern Ireland economically, set within the context of a global economy. Frequent mention is made of developing skills and aptitude for self-employment in young people, preparing them to be 'entrepreneurial'.

These are largely couched in terms of being self-directive in identifying the learning opportunities required to respond to labour market opportunities and challenges – being 'lifelong learners', actively identifying and seeking out learning opportunities which will position them well within the particular economic context they find themselves.

Wales

In Wales, while there is an evenly distributed emphasis on SES from a competency and moral-values perspective, there is also a recognition that part of schools' role is building their sense of identification with the community, thus reflecting also an identity perspective (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a). Recognition for the resources needed to build SES is nevertheless secondary to schools' role to build competencies. Of the nine objectives stated for this ambition, seven refer to SES:

Thinking-competencies:

- Organisational skills
- Decision-making skills in order to make effective career choices
- Goal setting
- Entrepreneurial skills

Moral-vales:

- The attitudes and values required for employability
- Recognition for the relevance of their studies to their life and work
- Sense of responsibility for work and adult life

And four subsidiary objectives:

Behavioural competencies:

- Working co-operatively
- Attentive listening and the ability to respond helpfully
- Skills to consider their own and other people's ideas
- Communication skills

These are subsumed into 13 key values, which they state cannot be taught, but can be 'fostered [through]…practical activities' (p.13):

- Honesty
- Reliability/trustworthiness
- Helpful and respectful attitudes to others
- Flexibility
- Awareness of others' needs
- Willingness to work in a team
- Willingness to take responsibility/the initiative
- Enthusiasm/self-motivation
- Willingness to be innovative
- Self-discipline
- Perseverance
- Readiness to overcome fear
- Readiness to go on learning

In the new *Curriculum for Wales 2022*, in terms of labour market preparation, it is clear that there is a competency perspective of the 'wider skills…integral to the curriculum and the design of the areas of learning and experience' (p.17). These primarily chime with a labour market preparation agenda and include:

Thinking competencies:

- Critical thinking

- Problem solving

- Planning and organisation

- Creativity and innovation

- Self-awareness

- Opportunity awareness

- Decision making

- Resilience

Behavioural competencies:

- Personal effectiveness

- Application

Morals-based:

- Motivation

A competency-based understanding of 'resilience'

Resilience is understood in Welsh policy as the 'ability to respond to the challenges that [young people] face, both now and in future' (p.15). This relates to 'Opportunities-awareness' which refers not to the schools' obligation to provide them, so much as the child's competency to perceive and respond to an opportunity when it arises, therefore a potential resource is reframed as an individual competency.

Policy domain 4: Educational inclusion

Summary

This policy domain refers to the obligations incumbent upon schools to meet the needs of children for whom, due to their personal abilities, health and characteristics present specific educational needs and requirements. This policy area has the least alignment between the home nations. While the competency perspective was still the dominant lens taken across all nations, with specific reference to Welsh and English policy, the educational inclusion (SEND) policy was noteworthy in its attendance to the resources needed to build key SES. This is indicative that inclusionary policies for target groups are frequently sources of inclusive practice for the whole student population.

Table 4: National comparison of SES in the educational inclusion policy domain

		England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Behavioural competencies	Speech and language skills				x*
	Social skills	x*			x*
	Learning difficulties				x*
	Motor or sensory ability			x*	x*
	Communication skills	x*	x*		
	Travel skills	x*			
Thinking competencies	Decision-making skills	x*			
	Able and talented pupils			x*	
	Expressing, comprehending and using language		x*		
	Memory and reasoning skills		x*		
	Organisational skills		x*		
	Problem-solving skills		x*		
Morals-based	Raised/high aspirations	x*			

Note: Emboldened skills denote those that are embedded within the curriculum. Asterisk (*) represents those skills that derive from statutory policy documents.

England

In England, the Departments of Education and Health (DfE/DoH 2015) outline the statutory duties for all public services with responsibility for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Three of the four broad categories of need for children with SEND involve SES:

- Communication and interaction

- Support for learning at a slower pace than peers.

- Social and emotional difficulties

SES is understood from a capital/identity perspective in emphasising the state provision of resources and opportunities in order to develop children's SES. The SES identified connect with those from other DfE policies and reflect a competency and morals-based approach. However, they are approached from a collective perspective where the onus is upon the schools' (and other state providers') role in assuring these skills and values are developed. SES highlighted are:

Competencies perspective:

- Communication skills

- Social skills

- Travel skills (confidence and competence to use public transport).

- Decision-making skills

Morals-based perspective:

- Raised aspirations

Overarching emphasis on 'raising aspirations'

Reflecting a morals-based perspective the development of high aspirations within young people are referred to multiple times across the policy and the focus of two whole sections (pp.79–80; pp.92–93). Aspiration building is identified as a key change in policy direction from the previous SEND Code 2001 (p.14).

Wales

The Welsh statutory SEND code of practice (Welsh Assembly Government 2004) is resource-based in its focus to ensure that such children have the provision necessary in order to maximise their chances for educational success. However, similar to England, the view of SES is framed primarily as an individual competency.

The four categories of 'need' mirror those specified in England, three of which implicate SES:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognition and learning
- Behaviour, emotional and social development

The areas are not described as expansively as within the English policy, however, the Welsh guidance does provide superseding guidance for how schools can support each category.

Overarching emphasis on 'communication skills' promoted through literacy support

'Communication skills' are understood from a competency perspective and identified as a universal problem for children with SEND. They require underpinning literacy skills 'in order to support [children's] thinking as well as their communication' (p.85).

English/Welsh language seen as a competence only, not pathway to identity-building

Unlike in the policy areas one and three, language capability is seen to be important for its individual value as a skill needed for academic learning only, and not for its social value in strengthening children's learner or social identity.

SES under the 'cognition and learning' category of need include:

- Memory and reasoning skills
- Sequencing and organisation skills
- Problem-solving skills

Scotland

A broad-based understanding of special educational needs is adopted in Scotland, with the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 listing a wide range of situations where young people may require additional support in their learning at school (Scottish Government 2017). It is framed around the particular needs that arise from a diversity of situations encountered by the general population, not narrowly framed towards a particular target group or population in 'need' as is the case in other home nations. Scottish policy-making considers that an equally wide range of situations give rise to these additional learning needs, beyond disability and health and include:

- 'Family circumstances' (including issues around poverty and disadvantage)
- 'Social and emotional factors' (brought on by bullying, adverse childhood experiences) (pp.23–24)

It is emphasised how 'a need for additional support does not imply that a child or young person lacks abilities, skills or strengths' giving the example of those who may lack English language skills, and deaf children, who will likely have multiple other skills and abilities (for example, those who may lack English skills are likely to speak and understand many other languages).

Some children, young people and families will find terms such as dyslexia or autism spectrum disorder useful in helping them explain and understand any difficulties being experienced. Others may experience such terms as limiting and stigmatising. Generally, children and young people are keen to be seen as being no different to their peers. Throughout, the requirement should be to view children and young people as individuals and to tailor support, positively and sensitively, to their individual needs and circumstances, considering all aspects of wellbeing. In this sense, Scottish policy-making is framed from a capital and identities perspective.

Repeated throughout the policy is that all children who have any assessed additional needs will have these met within existing school structures and curricula provision. In addressing these additional learning needs, Scotland's universalising approach gives emphasis to existing curricula provision and structures of support, and relies in particular on provision within *Curriculum for Excellence* (discussed above) as well as the *Getting it Right for Every Child* approach.

Northern Ireland

Embedded within Northern Ireland policy-making on SEND are SES necessary for children to develop, succeed in education and in their future transitions. There are eight physical, social and emotional difficulties described, which include:

- Learning difficulties

- Specific learning difficulties (for example, dyslexia)

- Emotional and behavioural difficulties

- Physical disabilities

- Sensory impairment: hearing difficulties

- Sensory impairment: visual difficulties

- Speech and language difficulties

- Medical conditions

(Department of Education, Northern Ireland Executive 1998, pp.69–86)

The difficulties experienced by children refer to both their educational and non-educational needs – and so acknowledgement is made of how physical difficulties (such as those listed above) are linked to the building of SES. Under each of these areas, the physical, social and emotional difficulties (or deficiencies) are defined with detail on how they may be assessed and what action schools need to take to address them. Learning difficulties describe children who have:

'Difficulty acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills and many will have significant speech and language difficulties. Some may also have poor social skills and may show signs of emotional and behavioural difficulties.'

(p. 69)

Literacy and numeracy skills are highlighted as a problematic area for those with specific learning difficulties (for example, dyslexia) which can lead to emotional and behavioural difficulties if such deficiencies cause frustration for the children exhibiting them.

Like Scotland, in addressing the social and emotional needs of children, policy-making in Northern Ireland seeks to promote inclusive school cultures which ensure all children have equal access to the curriculum and learning opportunities (Department of Education, Northern Ireland Executive 2005, p.41). In this sense, there is some alignment with the account taken of the social conditions of learning, and the importance of addressing inequalities in the availability of resources across school populations.

3 Interpretations of policy by schools

🔐 Key points

- Schools in all the home nations appeared to frame SES from an individual competencies perspective, privileging capacities to develop in children such as resilience, self-regulation and interaction with others.

- Schools across the UK reported awareness of a broad range of SES policies, spanning the multiple policy domains highlighted in chapter 2 (e.g. pastoral, behaviour and discipline, educational inclusion).

- While there is generally a strong awareness of SES policy across the UK, teachers surveyed in England reported the least awareness of policy.

- Compared to other jurisdictions, English schools were also much less likely to report that they used the policies they are subject to and that they found them helpful in developing their school-based provision.

- It is likely that the new curricula frameworks of Wales and Scotland are proving helpful in guiding teachers in these jurisdictions, while a large number of disparate English policies could be causing a lack of clarity in England.

- Across the UK, schools' reported interpretations of where SES should be developed reflect the complex and holistic nature of SES: across all parts of the school day as well as outside of school.

Introduction

Chapter 2 provided analysis of the major policies addressing SES across the four nations. This chapter moves on to consider from the perspective of schools themselves the nature of policy-making in their nation, including their awareness of policies, which policies they draw on, and the usefulness of such policies. Our analysis draws largely on data from the national survey, but also makes use of data from the qualitative interviews with school staff. The chapter begins by examining what teachers said about their understandings of SES, drawing on our qualitative data.

Teacher understandings of SES in government policy

Across all of the home nations, the teachers and headteachers we spoke to identified a similar range of SES they believe policy within their jurisdiction requires them to deliver. More often than not, their framing of these SES were from a competency-based understanding, privileging the development of individual capacities in the individual to cope with everyday realities of life, both in terms of their current school life but also as future adults.

'…in terms of SES, it's psychological development of the young person, but also their mental health obviously, but also their physical fitness and all of those things, their ability to interact with other young people and with older people, and I suppose it really is it's all tied up in an idea of, you know, positive mental health and mental health development.'

Headteacher, Northern Ireland

'And for the future, how they are, how schools can make sure that our children are socially and emotionally well in order to function day to day and make them better adults for the future.'

Teacher, Wales

'I think they see it as the development of pupils' specific emotions that they face on a day-to-day basis both in a school context or outside. And then the social interactions that they're having with each other, adults, in their home life and their school life.'

Teacher, Scotland

'And then it's about teaching the skills of self-regulation, recognising that they feel like that, and then understanding how they break themselves down and not always looking for a solution from somebody else. That you are the solution internally. Therefore you need to give them the skills to find the solution and therefore manage it.'

Teacher, England

This individual 'functioning' and ability to cope with life involved social and emotional skill-building in a number of areas, with teachers highlighting examples such as: emotional wellbeing, health, resilience, mental wellbeing, decision making, independence, thinking skills, processing information to enable effective choices. Teachers were all encompassing; describing SES as the full range of non-academic outcomes (albeit largely within an individualised competency framing). Two of the most common SES mentioned by every teacher were resilience and interaction with others. Resilience in particular was spoken about extensively, with teachers often referring to this in the context of children's mental health problems, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem/confidence. In the context of an interview, it was not realistic for a teacher to be able to recite the full range of SES we identified in our policy analysis (see chapter 2). However, based on our interview data, it would not be unreasonable to assume that they would recognise many of the individual competencies identified in chapter 2 as SES. Beyond the individual benefits these capacities bring, teachers in Wales and Northern Ireland also recognised the wider societal benefits building SES brings to addressing poverty and deprivation in Wales and historical community conflict in Northern Ireland.

The only instance where anything beyond individual competencies was alluded to came from Wales, were SES was also thought to include notions of belonging, citizenship and identity building – in line with the new *Curriculum for Wales 2022* (see chapter 2). The teacher recognised this as a new development and departure from traditional notions of what constitutes SES:

'So certainly there's lots about citizenship that perhaps hasn't been there before about their social, their need to socially relate to others …. So what does it mean to be belonging? What does it mean to belong? … And I talk a lot about what harmony is. And that means we're all singing the same song but not necessarily the same part. So that you can be an individual within the context of a whole and I think children are particularly waylaid by their online life and I think we have a responsibility to talk about their life outside of that, now more than ever, really what it means to be their own person.'

Headteacher, Wales

Awareness of policy addressing SES

The national survey collected information from schools about their awareness of policies that address SES. Figure 2 illustrates teachers' reported awareness about current policies which address young people's SES. The horizontal axis outlines the four levels of agreement respondents were asked to rate; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses.

Figure 2: Teachers' response to the statement: 'I am aware of current policies about young people's social and emotional skills'
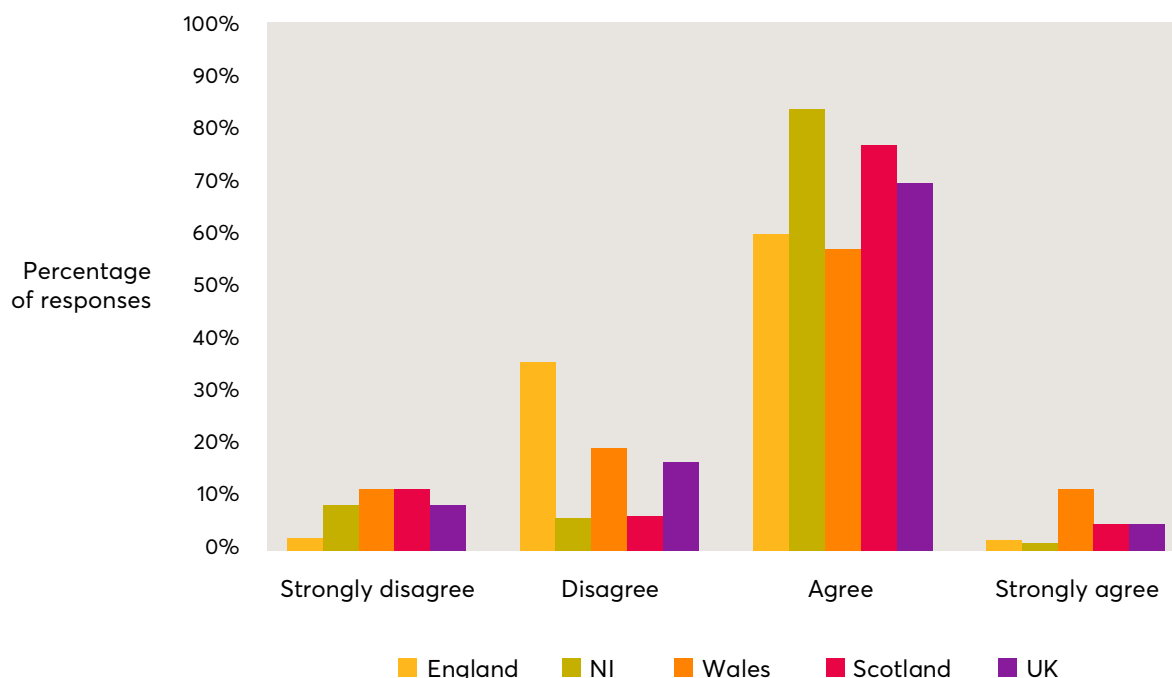
School staff across all four nations of the UK reported a generally high level of awareness of current policies (70% 'agreed'). However, a 5% 'strongly agree' UK-wide rating may be indicative that more work is required for schools to become highly confident about their knowledge on SES policies. While schools in Northern Ireland (83% 'agree') and Scotland (77% 'agree') showed greater reported levels of awareness, England (35% 'disagree') reported the least awareness.

Wales was more mixed in the awareness of policies, with some strong awareness (11% 'strongly agree', 57% 'agree') but also some sizeable gaps in awareness evident (19% 'disagree', 11% 'strongly disagree'). As shown in chapter 2, Wales has only very recently developed its new curriculum which incorporates SES. The fact that such a major policy shift has only recently been made could account for less reported awareness of policy-making in Wales, and it may be that in time, awareness of this new curricula increases.

In addition to their general awareness of policies, respondents were also asked to be more specific and 'name all the government policies about SES you are aware of'. This was an open-ended question, and the survey did not name any policies or prompt respondents towards particular sets of policies in any way. The results were tallied by frequency each time a policy was mentioned. Tables 5–8 below show the responses, per home nation, with at least three mentions per policy (or policy description). Despite teachers generally reporting confidence in their awareness of policy (see Figure 1), there are notable omissions when asked for specifics (e.g. in England, only two teachers mentioned the flagship *Character Education* policy – see chapter 2). This could be indicative of gaps in knowledge caused by the plethora of policies now in circulation or could reflect teachers understanding SES in different ways.

Table 5: Policies named by schools in England

Policy name	Frequency
Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)	17
Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)	15
SEND Code of Practice	14
PSHE Policy/Guidelines/Curriculum	9
Education, Relationships, and Sex Education (RSE)	8
Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools	6
Mental Health and Wellbeing Provision in Schools	5
Promoting Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing	4
Every Child Matters	3
Safeguarding	3
SES and their Long-Term Effects	3

Table 6: Policies named by schools in Northern Ireland

Policy name	Frequency
Education, Relationships, and Sex Education (RSE)	11
Child Protection and Safeguarding	10
Anti-bullying Policy	9
Pastoral Care	8
iMatter	8
Department of Education Northern Ireland	5
Every School a Good School	4
SEN Legislation	4

Table 7: Policies named by schools in Wales

Policy name	Frequency
New *Curriculum for Wales* (2017–21 and 2022–onwards)	12
Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Schools	9
PSE Framework for Wales	7
Prevent: Keeping Learners Safe	5
Thinking Positively	5
Wellbeing of Future Generations Act	5
ACE Agenda and Trauma Informed Practices	5
Successful Futures: Donaldson Report	4
Getting it Right: a UNCRC Action Plan for Wales	3
New Additional Learning Needs	3

Table 8: Policies named by schools in Scotland

Policy name	Frequency
Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)	26
Curriculum for Excellence	10
National Improvement Framework (NIF)	9
Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour	6
Included, Engaged and Involved	5
Health and Wellbeing	4
Scottish Government Ten Year Health and Wellbeing Agenda	4
Children and Young People's Act	4
Mental Health Strategy	4

This data can be interpreted in a range of ways. Firstly, the breadth of policies reflects the complexity of what 'SES' are, and what schools consider them to be. Safeguarding, PSHE, mental health, wellbeing, for instance, are broad domains which can overlap but do not necessarily have to. Secondly, the range of policies cited could imply a lack of clarity or cohesion, whereby different home nations and different schools take a different approach to SES development. This is not necessarily a criticism – there is an argument that a bottom-up approach may be more beneficial than a top-down one – yet, if this is the case, it is useful knowledge for policy-makers who may want to take a UK-wide approach.

Turning to the qualitative data, a range of factors could account for English schools' lack of awareness of policies found here (more than double the UK score of 16% 'disagree'). All of the teachers we spoke to across all four home nations reported an awareness and knowledge of policy within their nation, but Scotland and Wales appeared to have a more

immediate, stronger sense of what are the 'go-to' policies. This is likely to be owing to the fact that Scotland and Wales (most recently) have developed large-scale holistic cross-curricula programmes, which embed SES within them. When asked about policy, teachers in England and Northern Ireland did not immediately refer to any policies in the same way as teachers in Wales and Scotland.

Interviewer: '…what is your awareness and perception of government policy, then?'

Teacher: 'It was minimal. I mean, I knew of it and it – because some of it was – some of the things I was looking at were… seemed a bit dated. So I just thought, well, I'll just double check if there's anything new out there. I didn't feel there's any current or new policy under present circumstances. I don't know whether that is the case. But I certainly couldn't readily find things. I even went back on the government website…'

'…And because we've been doing a lot of social emotional stuff for a very, very long time. I think we just, not purposely, we don't always think what it is you are supposed to be doing if there's a statutory thing, or what's the government guidelines, because we have been doing it for well over ten years now. It's just embedded in our practice, but that doesn't mean it's the best practice. It's just what we've always done.'

Teacher, England

Later, the same teacher reflected on the enormous amount of materials that exist in England SES policy and guidance.

'…but the thing is that you get so many documents don't you… that you kind of, you've just got to focus on the ones that are important to you. Otherwise, you could spend your whole day just reading documents. So you've got to kind of focus on what's important at the time I guess.'

Teacher, England

At the same time, this same teacher was also unaware of the English *Character Education* policy (see chapter 2), despite this being a flagship policy advocated by the UK Government. It could be that the proliferation of documents, policies, and materials overwhelms teachers in England and negatively impacts on their ability to comprehend exactly what English government policy precisely advocates. This could lead English teachers to 'dip in' to the vast array of documents which exist when needed, as reflected on by this English teacher. It is not to say that the teachers in England and Northern Ireland were completely unaware of policies – indeed they mentioned a host of different policies – but rather there was no single holistic guiding framework they flagged.

This contrasts with a noticeably stronger sense of policy in Wales and Scotland as reflected in the wider survey data reported above, and also supported by the qualitative data (from the five teachers we spoke to in Wales and Scotland). In Wales, when asked about their understanding of current government policy, each of the four teachers we spoke to immediately responded by referring to the new statutory *Curriculum for Wales 2022* (see chapter 2). This was the single policy which sprung to mind, and was discussed extensively by teachers, signalling its dominance in their minds as the guiding policy for SES in Wales. Given this is part of the statutory wider curricular policy, it is perhaps unsurprising such strong awareness exists here. In talking about the policy, there was a strong sense that it was a step-change and innovation in how SES is delivered in the Welsh context. There was a feeling that Wales was embarking on a radically different approach in their adoption of a cross-curricula programme which embeds social and emotional learning across curricula areas.

'The four core purposes of what we want to achieve in the new curriculum there's a lot around the subject of health and wellbeing, which perhaps hasn't had the priority or that's what everybody says, has not had the priority when it was a very results driven curriculum up until now. And they seemed to be in contradiction to each other. Whereas now you know, I think, and I hope in Wales, we've realised that if you haven't got a healthy, confident individual, then you're not going to get any sort of learning taking place.'

Headteacher, Wales

The four teachers we spoke to in Wales had a very strong awareness and in-depth knowledge of the new curriculum, as would be expected given it is the statutory over-arching framework covering all aspects of learning, with social and emotional aspects one of the cross-cutting agendas. It is possible that the Welsh teachers we spoke to were those that recorded 'strongly agree' in the survey; however as noted above, it is important to highlight that their perceptions are not shared by all teachers, with 30% reporting much less awareness (see Figure 2).

This clarity was also evident from the teacher we spoke to in Scotland, who reported a very clear sense of 'go-to' policy that addresses the question of SES building.

'...we have eight wellbeing indicators that are taken into consideration across all so there's a health and wellbeing policy, that's the responsibility of all staff and within that there is specific benchmark criteria, that's an expectation of a school to embed across the curriculum we also have eight wellbeing indicators, SHANARRI, I don't know if you've seen that before so it's safe; healthy; active; nurtured; achieving; responsible; respected, and within those components we are developing the individual pupils across the board, the core mental SES.'

Teacher, Scotland

The fact that this teacher was able to cite the specific wellbeing indicators – SHANARRI – which is part of the Scottish *Getting it Right for Every Child* policy (also named by 26 of the survey respondents – see table 8 above) is indicative of strong awareness on the 'go-to' policy on SES in Scotland. In England, on the other hand, there was not the same sense of coherence around 'go-to' policies schools must deliver.

'I think the government policies, if they came out with a statutory thing, that would be different. It doesn't feel that it's statutory it feels like *"this is a good idea. We'll leave it to you to decide what you want to do"*.'

Teacher, England

This point made here about the statutory and non-statutory elements of education policy may lie at the heart of differences between schools' reported awareness of policy-making across the home nations. The new statutory curricula in Scotland and Wales place a strong emphasis on SES, and it could be that incorporating SES into statutory curricula is a more effective policy approach.

Effectiveness of policy at informing practice

➡ Implications for policy and practice

Policy-makers, providers and schools should note the breadth of reported awareness across each home nation regarding SES policy (however, this may not entirely reflect reality, given the lack of specific policies mentioned – it could be that teachers are unaware of gaps in their knowledge on policy). In the area of SES, schools regard a wide range of issues as relevant – including mental health, sex education and behaviour/discipline – which is important to consider when framing interventions to target the building of SES.

There are notable differences between the nations in their reported awareness of policies. Overall, it is noteworthy that Scotland displays the strongest reported awareness, and England the lowest, which may be connected to the nature of policy-making across the two nations. Scotland has developed an over-arching curricular framework with SES at the heart, whereas SES in England reflects a more disparate set of policies.

Figure 3: Number of policies schools use to inform their practice (from the policies they are aware of)
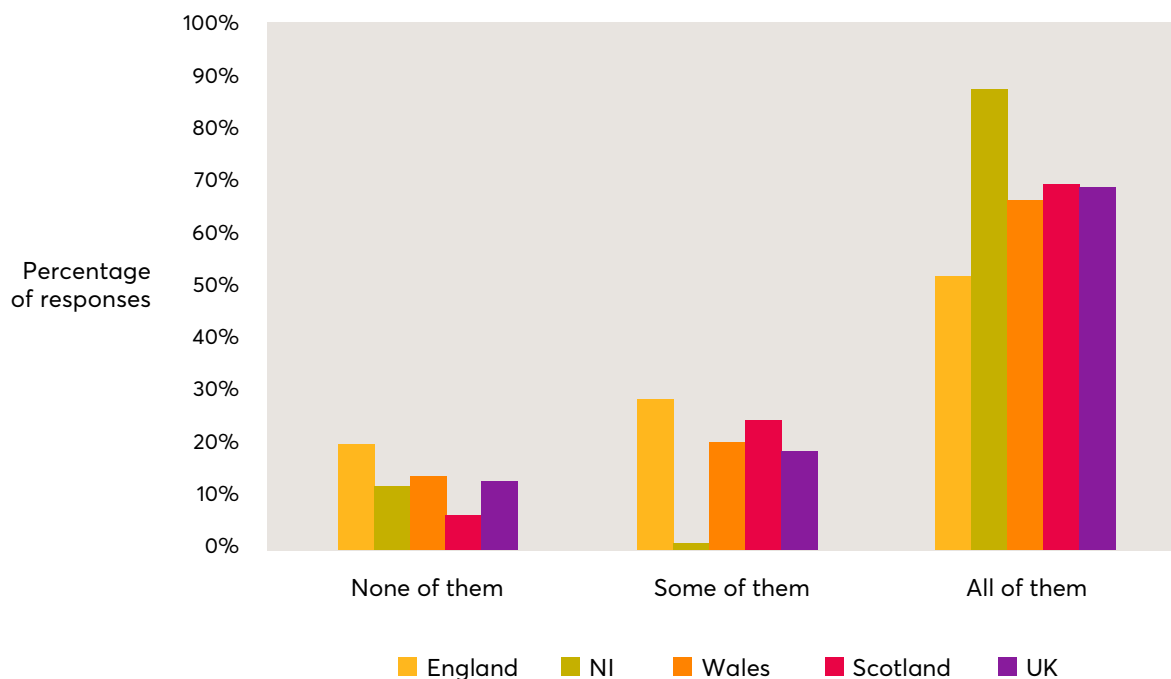
Drawing on what schools indicated as their awareness of SES policies, Figure 3 illustrates how many policies they reported actually using. The horizontal axis displays the number of policies schools reported making use of ('none of them', 'some of them', 'all of them'); the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. The UK-wide column indicates almost 70% of schools reported using all the policies they were aware of, which could be encouraging given Figure 2 showed 70% of schools felt they were aware about existing policies on SES. Combined with the proportion of schools indicating they made use of 'some of them', this means that the vast majority (89%) of schools across the UK say they are making use of policies related to SES. Schools in Northern Ireland reported implementing most policies they were aware of (85% 'all of them'), while England reported implementing the fewest (just over 50% 'all of them'). Additionally, England and Wales were above the UK-wide average in both using 'none of [the policies]' (20% vs UK-wide 13%) and 'some of [the policies]' (28% vs UK-wide 18%).

There are a range of factors which could account for this discrepancy between English schools and those in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. As noted above, teachers we spoke to in Scotland and Wales reported a strong awareness of their new statutory curricula; as an over-arching curricula policy it was embedded in their daily practice in a more structured way. In England, in line with overall quantitative trends, one of the teachers we spoke to appeared less aware of policies compared to teachers in other home nations, and also felt almost overwhelmed by the large number of disparate (and often non-statutory) policies that exist in their jurisdiction. It could be that England has 'policy overload' and the lack of a single coherent over-arching statutory policy is hampering policy implementation. Given the time constraints teachers face, it is not surprising that such a large number of disparate policies may not quite 'hit the ground' in English schools.

Figure 4: How helpful are Government policies in enabling you to develop effective activities aimed at improving SES?
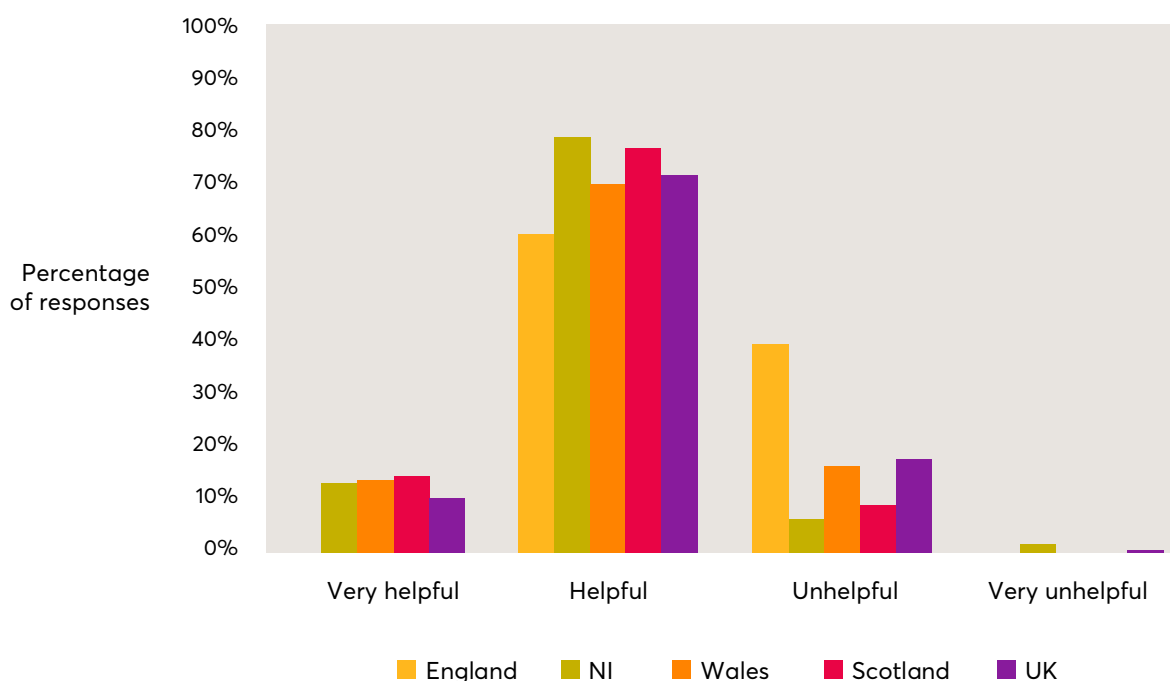
Examining the use of policies further, Figure 4 illustrates the extent to which teachers felt Government policies were useful to help develop effective SES interventions. The horizontal axis outlines the four levels of 'helpfulness' respondents were asked to rate; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. The general UK-wide trend suggested government policies were on the whole perceived to be of positive value in developing effective practices aimed at improving SES (70% 'helpful', 10% 'very helpful'). Across the home nations, English schools reported the lowest levels of perceived usefulness

(60% perceived SES policies to be helpful). This is also reflected in how English schools felt government policies were 'unhelpful' (39% vs UK-wide average 17%). There are two possible interpretations of why English schools felt government policies were unhelpful. The first is the policies may not be fit for purpose, which may also explain why English schools reported the highest responses of using 'none' or 'some' policies as shown above (see Figure 3). A second explanation may be a by-product of English schools reporting less awareness of existing SES policies (see Figure 2), therefore rating policies as unhelpful because of their general lack of awareness.

The qualitative data sheds further light on the kinds of policies which schools find useful in helping them to deliver practices around SES, as well as why English schools may not find policy in their jurisdiction as helpful. In the case of Northern Ireland, it seemed that the Education Authority was valued by the headteacher we spoke to in translating national government policy into practicable resources for schools:

'But I think that that's mainly where our information comes from, from the EA [Education Authority] so the Education Authority rather than necessarily DENI [Department of Education Northern Ireland] produce the document and then EA carry out the training and whatever else in relation to it. And there's been quite a bit of stuff recently about managing critical incidents. Now unfortunately, my head of pastoral care was due to go on that in May so that's obviously all been cancelled, but there was good stuff around that and there was actually a good training around trauma-informed leadership and anti-bullying this year as well all coming from EA. I know, EA has been, you know, proactive in those areas and in particular, in the last couple of years.'

Headteacher, Northern Ireland

The Education Authority exists in Northern Ireland as a regional non-departmental public body with responsibility for the delivery and provision of education and youth services. While these intermediary bodies exist in other parts of the UK, it could be that it is proving especially useful to schools in Northern Ireland. For example, in Wales, one headteacher suggested that there was confusion between the different government and non-government bodies that work with schools:

'So you've got your authority, you've got your consortium and then you've got Welsh Government, and all three of them …. are throwing stuff out and it's not consistent with maybe what the consortium are saying. Or the Welsh Government.'

Headteacher, Wales

In Scotland, the positive perceptions of government policy could be attributed to the statutory *Curriculum for Excellence* policy. As shown earlier, the teacher we spoke to in Scotland had embedded the eight wellbeing indicators directly into their school practice, stretching right across subject areas of the curriculum as intended by the *Curriculum for Excellence* policy. It seemed that this teacher valued having this holistic framework to follow with its specific articulation of social and emotional wellbeing. Teachers appeared to value clear statutory policies which provide specific details on exactly what needs to be covered. For example, in England, in referring to the new statutory guidelines on relationships and sex education, one teacher said:

'It depends on what the documents are… like the statutory one, you know, it's helpful in that we know what we've got to deliver because actually, when I took on this role last year, that wasn't what we had. There were lots of different [policies]… there was like the PSHE policy and then yes, so I guess that one has been useful in just knowing what we need to deliver. And also, from a kind of, from a senior leader point of view, say that this has to be covered, because I should imagine in a lot of schools it's an area that possibly, you know, was kind of a bit of an add on and a bit of, *"Oh, we've got to deliver this"* whereas now that you can kind of speak to the staff and say, *"this is now statutory guidelines, we have to deliver this"*. So whether you kind of like it or not you know, we are doing it as a school and being as supportive as possible. So that's a guide, I think that's a policy that should have been ages ago because students need to be taught these things. So that's been useful about that one.'

Teacher, England

It may be that the statutory nature of the guidelines is helpful in providing clarity to schools and teachers about what must be delivered in the building of SES. At the same time, another teacher in England pointed out that while it is important to have policy that is specific, it must also provide some degree of flexibility.

'I think it's difficult because it depends on what the guidance is for… is it that this is what you should be doing, is it *"oh have you thought about doing this"*. It's so wiffly-waffly sometimes. You look up on the internet and you get so many different things it's like well which one should I be really move towards and it's finding what fits for you as a school a bit like with SEAL [social and emotional aspects of learning] we felt like it fitted our school so we moved with that. If the government said, the policy said, *"every child needs to have this, this and this, they must follow that programme"* then you would do it but I don't think that's the right thing either. It's a difficult one because you want policy, but you also don't want policy. You want the freedom to do what you want really.'

Teacher, England

We can see here how teachers may value policies which are specific in what should be delivered; although SEAL is a programme, not a policy per se, this teacher found it helpful and translated its specific components into their school practice. The teacher didn't appreciate what he referred to as 'wiffly waffly' guidance on SES, but preferred specific examples of what SES are and how they can be practically applied within school. Likewise, we saw how the teachers in Scotland and Wales spoke of how they were able to translate the specific components of what counts as social and emotional wellbeing from their curricula into tangible school practices. Another teacher in England reflected on the need for guidance which provides practical strategies:

'And other ones I think policies that maybe not necessarily policies, but guidance that gives you strategies so I'm thinking about the anxiety related non-attendance (ARNA) one that gives you kind of strategies of how to support students how to support parents, how to support your staff. So I think practical ideas, because you can read all the research that you want and all the information but ultimately, you're like, *"right, how, how can I use this information to support all people?"*. So if you've got strategies and resources, that can be used pretty much straightaway.'

Teacher, England

It could be that the large number of policies which have proliferated in England over the past decade is causing ambiguity, incoherence and a lack of clarity in the minds of those working in schools. Given the lack of time teachers have available to read and research policy texts, it may be more helpful to have single coherent policies which act as central points of reference and that provide transferable examples for school practice.

➡ Implications for policy and practice

It is encouraging that teachers in Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland reported SES policies as helpful to develop such skills. Teachers appear to value specific but flexible policies, which provide some direction in defining and enacting SES, but also allow for flexibility in how they are interpreted and enacted by schools on the ground. Those with responsibility for SES also seemed to value statutory policies because they provide definitive clarity on what should be delivered, allowing for a more comprehensive and consistent delivery. In this respect, the kind of holistic statutory curricular policies developed by Wales and Scotland seem effective in providing guiding principles to direct school practices.

School spaces for the enactment of SES policy

Figure 5: Schools' perceptions about where policies suggest SES should be developed
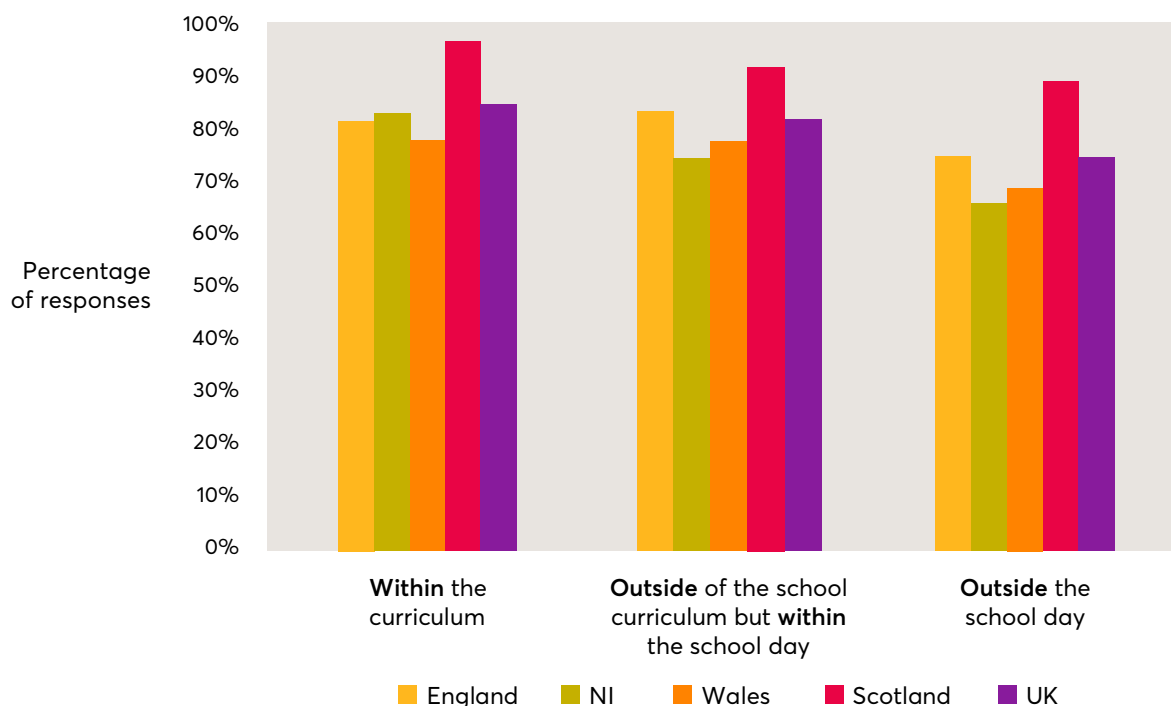
Note: Respondents could tick all that applied.

Delving more deeply into schools' understandings of policy within their jurisdiction, we also asked their views about where policies suggest SES should be implemented. The horizontal axis of Figure 5 outlines the three possible 'spaces' where SES could develop; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. The UK-wide results broadly indicate schools felt policies encouraged fostering SES across all three 'spaces': within the curriculum (85%), outside the curriculum but within the school day (82%), and outside the school day (75%). The consistent distribution of these responses – none of the three 'spaces' is overtly more or less relevant – reflects the complexity and breadth of SES development in the academic literature: these skills should be fostered throughout young

people's lives (Barry, Clarke and Dowling 2017;[12] Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley and Weissberg 2017[13]). When comparing the data by home nation, Scotland consistently scored above average in each of the three 'spaces': 97% 'within the curriculum' (vs 85% UK-wide); 92% 'outside the curriculum but within the school day' (vs 82% UK-wide); and 89% 'outside the school day' (vs UK-wide 75%). Given the reported strong awareness and perceived helpfulness of SES policy in Scotland, the fact that it is more widespread across school spaces could indicate schools in Scotland prioritise this non-academic aspect of young people's development to a greater extent than other nations. The other three home nations were roughly in line with the UK-wide average across all three 'spaces'.

➡️ Implications for policy and practice

It is encouraging that schools reported general agreement of policies having a broad remit in terms of where SES should be developed.

In accordance with the academic literature, which suggests SES should be developed in all parts of young people's lives, policies should continue to promote the holistic nature of these skills.

For providers who develop programmes and activities, it is important to note that schools perceive policy as advocating the importance of all spaces of children's lives in developing SES (inside and outside school). It may be worthwhile to develop programmes which reflect this broad remit.

4 Enactment of policy: School provision, relationships with providers and the role of evidence

🔑 Key points

- Schools across the UK overwhelmingly reported preference for a 'whole-school approach' towards SES development.

- Differences exist between home nations in the spaces used to implement activities: schools in Scotland reported favouring activities within the curriculum; schools in Wales both outside the curriculum, but within the school day and outside the school day; schools in England and Northern Ireland reported a preference for activities to take place outside the curriculum, but within the school day.

- Schools reported the most effective SES activities to be social and emotional learning programmes, mentoring programmes, behaviour interventions, careers and employability programmes, and, to an extent, sport participation activities.

- Schools across the UK reported a preference for either designing SES activities themselves or developing them alongside a partner. They reported limited appetite to entrust the activities entirely to external providers.

- The main sources of information reported by schools to develop activities were personal experience, suggestions from peers, and the local authority. Additionally, schools overwhelmingly felt they could access all the information they needed, when they needed it.

- Schools in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland reported strong confidence in how to measure the impact of SES activities. This perceived confidence could be considered surprising given the challenges associated with measuring SES. England was the outlier by indicating a lack of awareness about how to measure impact.

- The key barrier to measuring the impact of activities was a lack of time.

- Schools primarily measure impact through teacher observations and feedback, as well as student self-report surveys.

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the enactment of policy within schools in terms of the ways in which they develop and deliver their provision. First, we outline what approaches schools reported adopting to implement activities. Secondly, we explore what activities schools indicated they use to promote SES, including what activities schools considered to be effective. Thirdly, we unpack what sources of information and evidence schools reported they rely on to develop their activities, and finally we examine how schools measure the impact of their SES activities.

School spaces and approaches for the enactment of SES policy

This section explores what school spaces (Figure 6) and school approaches (Figure 7) were reported to be used by schools to implement SES activities.

Figure 6: The places where schools reported developing SES
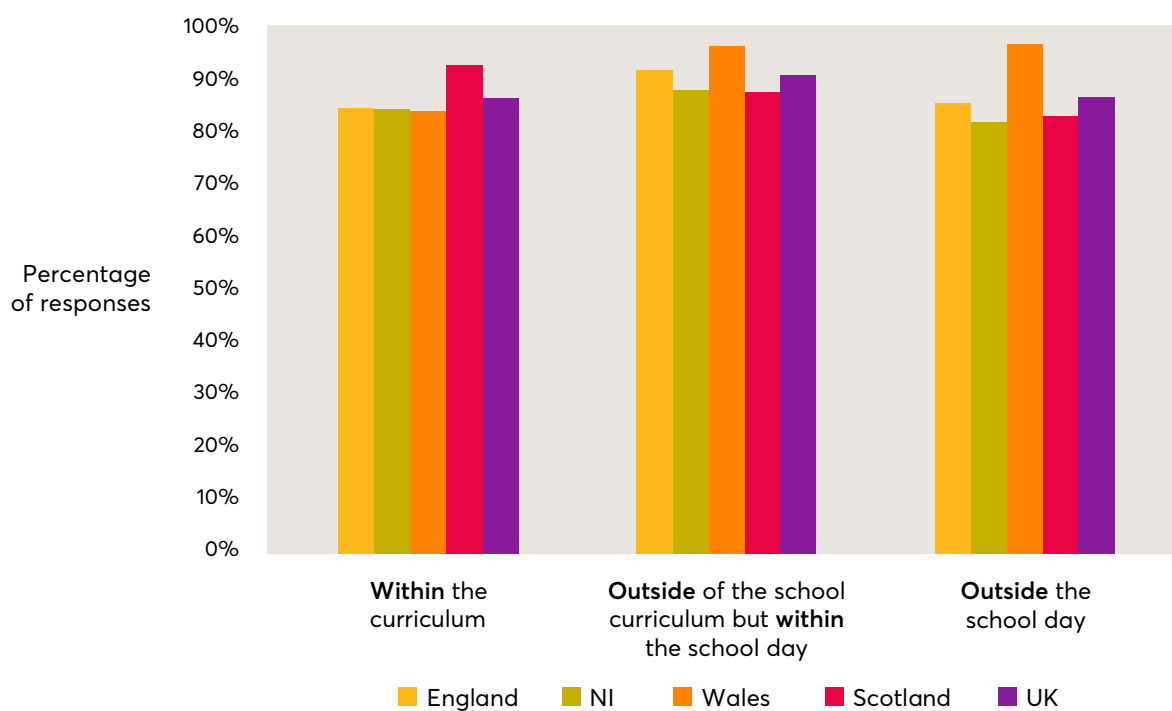
Figure 6 illustrates where the development of SES is reported to occur in schools. The horizontal axis outlines the three possible 'spaces' where SES develop; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. The UK-wide trend shows that all three 'spaces' are perceived by teachers to be equally important sites of SES development given the

UK averages are 85%, 90% and 86%. This holistic approach to SES development echoes what was reported in Figure 5, where schools interpreted SES policies should be enacted across all three 'spaces'.

While the home nations are broadly aligned on this issue, teachers surveyed in Scotland placed the most emphasis on developing skills within the curriculum (92%) and the least outside the school day (82%). This is likely to be accounted for by the Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence*, which has the emphasis placed on embedding SES within the curriculum. Welsh teachers reported the privileging of skills development outside the school curriculum but within the school day (95%) and outside the school day (96%), instead of within the curriculum (83%) – but it could be that in the years to come, Wales too will begin to embed skills within the curriculum given its more recent curriculum shift like Scotland. Lastly, England and Northern Ireland shared similar patterns: schools in both home nations reported skill development outside of the school curriculum but within the school day (91% England; 87% NI) over development within the curriculum (84% for both home nations) and outside the school day (85% England; 81% NI).

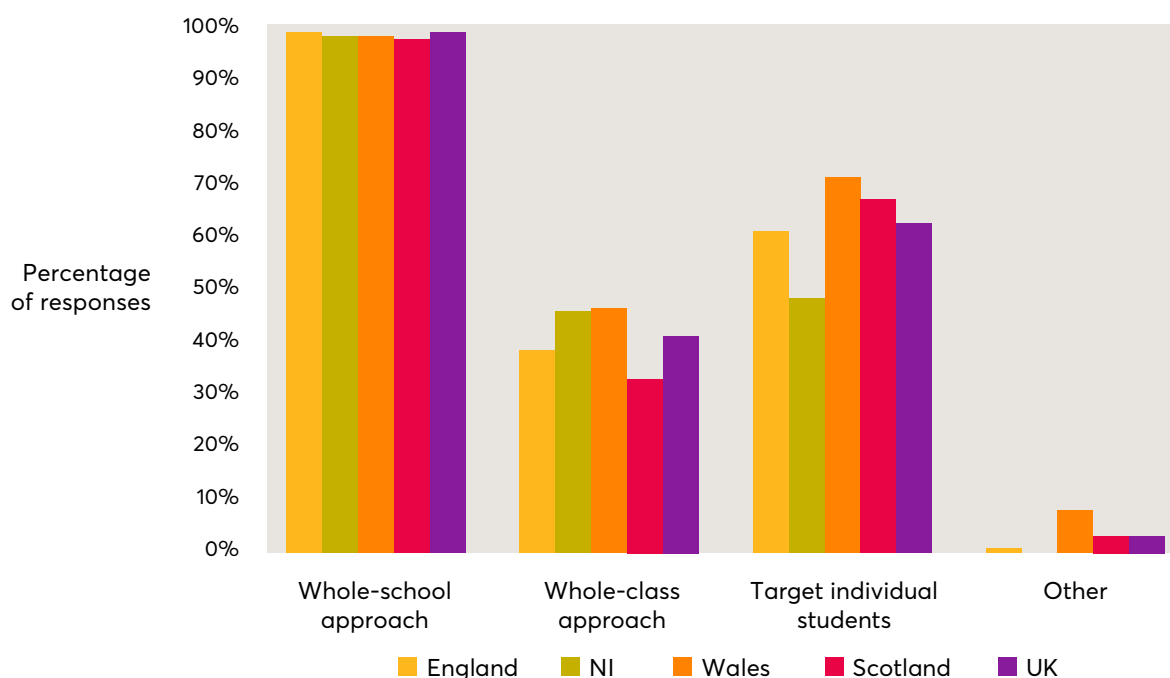**Figure 7: The approaches schools said they took to promoting SES**

Figure 7 displays the approach schools reported taking to promoting SES. The horizontal axis outlines the possible 'approaches'; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. Schools across the UK reported a focus on a 'whole-school approach' (98%) towards the promotion of SES development. The other two approaches – 'target individual students' (UK 62%) and 'whole-class approach' (UK 41%) were not as prevalent, yet they illustrate approaches which can complement the 'whole-school approach'. Teachers in Wales reported targeting individual students the most (71%), closely followed by Scotland (67%) and England (61%). The 'whole-class approach' category was led by both Wales (46%) and Northern Ireland (45%), closely followed by England (38%). What this data continues to suggest is the holistic nature of SES development. Teachers across the UK felt that policies on SES encourage promoting activities within the curriculum, within the school day, and outside the school (Figure 5). Figure 6 subsequently showed how schools follow this policy interpretation by reporting they develop SES across all three 'spaces'. This, by definition, requires a 'whole-school approach': combining the different structures and actors in schools that work within the curriculum, outside the curriculum but within the school day, and outside of the school day.

➡ Implications for policy and practice

Schools in the four countries reported that they promote SES development in different spaces. Scottish schools reported activities are delivered within the curriculum whilst Welsh schools said activities occur both outside the school day and outside of the curriculum, but within the school day (though this will likely change as the new Welsh curriculum becomes embedded). Schools in Northern Ireland and England reported that activities take place outside of the school curriculum, but within the school day. Understanding the effectiveness of developing SES policy and provision across each of these spaces can help policy-makers and providers target those most suitable for each nation, meeting the needs of schools.

Schools across the UK report predominantly taking a 'whole-school approach' to SES development, largely complemented by targeting individual students. Therefore, schools are likely to be more receptive to policies and providers that frame SES activities in this holistic way.

Activities used to develop SES

The data in this section focuses on what activities schools reported using to develop SES (Figure 8), what activities are reported as effective in developing those skills (Figure 9), and what spaces are said to be used to implement activities (Figure 10, Figure 11, Figure 12). Finally, we examine who is reported to design the SES activities: schools themselves (Figure 13), external providers (Figure 14), or a combination of both (Figure 15).

Figure 8: The activities schools reportedly use to develop students' SES
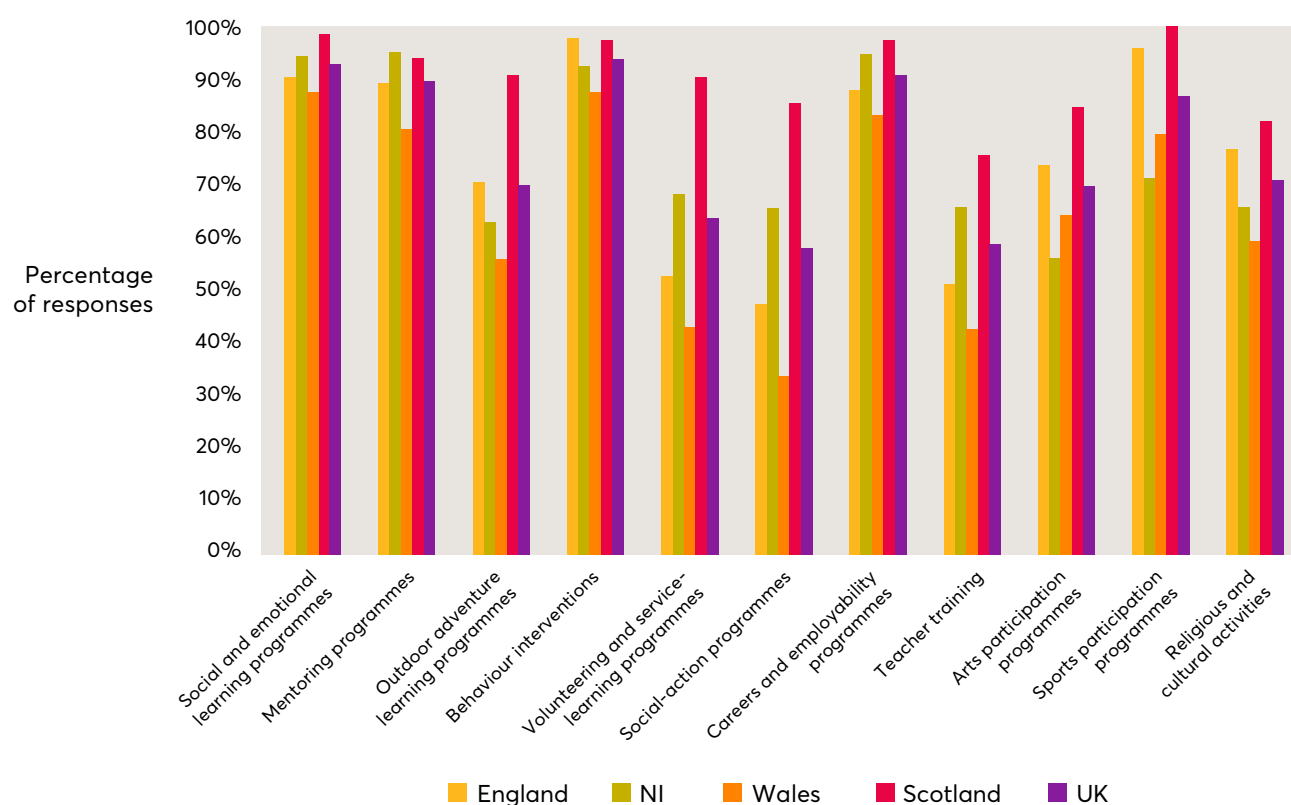
Figure 8 illustrates what activities schools reported as providing to develop SES. The horizontal axis outlines eleven possible activities; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. Across the UK, the most frequently used activities reported to be used were 'behaviour interventions'[14] (93%), 'social and emotional learning programmes'[15] (92%), 'careers and employability programmes' (90%), 'mentoring programmes' (89%), and 'sport participation programmes' (86%). Teachers reported the least-used activities as 'social action programmes'[16] (58%) and 'teacher training'[17] (58%). Examining the differences between home nations, English schools reported a high usage of 'behaviour interventions' (97%), 'sport participation programmes' (95%) and 'social and emotional learning programmes' (90%). Similarly, Scottish schools reported using 'sport participation programmes' (100%), 'social and emotional learning programmes' (98%), and both

'behaviour interventions' and 'careers and employability programmes' (both 97%) the most. Northern Ireland and Wales showed similar patterns; schools in both nations reported less emphasis on sport than England and Scotland, but still frequently drew on 'social and emotional learning programmes' (94% NI; 87% Wales). Additionally, a high proportion of schools in Northern Ireland and Wales said they provided 'careers and employability programmes' (94% NI; 83% Wales), 'mentoring programmes' (95% NI; 80% Wales), and 'behaviour interventions' (92% NI; 87% Wales).

A further noteworthy pattern is how prevalent SES activities were reported to be in Scotland relative to the other three home nations. The activities provided in Scottish schools were reported as being above the UK-average in every single activity category. Wales was the only home nation whose provision of activities was reported as being below the UK-average for all categories. Schools in England and Northern Ireland reported a mixed pattern, perhaps suggesting they pool their resources on specific activities more than the other two home nations.

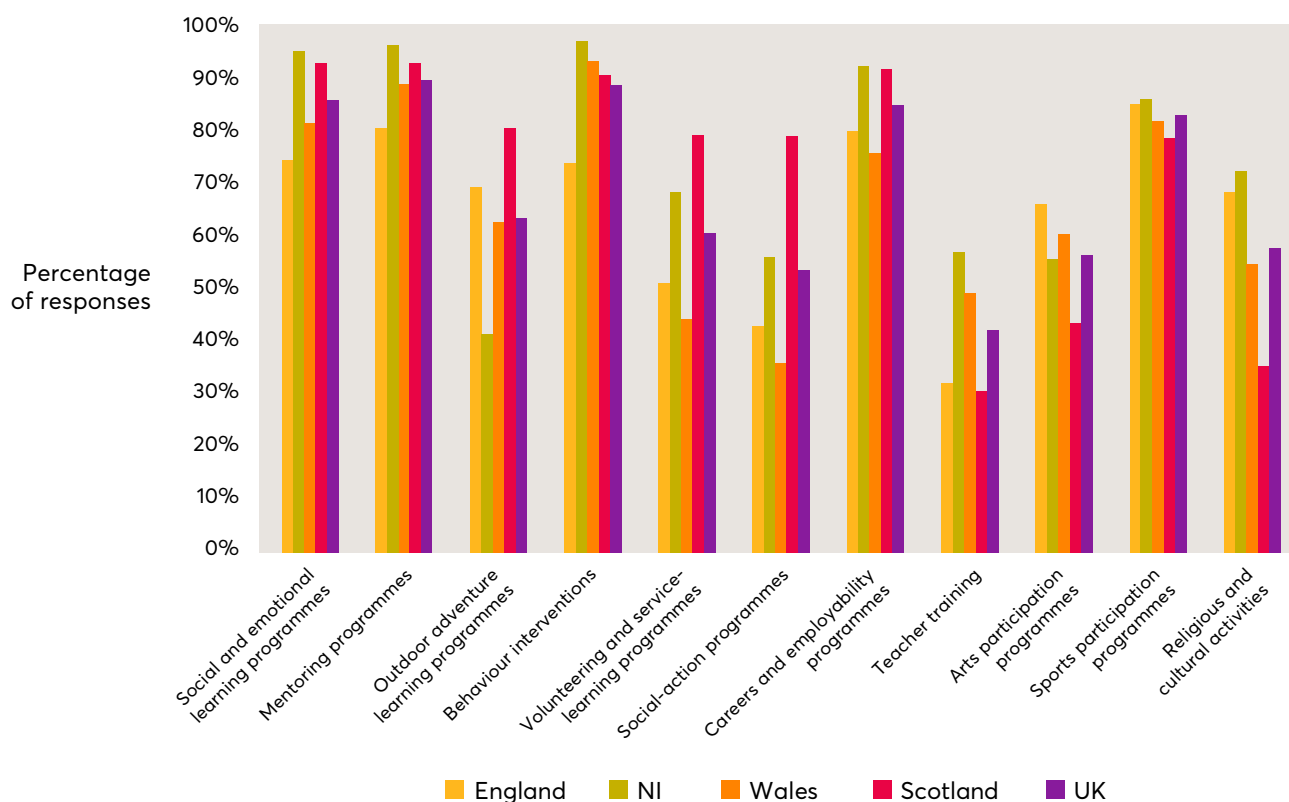**Figure 9: Activities the participating schools considered to be 'effective' in promoting SES**

Figure 9 illustrates what activities schools reported as being effective in promoting SES development. The horizontal axis outlines the possible activities; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses.

Across the UK, the most effective activities were considered to be 'mentoring programmes' (89%), 'behaviour interventions' (88%), 'social and emotional learning programmes' (85%), and 'careers and employability programmes' (84%).[18] Teachers perceived the least effective activities to be 'teacher training' (41%) and 'social action programmes' (53%). These patterns are in line with the actual activities schools say they use.

Examining the differences between home nations, schools in Northern Ireland – in line with the UK-wide averages – felt the most effective activities to develop SES were 'behaviour interventions' (96%), 'mentoring programmes' (95%), 'social and emotional learning programmes' (94%) and 'careers employability programmes' (91%). Welsh teachers echoed what teachers reported in Northern Ireland – deeming 'behaviour interventions (92%), 'mentoring programmes' (88%), and 'social and emotional learning programmes' (81%) as valuable, as well as also considering 'sport participation programmes' (81%) effective. Scotland followed the UK-wide patterns too, with teachers reporting that they felt 'social and emotional learning programmes' (92%), 'mentoring programmes' (92%), 'careers and employability programmes' (91%) and 'behaviour interventions' (90%) were the most effective activities. Lastly, English schools also shared the broad UK pattern, albeit with lower response rates for their highest frequency categories: 'sport participation programmes' (84%) were considered by teachers to be the most effective, followed by 'mentoring programmes' (80%), 'careers and employability programmes (79%), and both 'social and emotional learning programmes' and 'behaviour interventions' (73% each).

In general, as might be expected, perceptions about the effectiveness of activities largely map onto actual use of activities: schools across the UK, regardless of home nation, reported implementing the SES activities they felt were effective: 'social and emotional learning programmes', 'mentoring programmes', 'behaviour interventions', 'careers and employability programmes', and, to an extent, 'sport participation activities'. Equally, the activities considered by teachers surveyed here to be least effective were the two which were less frequently implemented: 'teacher training' and 'social action programmes'.

We now turn to where teachers reported activities took place within their schools, in terms of: 1) within the curriculum, 2) outside of the curriculum but within the school day, and 3) outside the school day. Figures 10–12 identify which of the previously listed activities in Figure 8 and Figure 9 are reported to be used across these different school spaces.
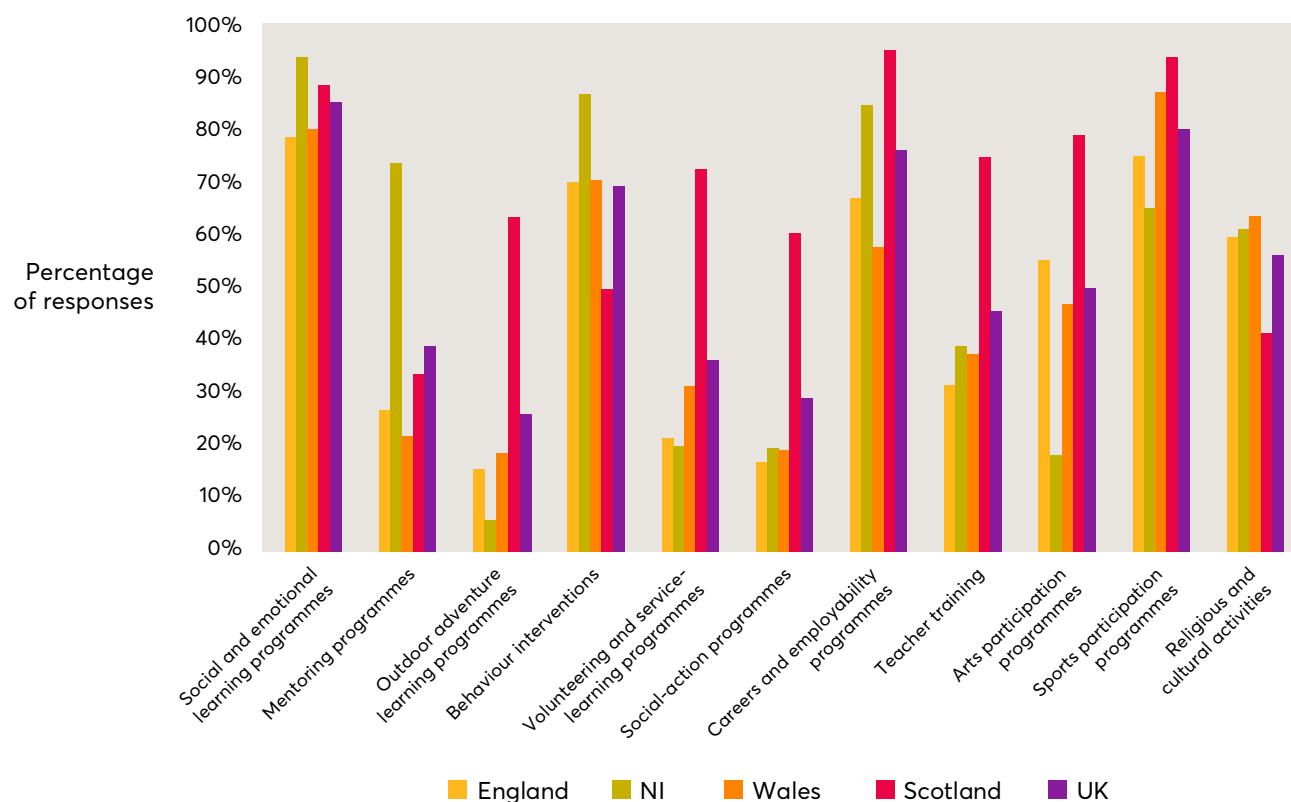
Figure 10: The types of activities which schools said take place within the curriculum

Figure 10 illustrates what SES activities teachers reported using within the curriculum. The UK-wide averages indicate 'social and emotional learning programmes' (85%), 'sport participation programmes' (80%), 'careers and employability programmes' (76%) and 'behaviour interventions' (69%) were the activities which schools reported using the most within the curriculum. As expected, the least used within the curriculum were reported as 'social action programmes' (29%) and 'outdoor adventure learning programmes' (25%).

However, comparing home nations, there is more inconsistency here. Scottish school teachers reported embedding social and emotional activities the most in their curriculum when compared to the other three home nations, given their scores usually exceeded the UK-average score, particularly in relation to activities which teachers reported less frequently in England, Wales and Northern Ireland: 'outdoor adventure learning programmes', 'volunteering and service-learning programmes', 'socialisation programmes', 'teacher training', and 'arts participation programmes'. This finding is in line with Figure 6, whereby Scottish schools reported focussing their SES development within the curriculum. An interesting outlier is the prevalence of mentoring programmes reported by teachers within the curriculum in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, this was mentioned by nearly twice the number of teachers (73%) compared to the UK-average (39%).

Figure 11: The types of activities which schools said take place outside the curriculum but within the school day
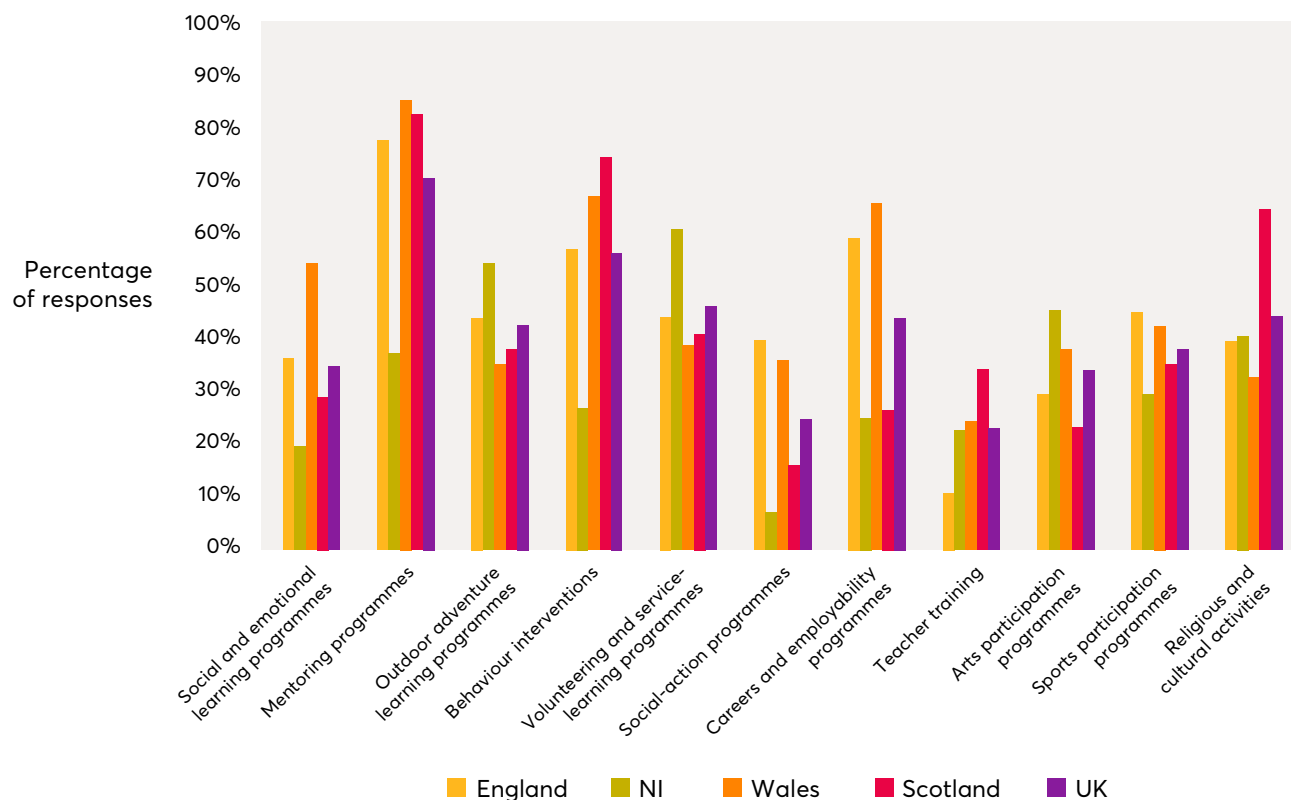

Figure 11 illustrates what teachers reported as the SES activities which take place outside of the school curriculum, but within the school day. The UK-wide data indicates 'mentoring programmes' (70%), 'behaviour interventions' (56%), 'volunteering and service-learning programmes' (46%) and 'religious and cultural activities' (44%) occurred most frequently outside the curriculum but within the school day. The least occurring activities reported by teachers here were 'teacher training' (23%) and 'social action programmes' (24%). Comparing the data amongst home nations, to some extent, the results here reflect the responses from Figure 6: Welsh and English schools reported implementing SES activities to a greater degree 'outside of the school curriculum but within the school day' than they did 'within the curriculum'. While English and Welsh scores were largely below the UK-wide average for each activity category in Figure 10 ('within the curriculum'), in Figure 11 they more frequently exceeded or matched the UK-average. Equally, Scotland's reported emphasis on activities within the curriculum is reflected in more subdued responses here. The data for Northern Ireland is mixed and reflects the results from Figure 6: NI teachers reported placing roughly similar emphasis on SES 'within the curriculum' and 'outside the curriculum, but within the school day'.

Figure 12: The types of activities which schools said take place outside the school day
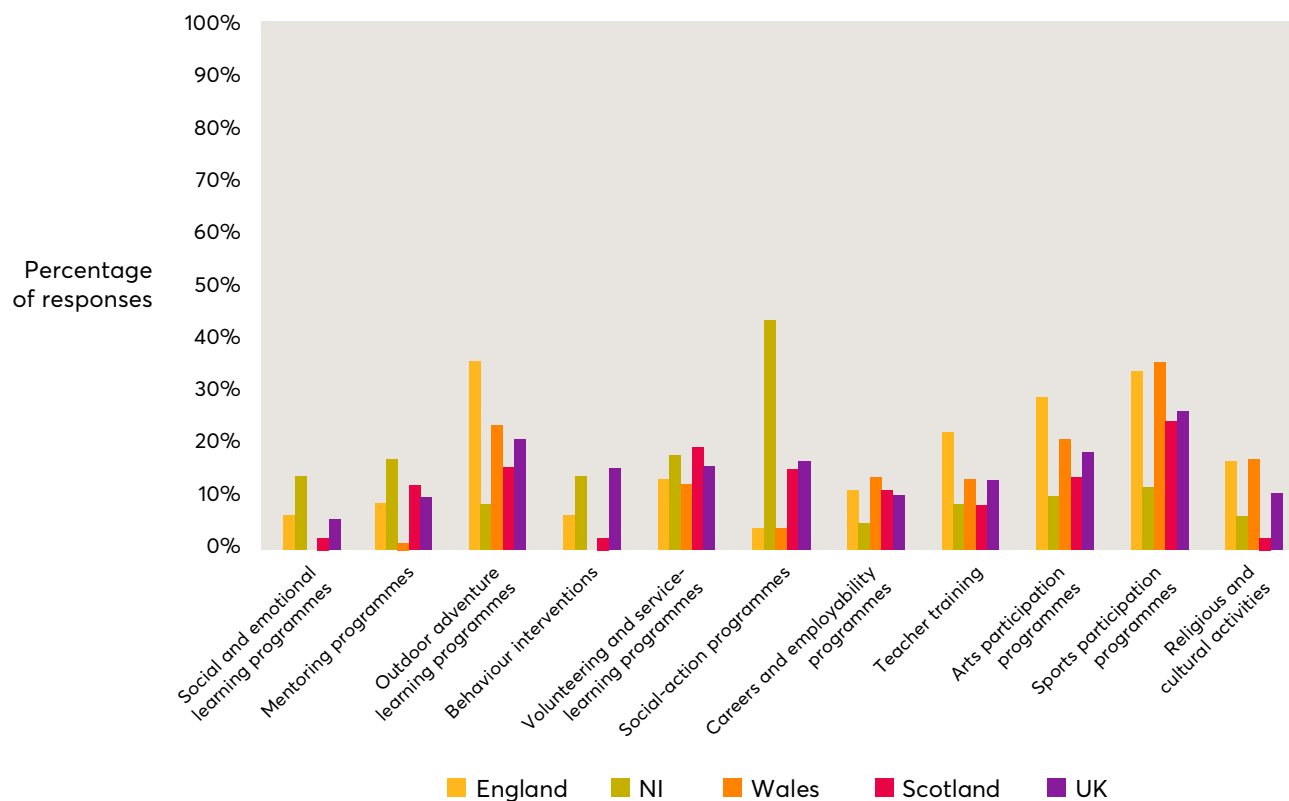

Figure 12 illustrates what SES activities were reported by teachers to take place outside the school day. As would be expected, the UK-wide data shows teachers reported 'sport participation programmes' (25%), 'outdoor adventure learning programmes' (20%), 'arts participation programmes' (17%) and 'social action programmes' (16%) as taking place most frequently 'outside of the school day'. The least occurring activities here were reported by teachers as 'social and emotional learning programmes' (5%) and 'mentoring programmes' (9%). The percentage of responses across the four nations is clearly lower for all activities which develop SES activities outside of the school day, which points towards a pattern whereby most activities occur 'within the curriculum', followed by 'outside the curriculum, but within the school day' according to the surveyed teachers. Unpicking the data across home nations, there is no clear pattern apparent here. Figure 6 suggested English, and especially Welsh, schools implemented SES activities outside the school day, however, both home nations only exceed UK-means per category in a few instances (such as 'outdoor adventure learning programmes', 'arts participation programmes', 'sport participation programmes', and 'religious and cultural activities'). In line with the findings from Figure 6, school teachers in Scotland (and especially Northern Ireland) reported deploying the least SES activities outside of the school day.

In terms of delivering activities, the qualitative data also revealed some important insights into barriers experienced by schools. A key set of barriers raised by nearly all teachers was around the attitudes, approaches and capabilities of some classroom teachers (e.g. form tutors often tasked with delivering programmes of activities), especially older teachers who were not always comfortable talking about social/emotional issues. A teacher in Wales referred to 'old school attitudes' which some teachers held, wherein they believe pupils should 'just get over' any issues they are facing. Another teacher in Wales reflected that:

'A lot of people find it difficult to talk about and have those conversations and then worry about what's going to come back at them, what kinds of questions are going to come back at them, if they're posing they're something alongside consent or sexual consent.'

Teacher, Wales

Similarly, a headteacher in Northern Ireland said:

Headteacher: 'You get some form teachers who are very willing to do things and you get others who much more hesitant and are saying *"well, you know, that's not for me"*.'

Interviewer: 'Right, that's not for me in terms of what?'

Headteacher:'In terms of talking to the kids about feelings and their own lives and I suppose sharing… there are some staff who are more comfortable in sharing who they are because children get a lot out of that.'

Headteacher, Northern Ireland

A teacher in England talked about the difficulties of some staff lacking SES themselves, which makes being a role model to pupils difficult. In Scotland, a teacher similarly suggested that it was not just the attitude of staff, but also a question of staff professional development, with a need to train staff in new sets of skills:

'I think [the] mindset of staff – and also professional learning of staff, we're always looking to upskill the team that work around the children and that comes from the teachers and certainly some of the programmes of work that have specifics to them like growth mindset or resilience, staff might not have an awareness of that so you're providing a body of work to the pupils and expecting that to be embedded throughout the school community but you're also having to train your staff.'

Teacher, Scotland

In England, a teacher mentioned that the younger staff who had more recently completed their PGCE qualification were more knowledgeable and 'braver' to talk about these kinds of issues with young people. It is noticeable that this issue of staff professional development and attitudes was prevalent across all four home nations. A further set of

issues raised by teachers was around curriculum pressures and the prioritisation of SES in school time, with staff often not having the time to prepare adequately for the activities. The issue of cost was also raised, although this was not connected to any particular home nation, but rather an issue that perhaps faced particular schools across all countries. One school in England raised the fact that their budget deficit means they are restricted in what they can spend on this area because they would need to spend the same amount for multiple cohorts for reasons of parity. The headteacher in Northern Ireland commented that their budget does not allow for large sums of money to be spent on activities, and they often give donations to providers or rely on free programmes instead.

Our data also reveal important insights into who teachers reported as designing the activities which schools use to promote SES. Survey respondents were asked to identify whether the school itself (Figure 13), an external provider (Figure 14) or a combination of both (Figure 15) were responsible for designing the activities.

Figure 13: Activities reported as being designed by the schools themselves
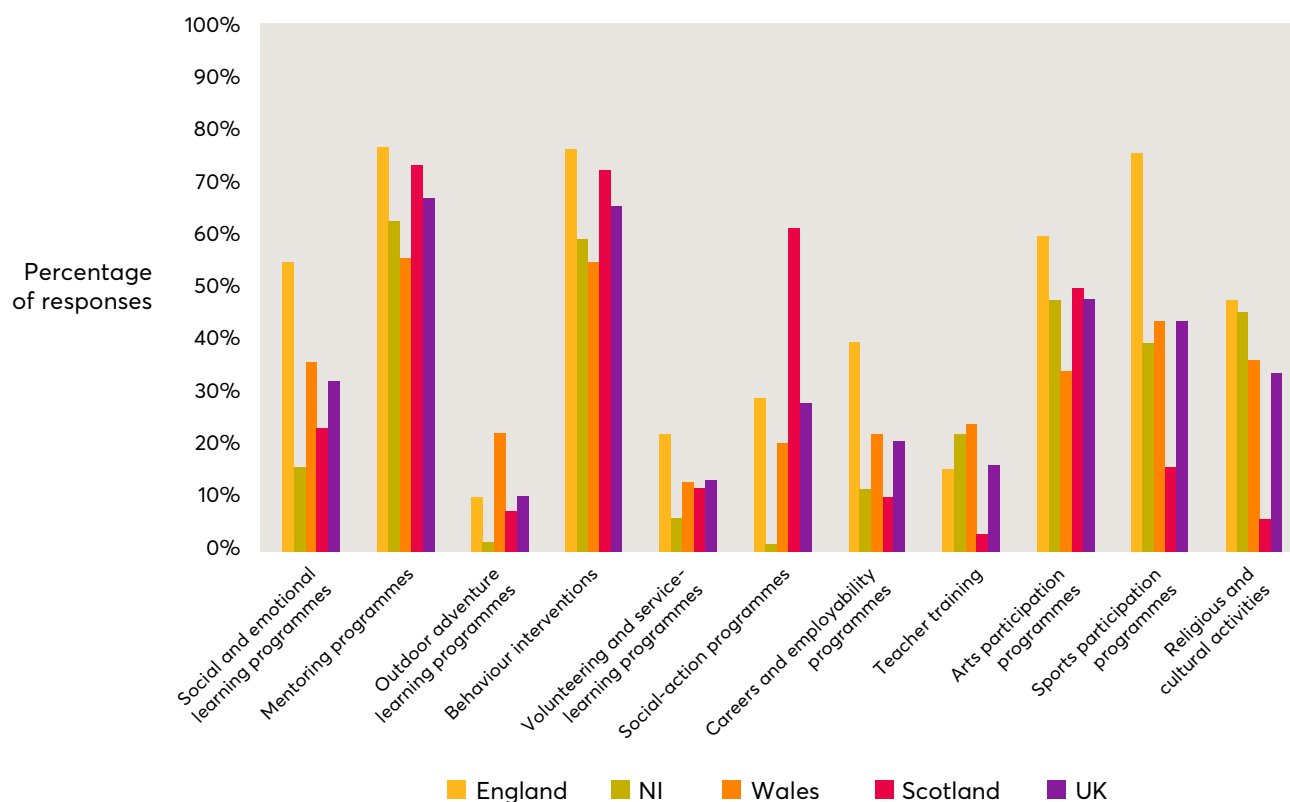

Figure 13 shows which SES activities are reported by teachers to have been developed by the school itself. The horizontal axis outlines the possible activities; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. The UK-wide data indicates 'mentoring programmes' (66%), 'behaviour interventions' (65%), 'arts participation programmes' (47%) and 'sport participation programmes' (43%) were reported as predominantly developed

by schools themselves. The activities said to be least developed by schools were 'outdoor adventure learning programmes' (10%) and 'volunteering and service-learning programmes' (13%).

There are some key distinctions to note between home nations here. Comparing across home nations, Scotland teachers more often reported designing 'mentoring programmes' (72%) and 'behaviour intervention programmes' (71%), compared with those in Wales (55% and 54%, respectively), Northern Ireland (62% and 58%, respectively) and England (76% in both instances). Interesting outliers (relative to the UK-means for each activity category) include English schools who reported more frequently designing their own 'social and emotional learning programmes' (54% vs UK-wide 32%) and 'sport participation programmes' (75% vs UK-wide 43%). Sport participation, as a way of developing SES, has been a frequent pattern in English schools. The final interesting outlier involves Scottish schools shaping their own 'social action programmes' (61% vs UK-wide 28%). This could be connected to why Scottish schools felt 'social action programmes' are an effective means of developing SES (as seen in Figure 9) relative to the other three home nations.

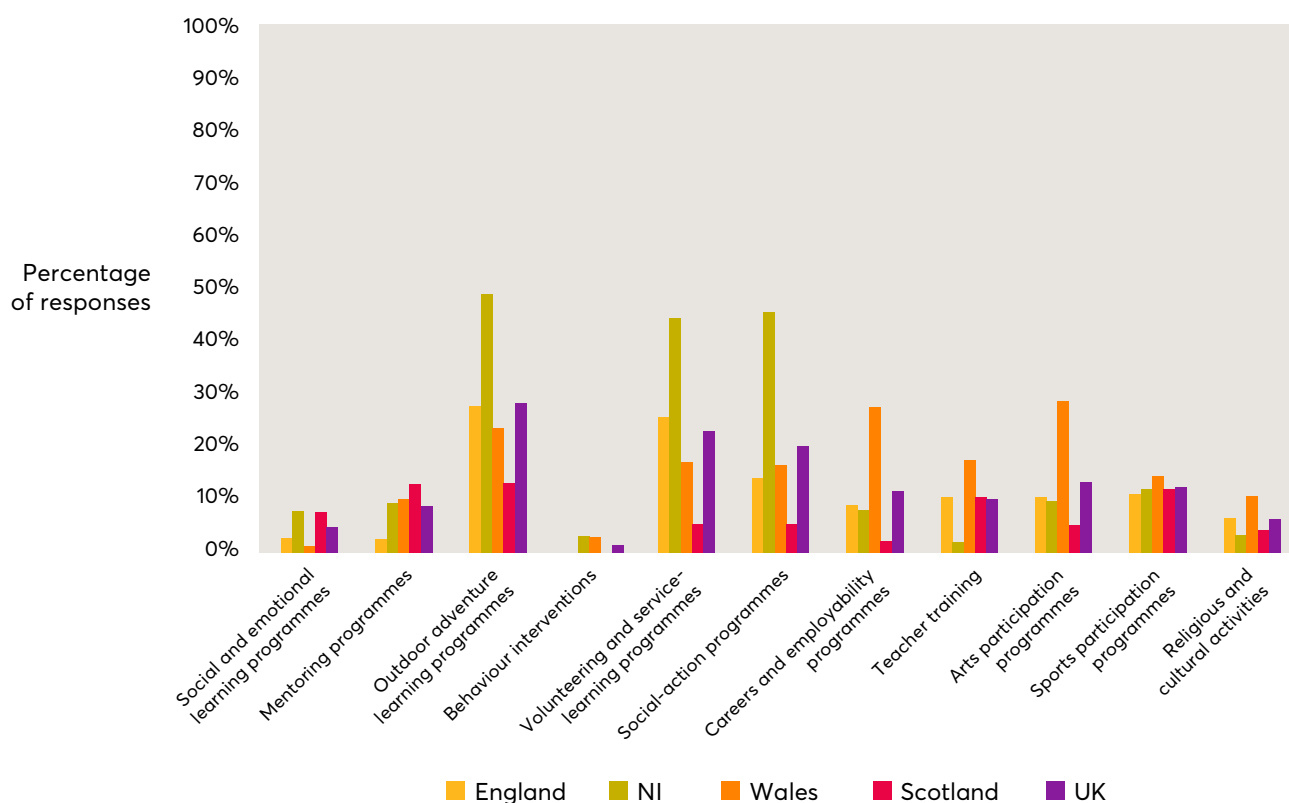## Figure 14: Activities reported as being designed by an external provider

Figure 14 illustrates what kinds of SES activities were reported to be developed by an external provider. UK-wide data indicates 'outdoor adventure and learning programmes' (28%), 'volunteering and service-learning activities' (23%), and 'social action programmes' (20%) were predominantly developed by external providers. The activities reported as

being least often developed by external providers were 'behaviour interventions' (1%), 'social and emotional learning programmes' (4%), and 'religious and cultural activities' (6%). The lower percentage of responses for Figure 14 across the UK, relative to Figure 13, indicates that, according to the teachers surveyed here, provision for SES is more often than not developed by schools than external providers.

Comparing the different home nations, the most interesting findings occur in Northern Ireland and Wales – who appear to focus more on external providers in developing their provision. School teachers surveyed in Northern Ireland deviated from the UK-mean for three categories: 'outdoor adventure learning programmes' (48% vs 28% UK-wide); 'volunteering and service-learning programmes' (44% vs 23% UK-wide); and 'social action programmes' (45% vs 20% UK-wide). In the case of Welsh schools, teachers reported relying on external providers more than the UK-mean in two categories: 'careers and employability programmes' (27% vs 11% UK-wide) and 'arts participation programmes' (28% vs 13% UK-wide).

Figure 15: Activities reported as being designed by a combination of the schools and an external provider
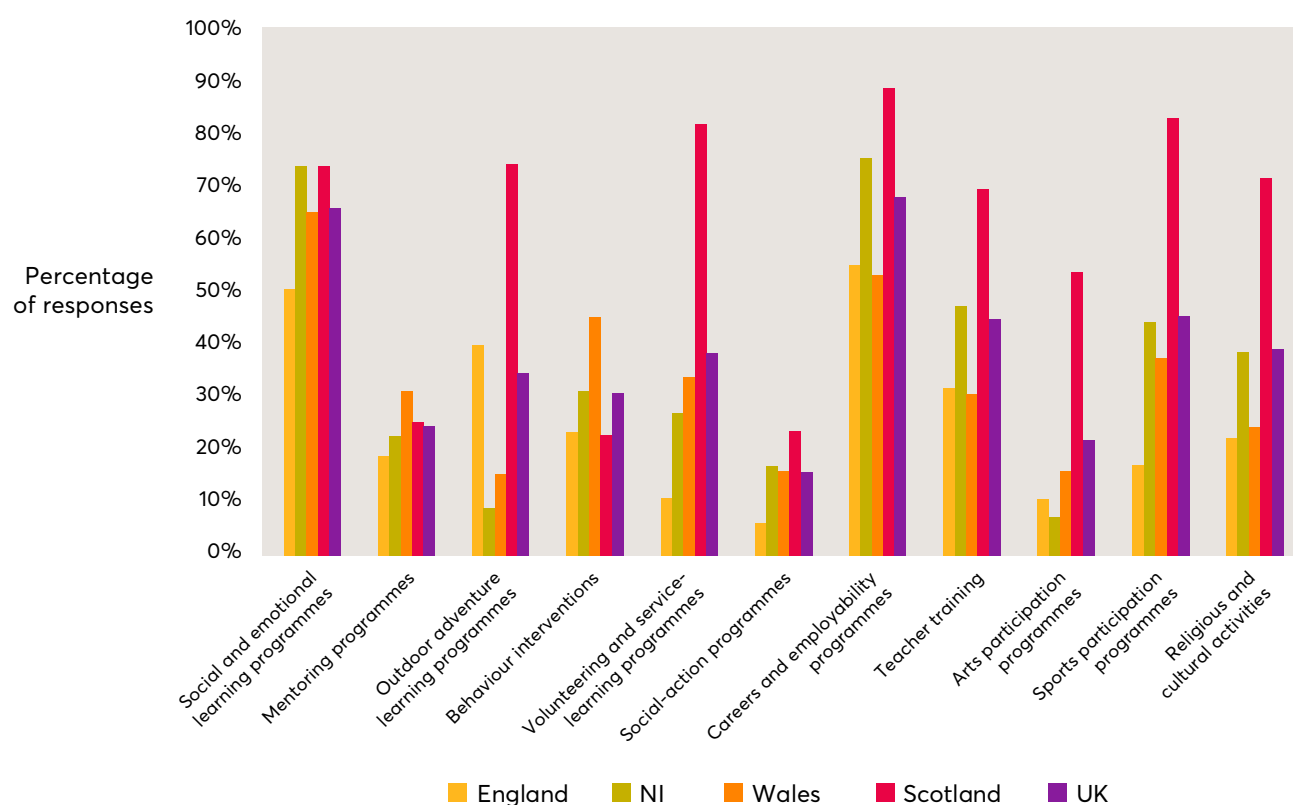

Figure 15 illustrates what SES activities are reported to be developed by a combination of both the school and external providers. The UK-wide data indicates 'careers and employability programmes' (68%), 'social and emotional learning programmes' (65%), 'sport participation programmes' (45%), and 'religious and cultural activities' (39%) were reported to be predominantly developed by both the school and external providers. The

activities teachers reported as being least frequently developed through a combined approach were 'social action programmes' (15%), 'arts participation programmes' (21%) and 'mentoring programmes' (24%).

Drawing comparisons across the four home nations, Scottish schools reported using the combined approach more than any of the other three home nations, given they scored higher than the UK-mean per category in all but one. Northern Ireland also reported more frequently using a combination of both school and external providers (except in the cases of 'mentoring programmes', 'outdoor learning adventure programmes', 'volunteering and service-learning programmes', and 'arts participation programmes'). This may be due to schools in Northern Ireland largely reporting that they used external providers (as seen in Figure 14) to deal with these SES activities. England and Wales showed mixed patterns, largely on par with the UK-mean or just below it, suggesting they are more invested in using a combination of in-house and external providers than relying on external providers (however, this also holds true for all four home nations).

What makes an effective relationship between providers and schools?

Our qualitative data shows important insights into what teachers perceive makes relationships with an external provider effective. Of the eight teachers we spoke to, there was consistency in the factors they reported as contributing to effective working relationships with providers. Most often, teachers talked about the importance of a provider being able to empathise and communicate with children, having the kind of personal qualities which would mean they deliver programmes that children relate to and are engaged with. The programmes themselves had to be innovative, interactive and the best activities were often seen as those which drew on real-life experiences and events (e.g. an activity involving an individual who has faced adversity, who comes in to speak to children about their experiences and overcoming life challenges). Teachers reported being able to see first-hand from the pupils themselves whether or not an external provider was engaging – for example, pupils being 'bored' or not engaged when providers delivered PowerPoint presentations or non-interactive sessions. In 'buying in' external provision, schools emphasised the need for creativity, originality and striking performances from providers.

'So I think getting the students thinking, and with, you know, real life situations as well, you know, students love having, I think they like the kind of real context of it. And we, in fact, actually, this week, we just had a webinar with a Holocaust survivor, that the National Holocaust Centre had set up, and she spoke for ten minutes, and then the students got to ask questions, and they were like, brilliant. The questions they asked were, like, really insightful. And they gain loads more from that, than they wouldn't do just sat listening to her I think, because they were obviously engaged in it because it was their question, and she gave the question, you know, really, really good answers. So yes, so I think they've got to be activities that are getting them thinking and making it relevant obviously to themselves.'

Teacher, England

'And I think that that sense of engagement I mean, they're used to it in a school context but if it's something completely different, they get excited about it, you know what I mean. We've had a lot of things that I've coordinated this year from external providers from a company called [provider name] … they provide these concerts, live gigs, so we've had bands in that have sung a few of their tracks and then talked about mental health and then asked questions from the audience and then delivered another couple of songs. That's something we've paid for this year. They've also come in and done a few songs and talked about social media, they've been great as well because it's just something that's completely different for the pupils.'

Teacher, Scotland

'Well, a lot of time the most successful people are the ones who have been teachers themselves, and they've left education for whatever reasons and they've become an education outreach officer, those tend to be the most effective delivery sessions because they don't have to worry about behaviour or anything because they seem to know how to engage with pupils. They've got to make sure that the content they deliver is balanced and there's no agenda, because they may be a charity organisation in the third sector or whatever and obviously they get funding to deliver these sessions, but they've also got to make sure that their content is balanced, it's got to be interactive, it can't be just them just speaking up there. A lot of the most successful ones have done YouTube clips that are included or little activities. They've got to be able to relate to the pupils so that the content again is age appropriate for what they're trying to deliver. It's about building that relationship with that external agency for a number of years, so they get to know the school, they get to know the pupils, they get to know the staff. They know what works and also, they've got to be aware of what's going on in the locality.'

Teacher, Wales

This last quote from the teacher in Wales draws attention to an important issue raised by a number of other schools, that of ensuring provision by external organisations is adapted to the school context and is deemed appropriate for the school pupils. The headteacher we spoke to in Northern Ireland, for example, talked about an instance where a provider was delivering content on relationships education which was not perceived by the school as appropriate for their rural pupils.[19] In working with external providers, a final issue that was raised by several schools was the importance of sustained partnerships, working with providers to deliver activities over a long period of time – 'one-off' activities were not favoured by schools because pupils needed continuity, and 'drip feeding' approaches were seen as more effective.

➡️ Implications for policy and practice

Providers of activities should take account of where in the school day activities are prioritised. The provision of activities to develop SES across UK schools was said to occur primarily in two spaces: within the curriculum, and outside the curriculum but within the school day. The least amount of activities was reported to take place outside the school day. Scottish schools reported that they deployed the most activities within the curriculum than any of the four nations. English and Welsh schools generally reported activities to take place outside the school curriculum, but within the school day. The Northern Ireland pattern was less clear, though they reported more activities to occur within the curriculum than outside the curriculum but within the school day. An interesting outlier is Northern Ireland, where schools reported mentoring programmes to predominantly take place outside the curriculum, but within the school day, whilst the other three nations said to have these activities within the curriculum.

Home nations within the UK reported similar types of activities to develop SES. Scottish schools, however, said they used the widest range of activities with the highest frequency in contrast to the Welsh, who reportedly implemented fewer activities. This information can be used to provide targeted provision of SES in each home nation.

Schools felt the most effective SES activities were social and emotional learning programmes, mentoring programmes, behaviour interventions, careers and employability programmes, and, to some extent, sport participation activities. Given these five activities were considered to be the most effective, they were also the main activities schools used to develop SES. While policy-makers and providers can continue to target these types of activities, it is important to consider that these are the activities that schools perceive to be effective but not necessarily the most effective ones. Schools should be encouraged to engage more in the evidence-base on the effectiveness of different activities, as there might also be value in promoting less frequently cited (or at times viewed as less effective) programmes, such as volunteering and service learning, or arts participation activities.

In general, schools across the UK said they mostly either design SES activities themselves, or do so alongside an external partner. Schools reported being less likely to entrust external partners to develop these activities alone (except in a couple of instances for Northern Ireland and Wales – see Figure 13). The availability of programme providers could go some way to explaining these patterns. However, it might also be that schools in some cases prefer to have a degree of control over what is delivered, and so like to work with external providers in adapting their programme to suit the school context.

Sources of information and evidence used by schools to develop activities

The data in this section first unpacks the sources of information schools reported using to either design a SES activity from scratch (Figure 16), adapt an existing programme to the school (Figure 17) or select an external provider to deliver a programme (Figure 18). Secondly, reported issues around the availability, use and value placed on different information sources is explored in detail.

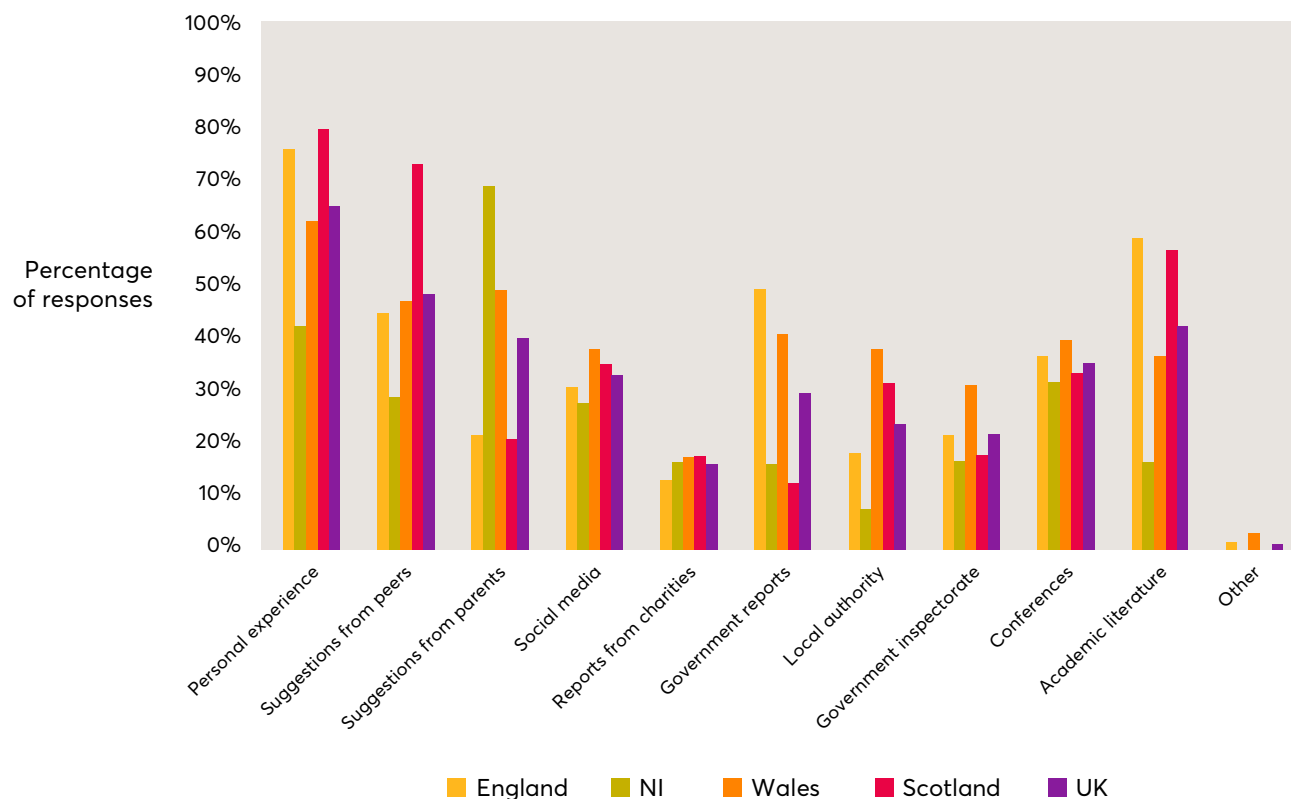**Figure 16: Evidence sources schools reported using to design their own programmes from scratch**

Figure 16 illustrates what sources of information schools reported using to design their own SES activities from scratch. The horizontal axis outlines the possible sources of information; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. The UK-wide data indicates that teachers felt 'personal experience' (64%), 'suggestions from peers' (48%) and 'academic literature' (42%) were the most prevalent information sources. Those least frequently reported to be used were 'reports from charities' (16%), 'government inspectorate' (21%) and 'local authority' (23%).

Comparing across home nations, Scottish schools followed the UK-wide pattern, frequently drawing on 'personal experience' (79%), 'suggestions from peers' (72%) and 'academic literature' (56%). While English schools also reported valuing 'personal experience' (75%) and 'academic literature' (58%), they indicated reliance on 'government reports' (49%). Welsh teachers surveyed here reflected the general pattern in the data, again valuing 'personal experience' (62%) and 'suggestions from peers' (46%); however, they also said they valued 'suggestions from parents' (49%) a great deal more than England and Scotland. In Northern Ireland 'suggestions from parents' were frequently cited as a useful source of information (68% vs 40% UK-wide), as well as 'personal experience' (42%).

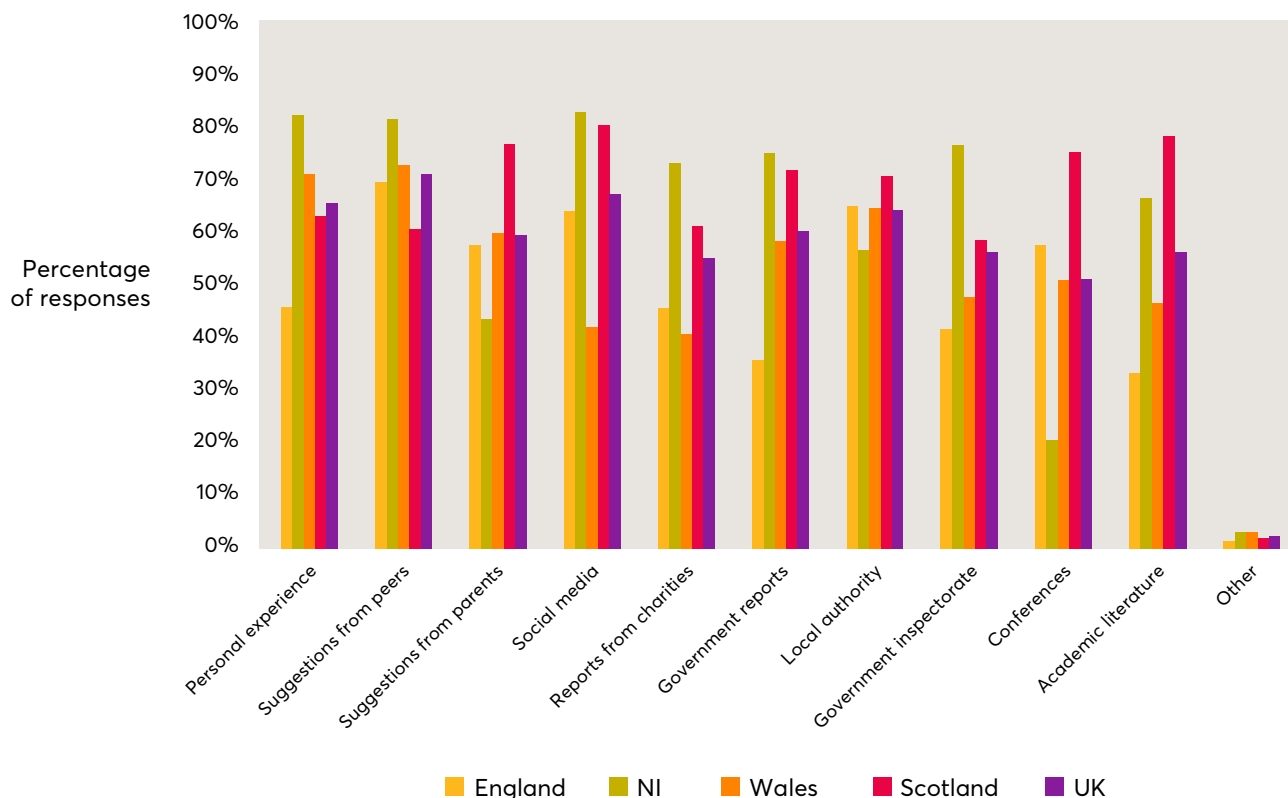**Figure 17: Evidence sources schools reported using to adapt an existing SES programme to their school**

Figure 17 shows what sources of information teachers reportedly used to adapt an existing SES programme to their school. This time, UK-wide data indicates 'suggestions from peers' (70%), 'social media' (67%), 'personal experience' (65%) and 'local authority' (64%) were the most prevalent information sources mentioned by teachers. The least frequently said to be used were 'conferences' (51%) and again 'reports from charities' (55%). Compared to Figure 16, the different data sources selected here were more balanced than those used to design activities from scratch (the range between the least used UK-wide information source and the most drawn upon was only 20% versus almost 50%). This suggests schools reported drawing on a wealth of sources when adapting an SES activity to their school, yet comparatively rely on fewer types of information sources when designing an activity from scratch.

The schools in Northern Ireland and Scotland consistently reported drawing on almost all the sources of information listed, as indicated by both nations exceeding the UK-wide mean per category all but twice. Comparatively, English and Welsh schools appeared to be more selective with the sources of information they chose. Schools in England reportedly preferred 'suggestions from peers' (69%), 'local authority' (64%) and 'social media' (63%) whereas Wales valued 'suggestions from peers' (72%), 'personal experience' (71%) and 'local authority' (64%).

Figure 18: Evidence sources schools reported using to select an external provider of activities
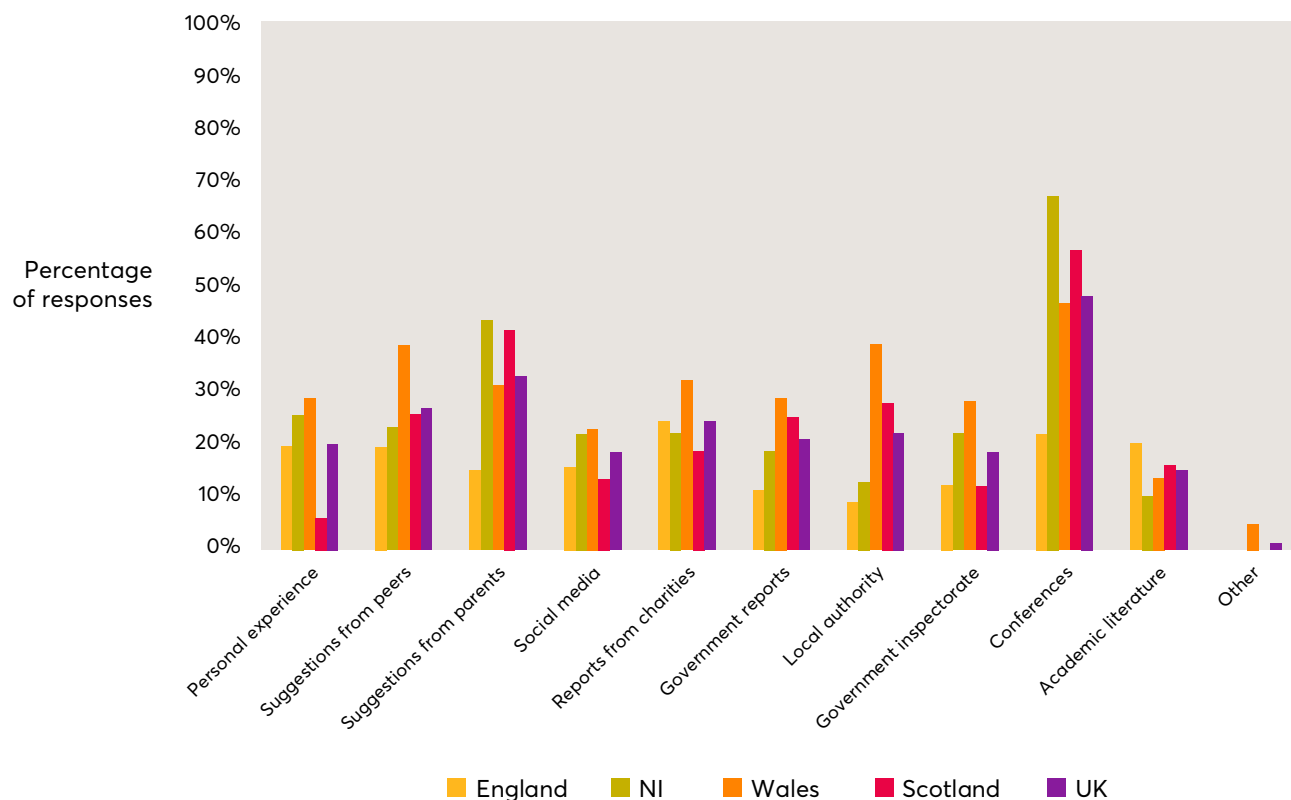

Figure 18 shows what sources of information schools reported using to select an external provider to deliver an SES programme to their school. The horizontal axis outlines the possible sources of information; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. The UK-wide data indicates 'conferences' (47%), 'suggestions from parents' (32%) and 'suggestions from peers' (26%) were the most prevalent information sources said to be used by teachers. The least frequently said to be used were 'academic literature' (14%), 'government inspectorate' (18%), and 'social media' (18%). The pattern in Figure 18 is like that of Figure 14: schools across the UK reported only using external providers to implement SES activities in a limited fashion. The response rates from Figure 18 were lower than those from Figure 16 (information the school uses to design programmes themselves) and Figure 17 (information schools use to adapt existing programmes).

Welsh schools reported being the most prone to use a wide range of information to select an external provider given they consistently matched or exceeded the UK-wide mean in almost all categories. Scottish schools and those in Northern Ireland reported similar feelings, valuing some sources of information more than others (the main two were in accordance with the UK-wide trend: 'conferences' (55% Scotland; 66% NI) and 'suggestions from parents' (41% Scotland; 42% NI). Lastly, English schools reported using the fewest sources of information when selecting external providers out of the four nations: they were below the UK-wide mean in all but one category.

Our qualitative interviews with teachers reflected the quantitative patterns in terms of how schools selected external providers, giving more detail on why they were important, and also raising one further way in which relationships with providers came about. The qualitative data reveal three most commonly cited ways in which activities delivered by an external provider came about:

- Schools already using the provider for other academic activities, and being supplied these additional SES activities as an 'add on'.

- Teachers attending a conference and being inspired to take on the provider

- Recommendations from other schools or external agencies (such as the local authority).

It might be that schools with a pre-existing relationship with the external provider are more likely to 'add on' further activities (in this case SES activities) because they trust that the provider will deliver effective provision. For example, in Wales and Northern Ireland, schools we spoke to had faith in external providers they both used for other academic programmes they'd previously delivered:

Headteacher: '[provider name] … are mostly educational, so you know it's things like differentiation, but they run things like prefects… developing skills in young people to make them positive mentors for junior pupils in the school so, they run a programme on that and you know, sort of help young people see how they can use and develop their skills in helping others.'

Interviewer: 'And how did you come across them?'

Headteacher: 'We actually had used them for educational purposes … we had used them for our own training on, we've had a number over the years, you know differentiation things like that you know, what we had been working on with them but they have sort of started to branch out into doing more with young people.'

Headteacher, Northern Ireland

'Well initially like I said, it was to raise our maths and our English results at GCSE, but again, if you can get on a [provider name] course, it will inspire you so much because the way they deliver it is amazing but obviously they've got different programmes, and [provider name] dealt with obviously the PSE side of things, they do this thing called LORIC, so they've got five skills which is leadership, organisation, resilience, communication and innovation, and tapped into them then are lessons on how to improve those kind of softer skills, but obviously that taps into your social and emotional wellbeing as well because if the children can you know, be more adaptable to those skills, then hopefully, they'll be able to cope with life better. And there's another side to [provider name] called 'Who am I?' or 'Them and Us' sorry, and that then, so along with those LORIC skills it deals with wellbeing, so you can be more resilient, then how do you become more resilient, well the 'Them and Us' side of it deals with that. So, it's worth looking into that, it's an excellent programme.'

Teacher, Wales

It was important for schools to trust that the provider would deliver effective activities, and so existing relationships perhaps encouraged such trust, but also recommendations from others were important, especially when schools were able to see programmes working effectively in similar schools or contexts.

'I think in the initial outset it was smaller pilot programmes that had run and the success they'd seen from that. And certainly like across authorities people talk, within schools. They may be presented at Education Scotland workshops and stuff … you kind of get a vibe from that how good they will be with working with young people.'

Teacher, Scotland

Reflecting the broader quantitative patterns, teachers also reported that they had been inspired by providers from hearing them speak at conferences or other events, and felt that they would work well within their school context.

In addition to what sources of information schools reported using to develop activities, respondents were also asked to be more specific and 'name all the sources of information you use'. This was an open-ended question, and the survey did not name any sources of information or prompt respondents in any way; however, it is likely that teachers interpreted 'sources of information' in terms of official sources of evidence, contained in reports or documents. Therefore, while the dominant sources appear to be personal experience, this question likely refers to the fewer instances when teachers refer to sources from more official channels. The results were tallied by frequency each time a source was mentioned and tables 9–12 below show responses with at least three mentions per source (or source description).

Table 9: Sources of evidence named by schools in Wales

Source of evidence	Frequency
Barnardo's	5
School Health Research Network reports	4
Local authority policies and guidance	2
Papyrus	2
UNICEF	2
Women's Aid	2
NSPCC	2
PiXL	2
Estyn school reports	2
Action for Children	2

Table 10: Sources of evidence named by schools in England

Source of evidence	Frequency
Education Endowment Foundation	10
NSPCC	10
Barnardo's	7
Sutton Trust	5
Local authority	4
Government reports or publications	3
Social media	3
YoungMinds	3
Mental Health Foundation	2
Anna Freud Foundation	2
SEAL	2
Place2Be	2
Local and national charities	2

Table 11: Sources of evidence named by schools in Scotland

Source of evidence	Frequency
Barnardo's	11
Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (RASAC)	9
Education Endowment Foundation	4
Jigsaw	2
PSHE	2

Table 12: Sources of evidence named by schools in Northern Ireland

Source of evidence	Frequency
Barnardo's	11
Education Training Inspectorate	8
Education Authority	4
Childline	4
Samaritans	4
Government reports	3
Cara-Friend	3
Northern Ireland Anti Bullying Forum	3
Academic research	2
Child Protection Service	2
Action Career	2

Drawing together the results across all four nations, the pattern which emerges is the reported reliance of schools on charities. Barnardo's was the source most frequently cited for Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and was the third most cited in England. It would be interesting to explore further why Barnardo's is valued as an information source by so many schools right across the UK. The other main source of information across UK schools were government or local authority reports, though these were drawn upon less frequently than charity reports. Comparing between home nations, Welsh schools reported a reliance on charities such as Barnardo's, UNICEF, Women's Aid, or the NSPCC. They also reported drawing on local authority reports, and the School Health Research Network (a network of Welsh secondary schools who work alongside researchers, the Government and other organisations to support young people's health). English schools overwhelmingly were reporting a reliance on charities, like Barnardo's, the Education Endowment Foundation, the Sutton Trust, and NSPCC. These sources of information were complemented by drawing on government or local authority reports. Scottish schools said they prioritised charities, e.g. Barnardo's, RASAC, and the Education Endowment Foundation. Lastly, schools in Northern Ireland drew on charities (Barnardo's, Childline, Samaritans) but also reported value in alternative sources more than the other three home nations, such as information stemming from the Education Training Inspectorate, the Education Authority (as evidenced earlier from our qualitative data), and government reports.

To further explore how schools might access information to develop SES programmes, we asked schools to identify whether there were any sources of evidence they would like to use, but lack access to. The results showed schools overwhelmingly reported being capable of accessing all the information sources they deem important (this could make sense on one level, given the majority of sources identified are unlikely to have paywalls). We also asked participants to reflect on how valuable the different sources of evidence were (Figure 19).
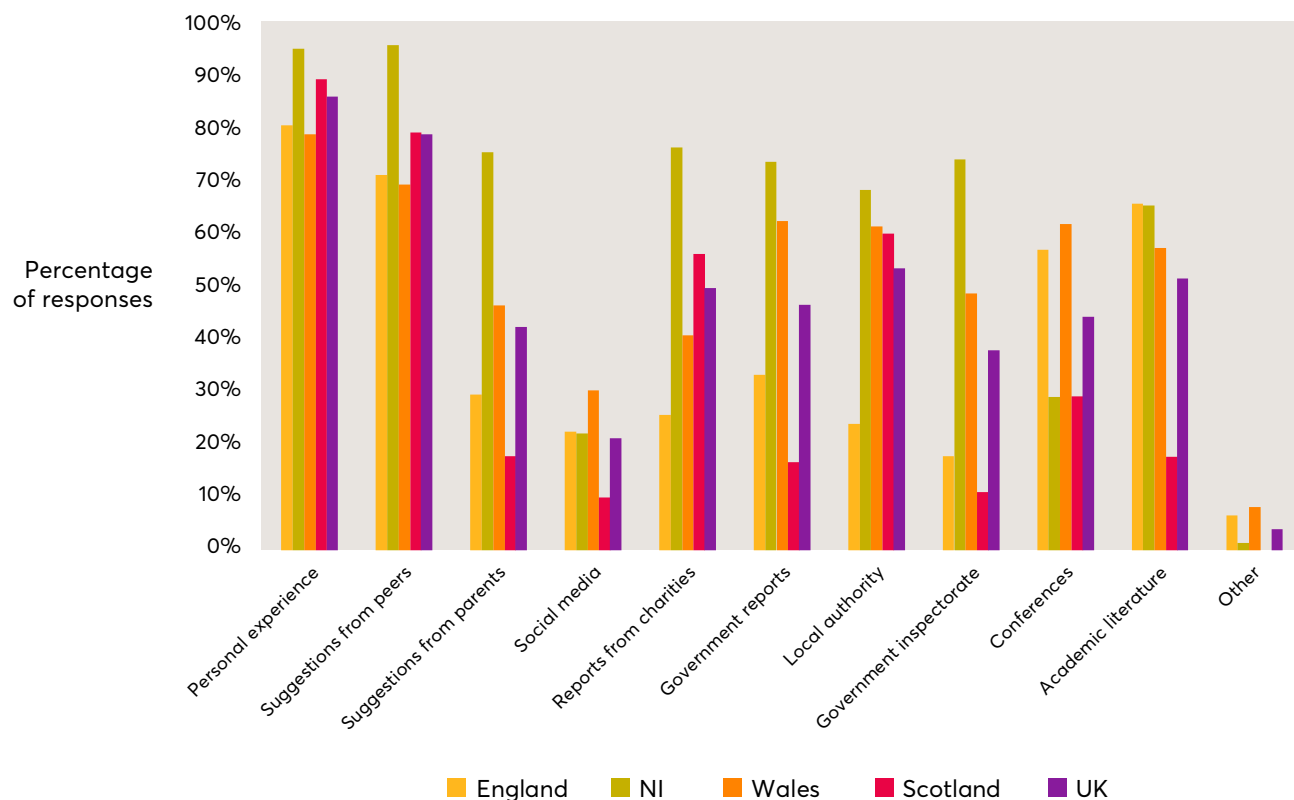
Figure 19: Sources of evidence schools considered valuable to develop activities

Figure 19 illustrates how schools rated the value of different sources of information to develop SES activities. The UK-wide data indicates 'personal experience' (85%) and 'suggestions from peers' (78%) were the two most overwhelmingly valued sources which teachers reported, followed by 'local authority' (53%) and 'academic literature' (51%). The least valued sources reported by teachers were 'government inspectorate' (37%) and 'suggestions from parents' (42%). The UK-wide data reflects the patterns seen in Figure 16 and Figure 17: 'personal experience' and 'suggestions from peers' are the sources schools said they used most frequently because schools reported they considered them the most valuable.

Looking at the different home nations, it is interesting to note how school teachers in Northern Ireland reported that they felt almost all sources of evidence (except social media and conferences) were highly valuable. A noteworthy point is how Northern Ireland reported valuing 'suggestions from parents' as an evidence source (again, echoing Figure 16) relative to the other nations. Scotland schools reported being the most sceptical about the value of many of the sources, especially for 'suggestions from parents' (17%), 'government reports' (16%), 'government inspectorate' (11%) and 'academic literature' (17%). Lastly, English and Welsh schools exhibited mixed patterns whereby some sources were reported as more valuable than others (though Wales seemed to value more sources more highly than England). In line with the UK-wide means per category, English schools frequently cited 'personal experience' (80%), 'suggestions from peers' (70%) and 'academic literature' (65%). Welsh schools followed a similar pattern, reporting an emphasis on the importance of 'personal experience' (78%), 'suggestions from peers' (69%) and 'government reports' (62%).

➡ Implications for policy and practice

Knowledge of what evidence sources schools use and trust to develop activities can help policy-makers and providers make the case for the effectiveness of activities and programmes.

The main sources of information reported to be used and valued by schools were personal experience, suggestions from peers, and the local authority. Social media was reported to be the least valuable source. Northern Ireland was an interesting outlier given they draw significantly on parents' suggestions, which the other three home nations reportedly did sparingly. This has important implications for how policy-makers and providers engage with schools, in terms of their communication channels. It might be that accessing schools via local networks could be more effective, for example.

However, when asked to name the sources of information schools use, the overwhelming majority cited charities, particularly Barnardo's. This indicates the value charitable organisations also have for the development of SES in schools.

It is encouraging that schools overwhelmingly felt they could access all the information they required to develop SES programmes. This suggests the amount of information available is largely accessible (except when kept behind a paywall). That said, there may be information sources which may not be fully on the radar of schools, which could be very useful in developing their provision. In particular, policy-makers may like to think about whether the value of 'hard' evidence (such as impact evaluations) could be promoted to schools – at present, they appear, from our data at least, to not value or use this kind of evidence as much.

Measuring the impact of SES activities

This section looks at how schools measured the impact of activities to develop SES. Firstly, we asked schools to reflect on how aware they are of effective ways to measure the impact of such activities (Figure 20). Secondly, schools identified key barriers to measuring the impact of SES activities (Figure 21), before indicating what specific forms of measurement they use (Figure 22).

Figure 20: Teachers' response to the statement: 'I am aware of the most effective ways to measure the impact of activities to develop SES'
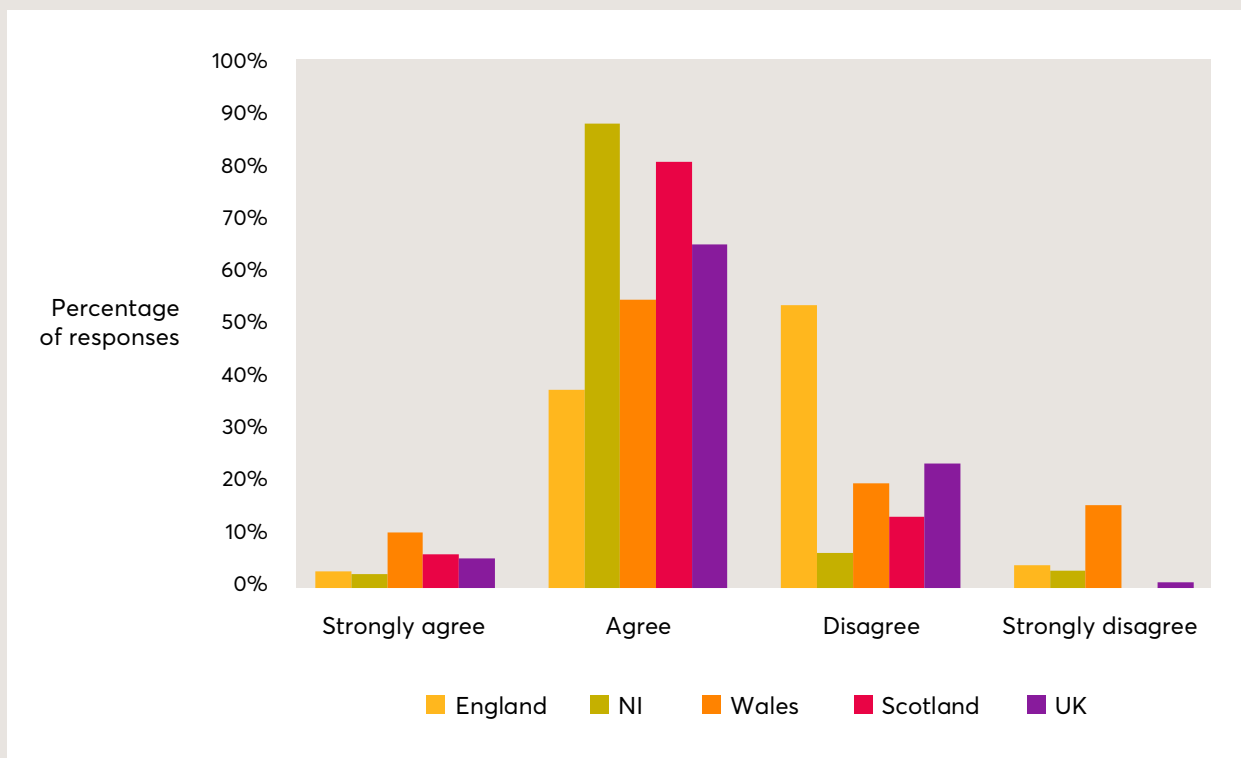

Figure 20 illustrates how aware schools thought they were about how to measure the impact of SES activities. The horizontal axis outlines the levels of agreement; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. The UK-wide data indicates schools generally 'agreed' (64%) they knew how to measure the impact of activities versus 23% that 'disagreed'. The nation-by-nation data suggests schools in Northern Ireland reported being the most confident in knowing the most effective ways to measure impact (87% 'agreed' with the lowest scores for both 'disagree' (6%) and 'strongly disagree' (3%). Scotland showed a similar trend, whereby 80% of schools 'agreed'. Welsh schools reported the greatest ambivalence: 54% 'agreed', however, they also had the highest scores of 'disagree' (19%) and 'strongly disagree' (15%). Lastly, England was an outlier. Schools in England reported the least awareness and confidence about how to measure the impact of SES: only 37% 'agreed' (almost half of the UK-wide mean 63%) while 53% 'disagreed'. On the face of it, these are positive findings on teachers' confidence about measuring impact. However, it must also be acknowledged that measuring the effect of activities on SES is not easy, not least given how difficult it is to measure the skills themselves. It might be that teachers may feel confident, but do not always appreciate the complexity of the task in hand, and may not be aware of their level of knowledge. Further research is needed to unpick this further and garner more insight into teachers' depth of knowledge on impact evaluation.

To further understand schools' awareness about how to measure the impact of SES activities, we also asked teachers about the key barriers to measuring the impact of these activities (Figure 21).

Figure 21: What do you think are the key barriers to measuring the impact of activities which develop SES?
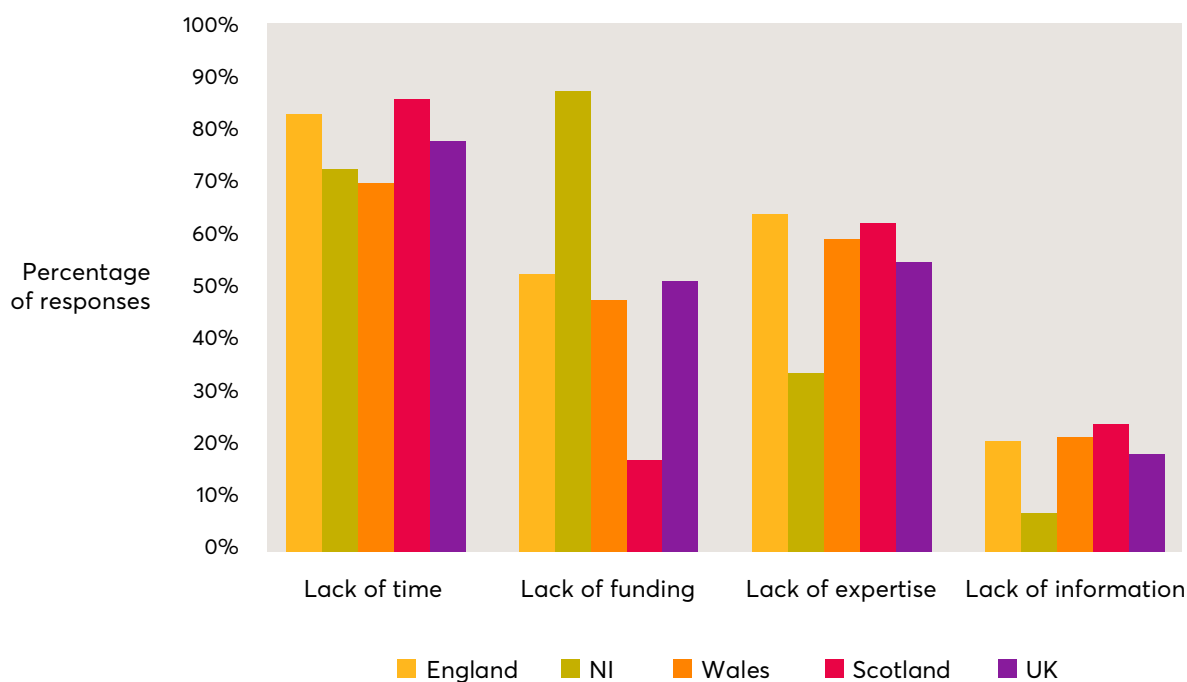
The UK-wide data indicates the biggest barrier raised by teachers was 'lack of time' (77%), while the next two barriers were considered similarly important: 'lack of expertise' (54%) and 'lack of funding' (51%). The barrier perceived as least important was 'lack of information' (18%). The fact that 'lack of information' was consistently disregarded as a key barrier by all four home nations could be encouraging given the consensus reported earlier in terms of the equal access to information sources across the UK nations (notwithstanding the caveat raised above on level of knowledge about impact evaluation).

Comparing across home nations, schools in Scotland, England and Wales generally echoed the UK-wide means per category and agreed on the 'lack of time' and 'lack of expertise' as significant barriers. Interestingly, schools in Northern Ireland felt 'lack of funding' was the most important barrier for them (86% – the highest percentage of response in Figure 21), while 'lack of expertise' (33%) was greatly lower for Northern Ireland than for the other three home nations.

Figure 22: How do you measure the impact of your provision for SES development (if at all)?
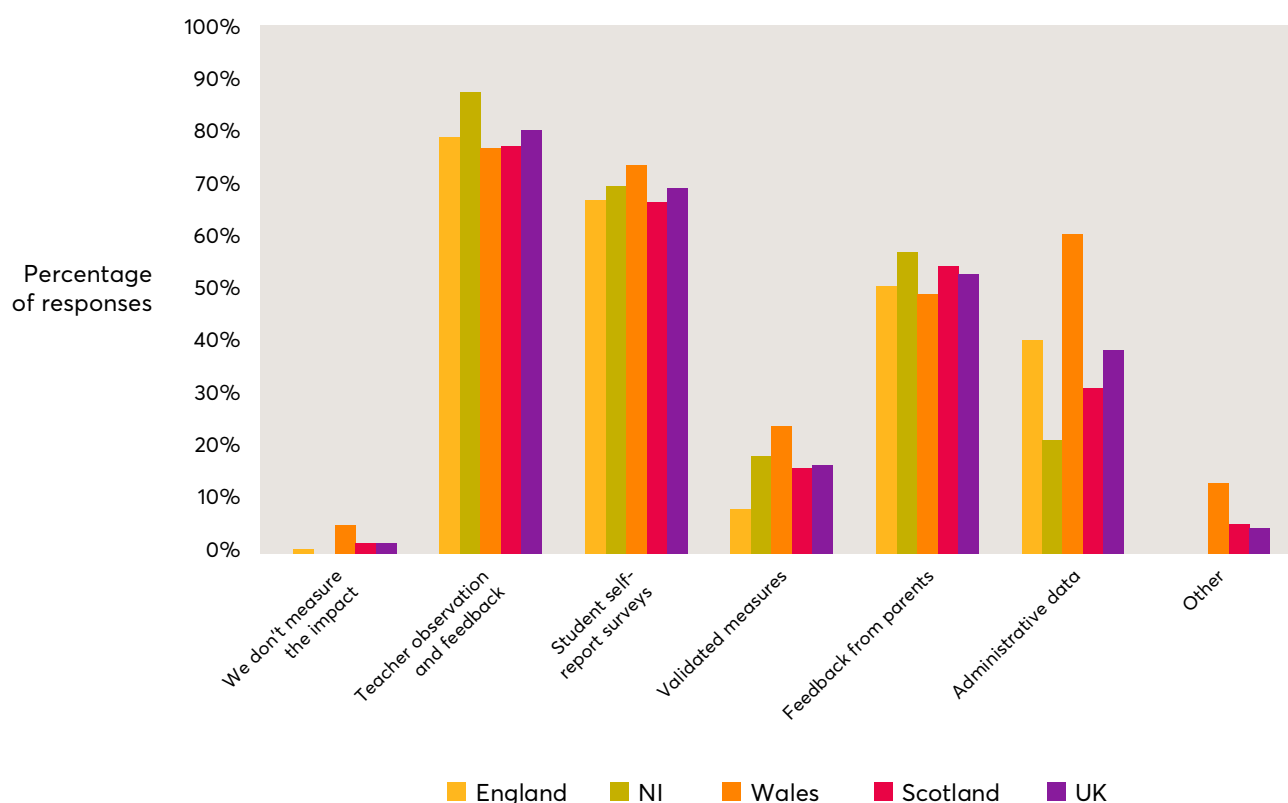
We also asked schools how they measure the impact of their activities (Figure 22). The horizontal axis outlines the methods of measuring impact; the vertical axis contains the percentage of responses. The UK-wide data indicates the most common approaches to measuring impact were reported to be 'teacher observation and feedback' (91%) and 'student self-report surveys' (79%). The least used approach was 'validated measures'[20] (19%). The UK-wide trends map onto the nation-by-nation responses in the majority of cases: the schools in all four nations predominantly said they relied (primarily) on 'teacher observation and feedback', (secondly) on 'student self-report surveys', and (thirdly) on 'feedback from parents'. The main difference was that Welsh schools said they relied significantly more on 'administrative data' (69% vs the UK-wide mean of 44%).

These findings echo the key trends identified in the previous section about what sources of information and evidence schools reportedly use to develop SES activities. Frequent sources of information raised by teachers were 'personal experience' and 'suggestions from peers', both which are heavily gleaned from 'teacher observation and feedback' and 'student self-report surveys', as well as 'feedback from parents'. This is further reinforced by the general lack of using 'validated measures'. On one level, this data suggests there is a risk schools may fall into a circular-logic trap where the ways they measure impact (anecdotal experience or self-report measures) are the key sources of information used to develop SES activities. The data suggests the picture is more complex than this, but it is nonetheless an issue worth flagging.

The qualitative data shed more light on how schools used evidence sources to measure SES and the effectiveness of their provision. As found in the survey data, pupil voice and teacher observation prevailed as the most important and often cited means of measurement, with all headteachers/teachers mentioning this. However, there was also an appetite for more validated quantitative measurements, and some schools did use this kind of data, either conducting surveys themselves of their student body or using data collected by external providers in measuring the impact of their activities. On the one hand, teachers valued this source of data because of its ability to trace the progress of pupils over time, but only if it did so over a sustained time period, measuring over a number of years the social and emotional capabilities of children. In the case of Wales, this is done by all schools through the national School Health Research Network survey carried out biennially, which schools found valuable in understanding the impact of their work over time, for example:

'So obviously it [the School Health Research Network survey] shows us any intervention we've put in place has worked, so like Chat counselling or something like that may be mentioned… Any interventions that we've put in place, it shows that they're working. Because I follow the pattern of this over the last six years, I can see, that being satisfied with life, has actually, is now above the national average, whereas before, boys were slightly below national average.'

Teacher, Wales

But it was also the case that other home nations do their own 'in-house' data collection, for example in Scotland a teacher commented:

'So we've this year developed a Google form and that will be shared with pupils so there will be a sliding scale of one to five for each of the wellbeing indicators and they can put in that sliding scale how secure they feel with that wellbeing indicator. And what we've tried to do is contextualise it with regards to COVID-19 and we've put in a set of scenarios that may have been experienced by a pupil for example, in the safe element, and the nurture element and throughout so we've tried to give examples so when they're looking at those kind of examples and scenarios that they can connect with something rather than just the language behind each of the wellbeing indicators … We're calling it a health and wellbeing self-report so we're looking to ascertain as much data as we can because what we're conscious of is that in terms of the monitoring of improvement with regards to health and wellbeing, particularly emotion and social skills, it is quite difficult to get quantitative data and the processes that we use normally are through conversations and the qualitative data is great but the measure of improvement and the measure of impact becomes difficult.'

Teacher, Scotland

However, while schools did value this kind of quantitative survey data they did recognise some of its limitations (for example, the same teacher in Scotland raised the issue of whether self-reported survey data necessarily reflects reality[21]) – which may account for why, in general, they tend to rely on more anecdotal evidence sources such as teacher observation. Teachers also mentioned the difficulty of actually measuring SES, given that it is hard to quantify such capacities in the person. Another headteacher in Wales pointed out that difficulties from measurement come from the fact it is hard to ascertain when an intervention will have the desired impact, which may not come for many years after the event.

➡️ Implications for policy and practice

School teachers in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales said they were strongly aware about how to measure the impact of activities. Whereas, English schools indicated they were unsure how to go about measuring impact. These findings relate to teachers' perceived confidence in their knowledge on how to measure impact. Just because teachers in England reported feeling less confident, does not mean to say they do not hold the same level of knowledge on measuring impact as those in other home nations. In fact, English teachers' reported lack of confidence could stem from the fact that they have more in-depth insight into the complexity of impact evaluation (they have a better grasp of the challenge). Moreover, given that teachers in all home nations expressed a preference for anecdotal evidence, it seems incumbent on policy-makers across all home nations to prioritise supporting teachers with impact evaluation.

The key barrier to measuring SES across the UK was said to be a lack of time. This is a prevalent issue in schools, and is perhaps made all the more complicated because schools (as discussed in previous sections) said they mostly designed their own activities, or adapt an existing one (though it must be acknowledged not necessarily out of choice). This means that measuring outputs needs to be tailored to a school's specific programme, rather than using an 'off the shelf' set of measures (which may be easier to use if schools use external providers, which they say is done less frequently in their schools). Northern Ireland was an interesting outlier – teachers here cited lack of funding as a key barrier.

Schools said they primarily measure impact through teacher observations and feedback, as well as student self-report surveys. Given teachers also reported they mostly draw on 'personal experience' and 'suggestions from peers' as sources of information, schools seem overly reliant on anecdotal evidence. The lack of any widespread use of validated measures and methods might create limitations in the effective measurement of activities. A key issue for policy and practice is the extent of such limitations, and whether schools might find more validated forms of assessment more useful and effective. In doing so, it would be important to alleviate possible concerns teachers hold over quantifying and measuring SES.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

🔒 Key findings

Divergence in curricula policy

Our review of policy documents across the four UK nations highlighted that Scotland and Wales have developed innovative curricula that take an integrative approach, embedding SES within holistic and singular curricula frameworks – unlike England and Northern Ireland, which rely more on a disparate set of 'stand-alone' policies.

This divergence in curricula was seen in the way schools in the different nations interpreted and responded to policies they were subject to. While the new curricula frameworks of Wales and Scotland proved helpful in guiding teachers in these jurisdictions, a large number of disparate English policies could be causing confusion and a lack of clarity. While there is a generally high level of awareness about SES policy across the UK, England appeared to have the least awareness. Compared to other jurisdictions, English schools were also much less likely to report that they used policies from their jurisdiction and that they found them helpful in developing and guiding their school-based provision.

However, schools across the UK reported awareness of a broad range of SES policies, spanning the multiple policy domains highlighted in our policy analysis (e.g. mental health, sex education, behaviour and discipline).

Prescribed sets of SES

It is clear from the policy analysis that home nations privilege certain skills across the different policy domains. 'Building and managing relationships' features prominently across all four home nations in the personal, social and health education (PSHE) domain. In terms of behaviour policy, there is a distinction between England, which promotes building individual competencies (e.g. 'self-conduct'/'self-discipline', 'comply with assigned work', 'belief in control'), and other home nations which recognise first and foremost the importance of school culture to promote good behaviour. The area of labour market preparation privileges highly prescribed skills such as influencing and negotiating skills, taking the initiative, teamwork and leadership abilities, being creative, innovative, flexible and resourceful.

SES as 'individual competencies' (and concomitantly individual 'effort') – missing social context and a broader understanding of what these skills are and how they develop

The perspective governments take to address SES is overwhelmingly competency orientated, and to a lesser degree orientated to building moral values (particularly in pastoral and labour market policy areas) and showed the least recognition for an ethical or an identity and resources perspective (notwithstanding the exceptions highlighted above). This is important in highlighting that across the UK SES are seen as individual competencies or capabilities and include values regarding individual conduct and behaviour that schools are to build in young people. The implication is that SES are seen to be above all, subject to the effort and responsibility of young people themselves, although schools have a core role to support young people in developing them. Few would dispute the importance of schools' role in building SES that equip young people with the skills needed to pursue individual success (be that in education, the labour market, or in life). However, we would argue, based on our analysis of policy, that the dominance of this competency perspective means that, the social, economic and political gains of SES building (and types of activities which may produce such gains) are potentially neglected.

Our evidence shows that schools themselves also largely framed SES from this individual competencies perspective, privileging capacities to develop in children such as resilience, self-regulation and interaction with others. This suggests that schools' interpretations are broadly aligned with the ways in which policy-makers framed SES. Again, we would argue that schools, like policy-makers in their jurisdiction, tend to neglect wider understandings of SES beyond developing individual competencies.

This is problematic because schools may be relaying the message to young people that their achievement of SES (or lack thereof) is attributable to their own individual effort or abilities and overlooks the different capitals young people have available to them and the external barriers and conduits to the building of SES. These include sufficient state resourcing, as well as the role of the school and community in building young peoples' sense of connection and identification with school and society, as well as their own sense of value as learners and citizens.

The holistic enactment of SES

Across all four nations of the UK, schools' sense of where policy dictates SES should be developed reflects the complex and holistic nature of SES; that they should be developed in all parts of young peoples' lives, in and out of school.[22] It is encouraging that schools perceive policies as holding this broad perspective on where SES should appear in the school day, which chimes with academic literature that suggests SES (given their holistic and all-encompassing nature) are best developed throughout children's lives and contexts.

This perception of policy by schools followed through in their delivery of activities, with schools favouring a 'whole-school approach' to providing activities which develop SES. However, differences were evident between home nations in the spaces used to implement activities: schools we surveyed in Scotland said they delivered activities within the curriculum; Wales both outside the curriculum, but within the school day and outside the school day (though this will likely change as the new Welsh curriculum becomes embedded); England and Northern Ireland generally said they deliver activities outside the curriculum, but within the school day.

Developing effective provision within schools

Schools clearly identified specific activities they felt were more effective in building SES, which included social and emotional learning programmes, mentoring programmes, behaviour interventions, careers and employability programmes, and, to an extent, sport participation activities.

In general, it was also clear that across all four nations teachers said they either design activities themselves or develop them alongside a partner. While some slight nation-level differences exist here, the majority of schools surveyed said they did not entrust the delivery of activities entirely to providers alone (in some cases however, it might be that this is because of the nature of programme availability). Whilst our qualitative data is limited, it does offer some insight into why schools seem to structure their provision in this way. Schools were acutely aware of what makes for an effective relationship with an external provider, mentioning the importance of providers who can empathise/communicate with children, deliver innovative, creative and original activities, and ensure activities are properly adapted and contextualised to the needs of pupils in their school. This could be one explanation as to why they said they did not entrust activities entirely to providers alone – schools might prefer to retain control, ensuring activities fit what they perceive as their pupils' particular needs and situations.

Teachers also said they were aware of key barriers to the enactment of activities within their schools, often mentioning a set of issues around the attitude, approach and professional development of teachers themselves, as well as curriculum pressures, less prioritisation given to social and emotional learning, and lack of funding.

A preference for 'informal' information sources on developing provision

Schools right across the UK feel they have good access to all the information they need to develop activities. Informal information sources (personal experience, suggestions from peers and the local authority) were privileged by the teachers surveyed here in developing these activities – these were preferred above evidence from 'hard' evidence sources such as academic research and reports from charities. Teachers seemed to be sensitive to their school context in this regard, preferring to see and hear first-hand accounts of activities working in schools within their locality.

Measuring effectiveness of provision informally

The reported preference for informal evidence followed through in the methods for evaluating activities. Schools in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland said they were confident in their ability to measure the impact of their provision – however, English schools were reported as being less confident in their ability to measure impact. Given that these findings relate to the perceived confidence of teachers, they may not be reflective of their actual capabilities in impact evaluation.

Teacher observations and feedback, as well as student self-report surveys are the primary evidence sources teachers said they rely on to measure impact. However, that said, we found evidence that schools were open to more validated forms of measurement but acknowledged the difficulties of quantifying progress in SES as well as the question of when impact will be 'seen'. A lack of time was cited as the key barrier to measuring the impact of activities.

Recommendations

To enhance policy and provision for SES in the UK, we put forward seven recommendations targeted at policy-makers, programme providers and funders:

Recommendation 1: Government in England should provide greater coherence and clarity in the area of social and emotional skills policy.

Based on what appears to be much less awareness of policy in England, we recommend that education policy-makers in England look into providing greater clarity on SES. It is true that English policy was the most extensive in this area, with the largest number of documents and resources evident – but this also seemed to be part of the problem, with the flurry of documents perhaps overwhelming schools in England and negating any clear policy messages. Our review of policy found England had the most extensive array of individual policy documents, but out of all the home nations, English schools were the least aware of policy-making in their jurisdiction. There is evidence to suggest that the Welsh and Scottish new curricula are more effective in providing this clarity and coherence – and England could borrow insights from their work in developing these curricula.

Recommendation 2: Schools should be afforded greater time, space and resources to develop their social and emotional skills provision, drawing on the latest evidence.

Developing SES provision in schools requires a significant investment in time, space and resources. The fact that schools said they were much less reliant on 'hard' evidence sources in developing their provision and measuring its impact might be reflective of them lacking time, resources and space to engage with this (accessing anecdotal sources out of ease, instead). Indeed, the key barrier to measuring the impact of activities was said to be a lack of time. From the teachers we spoke to, it was clear that reading policy texts, uncovering and digesting the latest research on activities, and even delivering activities are all things that their demanding roles make difficult. Governments should give greater space and focus to SES by privileging this to a greater extent in the curriculum. Teachers should also be given more opportunities for professional development on the value of evidence-based decision making in relation to provision, as well as more robust methods of impact evaluation (perhaps via Initial Teacher Education programmes or stand-alone workshops).

Recommendation 3: External providers of activities should work in partnership with schools to devise and deliver adaptable activities.

A key message from our research is that schools across the UK say that they work together in partnership with external providers in developing and delivering their activities (perhaps because it provides them with a degree of control over content). They reported being far less likely to leave it entirely to the external provider alone. Providers may need to take this into account in how they work and approach schools, perhaps devising flexible programmes that are readily adaptable to school contexts. It also means that they should have transparent dialogue with schools to collaborate with them in determining the content and delivery of activities.

Recommendation 4: Policy-makers, funders of programmes, and programme providers should continue to emphasise the value of a 'whole-school approach' in developing social and emotional skills.

The complexity of SES is reflected in the many spaces and types of activities schools can use to develop them. Therefore, continuing to champion and promote a 'whole-school approach' towards the development of SES is fundamental, we argue. The holistic nature of these skills do not lend themselves to be learned in silos or isolated experiences;[23] they need to be embedded within schools' broader frameworks.

Recommendation 5: Programme providers and their funders should promote the value of a broader range of evidence-based activities to develop social and emotional skills.

While schools said they favoured SES development through activities such as social and emotional learning programmes, mentoring programmes, behaviour interventions, careers and employability programmes, and, to an extent, sport participation activities, this should not be interpreted as a signal for providers to exclusively focus on those activities. Others, such as service learning programmes and social action programmes, were comparatively used less frequently; but the value of these activities in developing SES (in terms of their evidence base) is on par with the programmes schools tend to use.[24] Reasons for their lack of take-up should be investigated and addressed. For example, it might be that programme providers and designers could help identify ways to shape service learning or social action programmes to be more easily embedded within school curricula or school hours. It could also be that the evidence-base of different programmes could be better communicated to schools (perhaps via informal professional networks which teachers said they relied on the most as sources of information).

Recommendation 6: Funders and governments should encourage the development of longitudinal research to generate robust evidence on what pupils need, and the effectiveness of school-based provision.

Schools across all parts of the UK are largely reliant on informal information sources to both understand the needs of pupils as well as what impact activities have on building SES. These information sources clearly have an important role, and prove useful to schools, but there is also appetite for more validated forms of measurement which could be an additional source and prove especially valuable to government and funders. Schools in Wales valued this kind of data which they received from a national longitudinal survey carried out by the School Health Research Network (SHRN). We recommend the development of longitudinal research which traces young people over their entire school career and beyond into the labour market – to understand their SES gaps at different time points, as well as what impact interventions may have had over the long term.

Recommendation 7: Policy-makers should adopt a broader understanding of social and emotional skills; accounting for the socially situated nature of these skills as well as their ethical and identity-based dimensions.

We argue that SES are more than individual competencies and values, they also refer to ethical values that benefit society as a whole, and resources that are bestowed as well as learnt (i.e. social capital and the ability to navigate social networks requires access to useful social connections, not just the competencies to mobilise them when needed). The importance of nurturing a valued identity as a core social and emotional skill should also be recognised at all levels of social life from the macro (global and national citizen) to the micro (community citizen) and crucially for pupils' sense of being a valued part of the school community (learner identity).

Annex

List of policies

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Welsh Assembly Government (2008) *Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship: A Common Understanding for Schools*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government

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Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Practical Approaches to Behaviour Management in the Classroom: A handbook for classroom teachers in secondary schools*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government

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Endnotes

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8. Whilst data collection coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, we asked that participants reflected on practices in 'normal times'.

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10. The Department for Education in England, Education Scotland, the Department for Education and Skills in Wales, and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland.

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13. Domitrovich, C. E., Durlak, J. A., Staley, K. C., and Weissberg, R. P. (2017) Social-Emotional Competence: an essential factor for promoting positive adjustment and reducing risk in school children Child Development, Vol. 88 Issue 2, pp. 408-416.

14. 'behaviour interventions' are the programme of activities, now widespread in schools, which are aimed at improving behaviour and discipline. For example, by reducing a variety of behaviours perceived as problematic, from low-level disruption to aggression, violence, bullying, substance abuse and general anti-social activities, etc.

15. For example, Social and Emotional aspects of Learning (SEAL).

16. Social action programmes describe the sorts of activities schools might use that involves taking practical action with the aim of achieving positive social change.

17. Teacher training refers to those programmes which train teachers to embed social and emotional skill development into their everyday teaching.

18. Schools were asked about their own perceptions of effectiveness, which do not necessarily reflect actual effectiveness (for example, there is evidence to support the efficacy of many of the interventions teachers do not rate highly). Teacher perceptions may be impacted by a range of factors, such as the extent to which they have experience implementing such programmes.

19. It must also be noted that these kinds of sessions that involve external speakers are not the only form of provision provided by external organisations, with teachers we spoke to also mentioning other forms of provision such as drama/arts-based activities (see further examples here: https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/future-ready-fund-winners/).

20. A 'validated measure' is referred to here as an instrument that has been tested for reliability (the ability of the instrument to produce consistent results) and validity (the ability of the instrument to produce true results), often used in formal impact evaluations, for example.

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