

Consultation on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Evidence submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for Stage 1 scrutiny of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill.

About you

Organisation: Education Directorate, Swansea Local Authority

1. The Bill's general principles

1.1 Do you support the principles of the [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#)?

Yes

1.2 Please outline your reasons for your answer to question 1.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1500 words)

Broadly, yes, although, given the open nature of the framework, there are widely differing interpretations of what the curriculum might look like and how it can be delivered.

Welsh Government have tried to counter some of the mistaken interpretations in their Myth Busting blogs:

<https://curriculumforwales.gov.wales/2019/07/26/the-curriculum-for-wales-dispelling-the-myths-part-1/>

<https://curriculumforwales.gov.wales/2019/09/26/the-curriculum-for-wales-dispelling-the-myths-part-2/>

However, many of these interpretations still exist, and a significant challenge will be ensuring there is equity of experience between schools given the differing interpretations.

Swansea SACRE agrees with the principles of the curriculum, particularly in ensuring that all learners receive equal opportunities to the highest quality education in Wales. However, we believe that SMCMP development should be made more explicit within the guidance. The only mention of this is within Chapter 4 (part 5) under 'post compulsory education in

maintained schools.’ This could cause a degree of confusion within schools, and, at worst, it could potentially result in fewer meaningful opportunities for SMCMP development in some schools.

The incorporation of RE (RVE) within the Humanities curriculum is a positive move; however, there is concern that the nuances of the subject will be lost within this approach. We therefore request appropriate and specialised professional learning for staff to ensure that all pupils are given the meaningful and purposeful RVE that is crucial in today’s multi-cultural society.

1.3 Do you think there is a need for legislation to deliver what this Bill is trying to achieve?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Yes, but this is only as good as what is in the legislation. If the legislation is too vague, then it is likely there will be a wide variation between local school curricula. If the legislation is too prescriptive, schools will have insufficient freedom to tailor their curricula to the needs of their learners. Striking the right balance between what we’d like all pupils to learn about and allowing sufficient professional autonomy is key.

We think some consideration should be given to providing more detail on a core of knowledge, skills and experiences for pupils in Wales. This would hopefully ensure a degree of parity between schools, but at the same time allow sufficient freedom for schools to innovate and tailor curriculum experiences more closely to their pupils. National resources could be created to support teachers in the delivery of these core aspects, something which Prof Dylan Wiliam noted as being worthwhile for education systems to pursue. The creation of these resources, using hwb as a delivery platform, as well as providing a degree of equity between schools, would also alleviate, in part, the workload burden that is associated with all schools creating their own curricula.

Swansea SACRE appreciates that there is a clear need for changes in legislation; however, they express caution over some changes:

- The changing of the name to Religion, Values and Ethics – this doesn’t adequately describe the subject nor connect to the academic nature of the subject.
- The changing of SACRE’s to SAC’s – this loses the purpose of the working party.

- Voluntary aided schools having to offer two RVE curriculums – this will undoubtedly cause significant financial and staff wellbeing/ workload issues.
- The broad and vague description of philosophical convictions – this needs greater clarity in order to ensure equity of teaching and learning for pupils.

2. The Bill's implementation

2.1 Do you have any comments about any potential barriers to implementing the Bill? If no, go to question 3.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

A significant barrier to the implementation of the bill is the current pandemic. The lockdown has resulted in a massive disruption to pupils' learning and schools' planning. As a result, school leaders have been focussed on reconfiguring as emergency childcare centres, delivering distance and blended learning, and now, the return to school, with all the challenges that is bringing, and, will continue to bring, this year. Therefore, schools are not in the best position to release staff to design, develop and trial new curricula.

Before the lockdown, a potential barrier to the implementation of the bill was the workload being placed on teachers to design and create local curricula, while at the same time being expected to teach pupils; all to the back drop of financial cutbacks. This challenge still remains, and the impact of the pandemic means there is less professional learning time and money available for schools to use for curriculum and teacher development.

It would seem sensible to review the implementation timeline of the CfW bill in the light of the pressures created by the pandemic. This extra time will give schools the space they need to focus on supporting the pupils in their schools now. Also, should it be deemed appropriate, it would allow for any amendments to be made to CfW framework.

Swansea SACRE has concerns (see above) regarding the potential changes, which will impact significantly on schools as well as LA provision and the support given.

2.2 Do you think the Bill takes account of these potential barriers?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

We do not think the bill is taking into account the pressures faced in schools during the pandemic. Also, we feel more investment needs to be made available to allow teachers the time and space to design high-quality local curricular. This pressure can be relieved somewhat, if a core of national resources were created around, for example, key aspects of Welsh and UK history (including BAME culture).

Swansea SACRE feels that the name change, removing the right to withdraw and the expectation that Voluntary Aided schools offer two separate curricula will cause upset to stakeholders and significantly add to workload within schools and the LA.

With regard to having 'new groups' on SACRE with voting rights, this could be disproportionate to local representation and potentially cause conflict.

3. Unintended consequences

3.1 Do you think there are there any unintended consequences arising from the Bill? If no, go to question 4.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

The main unintended consequence of the bill is potentially a lack of equity of what is taught and learned between schools, and indeed, between teachers within schools. This may well disadvantage pupils from poorer backgrounds to a greater extent, as they are less likely to gain knowledge, skills and experiences from their family background and peers.

In addition, key elements of what could be called a "core" curriculum, the sort of things we'd expect all pupils to learn about and experience while at school, might be missed as schools design their own bespoke local curricula. We would echo the growing concerns have been expressed recently about key aspect of Welsh and UK history, and BAME culture not being clearly referenced in the curriculum. The Welsh Government has appointed Prof Charlotte Williams to look at how the curriculum can support the teaching of key themes relating to BAME culture. This is to be welcomed, but a wider question remains, "What other aspects of the curriculum do we need to specify in more detail to bring about a reasonable degree of equity of learning between schools in Wales?"

A potential unintended consequence of the bill is the dilution of subject-specific knowledge and skills. This dilution is a particular concern in subjects such as modern foreign languages, music, RE, history and geography. In years to come, this might lead to a much lower uptake at GCSE, A level and higher education, which we are already seeing, with the knock-on effect there being fewer graduates to bring back into the system to teach these subjects.

Swansea SACRE is concerned that misunderstanding about the subject (via the name change) and the removal of the right to withdraw may cause some parents to choose to home educate.

4. Financial implications

4.1 Do you have any comments on the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#))? If no, go to question 5.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

The financial situation is challenging, even more so due to the pandemic; this makes the substantial task of curriculum reform difficult for schools.

The supply days needed to allow for staff's professional development and work in the new curriculum as outlined in the Explanatory Memorandum, Sept 2020, are significant. As well as the financial costs to release staff, there will inevitably be an impact on teaching and learning for the pupils currently in the system. Given the disruption to learning caused by the pandemic, this is not an ideal situation at all. Now is the time for schools to double down on high-quality teaching and learning to get pupils back on track. That has to be there main focus for at least this year, possibly longer, depending on how the pandemic plays out.

Furthermore, more money is needed for non-pioneer schools as they have had less resources to develop the curriculum to date. Also, as a result of not being involved in the design and refinement process of the curriculum, they are less familiar with what is required. Therefore, we believe it would be beneficial if this funding, knowledge and experience deficit was addressed in funding models moving forward.

Swansea SACRE would emphasise that with legislation changing and the role of RE (RVE), the need for specialist professional learning will be crucial to ensure that excellent teaching and learning is provided consistently to all pupils.

5. Powers to make subordinate legislation

5.1 Do you have any comments on the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)). If no, go to question 6.1.

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Generally, we think it is sensible that Ministers have the powers to make amendments to make adaptations as necessary. Although there is a danger that the curriculum could be tinkered with on a piecemeal basis for political reasons rather than for sound, educational reasons. Following evidenced-based approaches and consulting with stakeholders is paramount.

Swansea SACRE is concerned that there is a risk that RE (RVE) could potentially be removed as a mandatory element, without consultation at some stage in the future. The group feel that any significant change to the curriculum should always be consulted upon with all relevant and interested parties.

6. Other considerations

6.1 Do you have any other points you wish to raise about this Bill?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

Overall, we are supportive of curriculum reform. However, given the current disruption to learning caused by the pandemic, and the heavy workload to design local curricula, we feel now is an opportune time to take stock and review the implementation timeline to ensure we get this right for our schools and pupils (for both those now in the system and those in future years)

