

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

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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)

It is very refreshing seeing a new curriculum being designed around a set of principles that set out to define the sort of young people we wish to see emerge from their years of compulsory education. Setting out all the elements of the curriculum experience from the four purposes to the cross-curricular skills, the mandatory elements to the pedagogical principles provides schools with the essential foundations for building an excellent curriculum model. The challenge comes with the local constructs and the fact that very few school staff have the experience of either designing or delivering a curriculum that goes well beyond subject knowledge to a more holistic development of the young person. It will be essential to ensure that staff move beyond the 'descriptions of learning' in the guidance, which is the safe ground to deliver, to the more challenging principles in the Bill. These may well be more demanding for the current cohort of staff in schools but they will eventually be found to be more liberating for teacher and pupil alike.

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. In the context of Welsh Government wanting to create a unique and modern curriculum for schools in Wales then setting out the fundamental principles in legislation is critical. It is effectively the nation defining the future generations of citizens and what they will be capable of contributing to the country's future. Such an enterprise cannot be left to chance therefore setting out the guiding principles and requiring schools, through legislation, to deliver on these ambitions and aspirations is essential. It also provides a consistent framework of accountability for all school settings and gives Estyn the basis for its inspection and reporting regime.

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)

There are a number of potential barriers which I am sure have been identified and are being addressed. These include:

The point made earlier concerning the expertise of the staff and how this bill and the creation of the new curriculum will stretch them well beyond their current experiences.

There is the issue of time. Excellent curriculum development (I have been involved with a number of national science curriculum projects in the past) takes time and cannot be rushed. If it is to be done well then it will also be a considerable collective and collaborative exercise. If the approach is to rely on the teachers currently in schools with their already busy day to day schedules then it is critical to identify how time and space can be made to allow for this developmental work to take place notwithstanding that some are already designing and introducing lessons and topics in the style of the new curriculum.

There is an ongoing need for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in order to upskill all teachers in the range of pedagogy, skills and expectations that are set out in the Bill and associated guidance (draft from January 2020).

The Bill/guidance places an emphasis on co-construction. Within the Science 'What Matters' we find this reference. "Progression of learning is not linear but cyclical with learners revisiting existing knowledge, linking this with their new learning, and adjusting schema in light of new discovery." My concern here is around the connectivity between the primary curriculum across a cluster of schools and the secondary school curriculum which

will later be experienced by the majority of those primary learners. The continuity and progression across the age range of 3-16 requires staff both within and across primary and secondary settings to be co-constructors so that concepts are developed and delivered in a co-ordinated manner. This requires yet more time/input from staff alongside the day job.

In other times major pieces of curriculum development were often undertaken by staff with expertise seconded from their schools who had time and space to produce materials and ideas and then take them back to colleagues in schools and trial/evaluate/refine them. I don't believe this is an approach being taken in Wales so the question remains about how that time and space is being created for the staff preparing the new curriculum under the Bill.

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)

The Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill sets out a number of ways that take account of the barriers I have indicated, in particular sections 3.126 to 3.139. However, while the Welsh Government is making resources available, as always there is the constant tension between releasing staff from the timetable for CPD or curriculum development and not having those staff in front pupils (daytime activity) or significantly extending the working day (after school activity). Whether the lessons for distance working derived from the Covid-19 experience can be used to mitigate some of these impacts remains to be seen.

Reference is made in the Explanatory Memorandum to the use of an extra INSET day. This, however, is a drop in the ocean. A more explicit use of the whole range of INSET days in the lead up to implementation would have alleviated some of the time constraints mentioned above. I feel that the joint planning of INSET days by Heads across clusters and local authorities is greatly underused and should have been given greater prominence in supporting the development of a project that is the size and scope of a brand new 21st century national curriculum for Wales.

In summary I don't believe the Bill gets to the heart of the operational decisions that have to be reached at school level in order to deliver on the contents of the Bill. Whilst various supporting mechanisms are described from section 3.116 to 3.139 in the Explanatory

Memorandum it still leaves considerable individual decision-making at school level rather than supported collective decision-making across the nation.

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)

I don't believe so. The Bill really is a piece of positive legislation. There may, however, be an increase in challenges from parents over some of the mandatory areas where the 'right to withdraw' will no longer exist. It will be interesting to see how Religion, Values and Ethics syllabi develop within the Voluntary Controlled and Aided school sectors and whether two distinct streams of experience might emerge between the agreed and denominational courses.

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)

No

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)

The powers would seem appropriate. In the light of evaluation and development of the new national curriculum it would appear sensible to have these in place to introduce modifications rather than return to primary legislation.

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)

It is a pity that Welsh Government has not taken advantage of this new legislation to look at compulsory components of the curriculum from 3 to 18. I believe that the principles, values and skills envisaged in the Bill for 3-16 year-olds are equally applicable to learners up to 18. They are still in their developmental years and have yet to reach majority.

There is a contentious area in 16-18 education around the delivery of the Welsh Bac and in particular the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate (ASCC). The latter encapsulates many of the skills and attributes articulated in the new national curriculum and its study by post-16 learners on level 3 academic courses should be a compulsory component in their 16-18 curriculum offer. However the Welsh Government has only adopted a mode of encouragement. Schools recognise the benefits of the ASCC for their learners and when they attempt to apply the Welsh Government aspiration of 100% coverage they are left with regular and often heated debates with parents and learners about its inclusion.

I believe that the Bill represents a missed opportunity to embed the principles, values and aspiration of the new curriculum into 16-18 education. Why should the subject curriculum of A levels, BTECs and other qualifications not have the same set of holistic aspirations wrapped around them? I would suggest that a learner who starts his or her journey at age 3 does not complete it by age 16 but continues to grow, develop and mature until 18 and the Bill should have acknowledged that. I am aware that there are complexities when the debate moves beyond schools to the FE sector but that is not an excuse to fail to cement, for all learners across Wales in full time education to age 18, the excellent holistic aspirations contained in the new national curriculum.

Of the two components of the Bill that reference post-compulsory education the first item relating to a broad and balanced curriculum offer is appropriate. I note that the wording used is 'provided' not 'offered'. I believe the latter is more in line with the legislation connected with the Learning and Skills Measure (Wales) which sets out the 'offer' for 16-18 year olds.

The item relating to the teaching and learning of Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) states that there is a duty to provide this where learners request it. I foresee a significant reduction in this across secondary schools for this age group. And yet the debates and learning that learners age 16-18 have on this topic are frequently vibrant and animated. It

is perhaps a time when some of these issues become more cemented in the minds of our young people and therefore the need for debate and to hear differences of opinion and values is all the more essential.

Combining elements of the RVE syllabus with the Citizenship Challenge of the ASCC and enshrining the national curriculum principles along with the cross-curricular skills in the 16-18 post-compulsory curriculum along with PSE programmes is something this Bill should have addressed. As it is we will be left with a diminished offer still suffering the tensions observed earlier and with no semblance of a unified, coherent and holistic curriculum model for 16-18 year-olds. The system at 16-18 will remain fragmented due to the different approaches taken to the curriculum model in individual schools, sixth-form partnerships or FE colleges. A missed opportunity.

