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Is Policy Enabling Adaptation?

An assessment of Welsh national climate adaptation policies

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Welsh government ambition to reach a target of net zero greenhouse emissions by 2050 is on track, however, even if this is achieved there are already locked in climate change effects that cannot be avoided. Climate adaptation is essential to deal with the increasingly severe and frequent impacts of climate change and build a resilient Wales.

National policy is a key driver in progressing 'on-the-ground' adaptation action and building resilience. In this summary for policy-makers, the EPA-funded Transboundary Adaptation Learning Exchange (TALX) project team assessed Welsh national adaptation policies and outlined where barriers must be overcome for policy to be effective in enabling adaptation.

Key Messages

The TALX project has identified five key principles which are central to the development of good quality adaptation policy, in line with the The Well-being and Future Generations Act (2015). Welsh legislation places a duty on public bodies to ensure sustainable development for the well-being of Wales, both now and in the future. However, despite making progress in certain aspects, Wales is not fully addressing any of these principles. Across all areas, policy has either failed to acknowledge essential criteria for adaptation, or has not provided resources for implementation. Important messages for each theme are highlighted below:

Stakeholder Engagement – Representative stakeholder engagement is a fundamental feature of good quality adaptation. While Wales has some structures (such as public consultations/national conversations) in place to support this work, this is primarily focused on the creation of adaptation policy and is not evident in the implementation and evaluation phases of adaptation.

Policy and Governance – National climate adaptation policies in Wales are underpinned by legislation, a monitoring and evaluation framework and the division of responsibilities, highlighting an appetite for aligning and progressing adaptation actions at a national level. However, an absence of adequate resources means that support at local levels is limited, and many actions aren't working in practice. The lack of resource for implementation has hindered the emergence of climate leaders, impacting growth at local scales and limiting progress on creating 'a more equal Wales', as justice and equity issues are failing to be adequately addressed.

Resource – Welsh policy fails to acknowledge the scale of required staff and financing for effective climate adaptation something which has a knock on effect on building capacity and advancing and communicating the evidence base to citizens. The magnitude of the challenge Wales faces is immense, and the need for adaptation action at all levels essential. Without clear government understanding, and plans which acknowledge the scale of the financial cost in implementing adaptation measures, policy goals will never be reached, and the adaptation gap will continue to grow. A significant investment of resource is necessary to ensure this does not happen.

Decision-making – Successful adaptation at all levels is underpinned by good decision-making, however, the skills, resources and guidance needed to assess and decide on adaptation options in an equitable manner is currently not provided for in national level policy. Relying on a 'wait and see' approach is the most expensive, and worst option, increasing the likelihood of inequity and maladaptation in Wales.

Mainstreaming – Welsh legislation acknowledges that growth and development must be sustainable, and that adaptation is key to achieving this. However, there is still a large adaptation gap in Wales, and current sub-national plans and policies on adaptation lack the detail necessary for successful implementation. The perception within society that mitigation is the key factor in addressing climate change, still persists, and has had a knock-on impact on funding and delivery for adaptation, with a significant lack of initiatives implemented across Wales.

Recommendations

The TALX project outlines the current critical barriers to successful and effective climate adaptation. To address these, we recommend policy-makers and practitioners should:

1. **Incentivise place-based adaptation partnerships¹**, ensuring cross-sector and multi-level collaboration and guaranteeing all levels are supported. Place-based adaptation partnerships, such as the Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum, bring together a wide range of stakeholders to address common risks and opportunities in their locality. By promoting and funding locally-led partnerships and initiatives, the government can build on the success of established initiatives and support replication across Wales.
2. **Develop long term and self sustaining initiatives** to move adaptation beyond short-term project and political cycles. Policymaking can support a pipeline of adaptation projects that will have social and economic co-benefits, affecting real and meaningful change in Wales and fulfilling the promise of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act (2015).
3. **Ensure transparent monitoring, evaluation and learning processes are embedded in adaptation activity** at all levels, so that there is a robust process for continual improvement. Mandate and support the reporting of adaptation progress for all sectors and local authorities on regular cycles and promote and reward examples of practical and innovative climate action solutions that prioritise mitigation and adaptation co-benefits.
4. **Map climate impacts** alongside socio-economic data so where and how these impacts exacerbate existing inequities and injustices can be seen and measured. Use this information to develop and prioritise adaptation solutions that will increase the resilience of vulnerable stakeholders and communities.
5. **Communicate and co-develop adaptation solutions** with those they are intended to benefit to avoid opposition and maladaptation². Tailoring communication to engage under-represented groups will empower vulnerable stakeholders to take ownership of adaptation actions and support the systemic change that is necessary for successful adaptation.

Detailed Results

You can find a breakdown of the exact criteria used to assess National Climate Adaptation Policy on the next page, listed under the five areas outlined in the 'key messages' above. These criteria were arrived at after a comprehensive literature review of international good practice in climate adaptation by the TALX project team and validated by an expert panel of practitioners and policy-makers, using the Delphi approach..

More information on how the TALX team arrived at these conclusions, and how some of these recommendations can be carried out, is now available on the Transboundary Adaptation Learning Exchange (TALX) website (www.talx.ie), where the TALX project has developed a framework to support place-based adaptation partnerships.

¹ *Place-based Adaptation Partnerships - formed from cross-sectoral and multi-level collaborations to support adaptation in a particular area*

² *Maladaptation – when climate adaptation actions have unintended negative consequences*

Table 1: The criteria used to assess national climate adaptation policy (Blue: Acknowledged in policy with resources provided, Amber: Acknowledged in policy without resources provided, Red: Not acknowledged in policy)

Factor	Sub-factor	Code	Criteria	Rating
Stakeholder Engagement	Stakeholder Engagement	S1	Representative stakeholder involvement throughout the entire climate adaptation process, from the creation of adaptation policy to the implementation and evaluation of adaptation plans	Blue
		S2	A dedicated process in place to facilitate inclusive stakeholder involvement in the preparation of adaptation policies	Blue
Policy and Governance	National Policy	P1	A central administration body officially in charge of adaptation policy making	Blue
		P2	A national climate adaptation policy	Blue
		P3	Country level legislation in place to underpin adaptation policy (including frameworks and strategies etc.)	Blue
		P4	Independent monitoring and evaluation of national policy	Blue
	Leadership & Co-ordination of Roles and Responsibilities	P5	Horizontal (cross-sectoral) coordination mechanisms exist within the governance system, with division of responsibilities and SMART objectives and the alignment of policies	Blue
		P6	Vertical (multi-level) coordination mechanisms exist within the governance system, enabling all levels of administration from local to national to influence policy making	Amber
		P7	Creation of spaces for leaders of climate adaptation to emerge across scales	Amber
		P8	Climate adaptation is scalable, able to be tailored to different levels	Amber
		P9	Transparent climate finance with regards to adaptation initiatives	Amber
		P10	Transboundary cooperation (either existing or planned) to work together to address common challenges with other countries	Blue
	Climate Justice and Equity	P11	Domestic justice and equity issues (economic, social, environmental and cultural), relevant to each country, are recognised in national-level climate change policy and implementation (e.g. through decision-making)	Amber
		P12	Processes are in place to allow actions to reduce any identified differences and/or ensure the benefits of interventions accrue to the most vulnerable	Amber
		P13	Climate adaptation policy development, implementation and review is fully transparent	Amber
Resource	Staff and Financing	R1	Appropriate financing (enough to cover the cost of policy actions) is being applied to climate adaptation to achieve policy goals at all levels of governance	Red
		R2	Accessible long-term and self-sustaining resources are available to support policy goals at increasing climate resilience (i.e. funding, infrastructure, human resources)	Amber
	Capacity Building and understanding the capability of decision-makers and action takers	R3	Policy supports education, empowerment and engagement of stakeholders at all levels of decision making and action taking in relation to adaptation	Amber
		R4	Mechanisms exist to recruit and train practitioners with the specific skills required to undertake complex climate adaptation	Amber
	Information and Data	R5	The policy supports advances in scientific research to improve understanding and inform decision-making	Amber
		R6	Guidance for how to employ climate adaptation information is provided at sub-national levels	Amber
	Communication and Guidance	R7	Communication and engagement strategies included within the policy that utilize multiple platforms in order to reach diverse stakeholders	Amber
		R8	Recognition within the policy that climate change is an international issue and that adaptation strategies must look beyond national boundaries (i.e. the policy ensures the international aspect of adaptation is considered at decision-making levels)	Amber
		R9	Learning and support networks are available to enable all decision makers in producing and implementing appropriate climate adaptation policies	Amber
Decision-making	Decision-making	D1	Priority adaptation options are identified, prioritised and selected based on robust, equitable and transparent methods (e.g. using decision support tools)	Amber
		D2	An evaluation process is in place to assess the effectiveness of actions taken across all aspects of climate adaptation (i.e. from stakeholder engagement to mainstreaming)	Amber
		D3	The policy recognises that adaptation is an iterative and flexible process that accounts for new information/ experience	Amber
Mainstreaming	Mainstreaming	M1	Consideration of climate change adaptation been included in the national frameworks for environmental impact assessments and DRR's	Amber
		M2	Key policies recognise the need for adaptation action in future growth and development as a result of the impacts of climate change	Blue
		M3	National policy instruments promote adaptation at sectoral level, in line with national priorities	Amber
		M4	Adaptation is mainstreamed in insurance or alternative policy instruments to provide incentives for investments in risk prevention	Amber
		M5	Climate mitigation and adaptation are being investigated in tandem	Amber
		M6	Adaptation actions are sustainable (i.e. meet environmental, societal and cultural needs) for their intended lifetime	Amber



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Contact Details

Denise McCullagh

denise.mccullagh@ucc.ie



TalX
Transboundary
Adaptation
Learning Exchange