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Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol Dros Dro / Interim Director General

Y Grŵp Addysg, Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a'r Gymraeg /
Education, Social Justice and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Adrian Crompton
Auditor General for Wales
Audit Wales
24 Cathedral Road
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8 June 2022

Dear Adrian

AUDIT WALES REPORT: THE NEW CURRICULUM FOR WALES

I am writing in response to your publication of the above report. Please find enclosed a copy of the government response, which we are also making available on the Welsh Government website.

Our education reform programme is significant in scale and scope. Since we set out proposals in 2015 to transform the curriculum we have embarked on an extensive programme of work, not only to define curriculum expectations and associated assessment requirements but to support partners, schools and settings to realise its benefits to improve learning and teaching for our children and young people. You will recognise this programme of work is much more than a set of discrete deliverables and requires us to maintain focus on building the enthusiasm, motivation and innovation within the classroom that our learners and practitioners deserve. This report is a constructive and strategic input into that process which recognises actions that need to be addressed. You will note that we have accepted the range of recommendations which provide a helpful focus for our ongoing work in supporting the successful implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales over the longer term.



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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

As your recommendations are forward looking, it may be helpful if we return to them in the course of business next year. Our respective teams can stay in touch to determine an appropriate point in time for an update. I am also grateful to your team for constructive discussions with the Welsh Government during the course of this review.

A copy of this response goes to the Senedd's Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee for information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Iolme Rees'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'I' and a long, sweeping tail.

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol Dros Dro / Interim Director General
Y Grŵp Addysg, Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a'r Gymraeg / Education, Social Justice and Welsh
Language

Audit Wales Report: The new Curriculum for Wales Welsh Government response: 26 May 2022

Overall response

The report recognises that Welsh Government worked well with schools to co-design the new curriculum. It also recognises how we have responded to emerging needs as a consequence of the pandemic, while maintaining progress on these reforms.

The Curriculum for Wales emphasises the importance of schools and settings continuing to trial, evaluate and improve their curricula as part of the continuing improvement journey. September 2022 will be a key milestone for primary and many secondary schools, and from September 2023 we will see all schools in Wales teaching the new curriculum.

The National Network will be the centre point for practitioner-led discussions providing feedback and reflections to enable further policy development. It is there to gather and share understanding, co-construct approaches to overcoming challenges, and driving change. In the context of our commitment to the curriculum as practitioner-led we will be keen to understand the nature and scope of thinking around how, when, and what needs updating and improving on an ongoing basis.

The investments we are making in 2022-23 and in the years ahead to support curriculum reform will also support continuous learning in schools and settings. The report highlights that our directly attributable funding for curriculum reform is at the upper end of pre-pandemic projections. That is entirely appropriate. We recognise the disruption that schools and learners have faced over the course of the last two years, and have responded by ensuring that the philosophy of the new curriculum – wellbeing and learner progression – were at the heart of our response to the pandemic. Investment in our Renew and Reform programme aligns with the new curriculum, and we retain a clear and consistent system-wide focus on this. Additionally, to maintain momentum around curriculum reform and to enable learners to benefit from the new curriculum as early as possible, we committed to support schools in their journey to the new curriculum from 2022. The government responded swiftly and positively to those needs, increasing funding to schools, and that is why current spending is at the higher end of pre-pandemic projections. We note the report's reference to innovative working during the pandemic in some schools, and the strong cluster working across Wales as they prepare for the autumn.

We have committed to putting in place a robust programme of evaluation to track and monitor progress. We will publish an evaluation scoping report during the summer term 2022, followed with a more detailed evaluation plan later in the year. The evaluation will seek to examine the extent to which the vision and requirements set out in the national CfW framework are being realised through the actions of schools and the wider education system. Findings will inform system learning continuously and will include both planned and responsive activity.

With the new curriculum being introduced from September, there is every reason to be positive about progress to date, whilst recognising there is more to do over the coming period. The report recognises the integrated nature of the wider education reform agenda: the fundamental importance of professional learning and pedagogy, the work on school improvement, self-evaluation and accountability, the reform of qualifications, and the important role of parents and carers to this programme. It also recognises that, as we progress, the reform agenda is intended to improve educational standards across Wales and specifically to support learners who are disadvantaged or impacted by poverty.

Recommendations

1. To better understand and to support scrutiny of the cost of curriculum reform

It has not been easy for the Welsh Government or us to identify expenditure on curriculum reform to date. In part this is because of difficulties in calculating expenditure specific to curriculum reform as opposed to other elements of the education reform programme, or the Renew and Reform programme, some of which may benefit curriculum reform. However, understanding the cost of curriculum reform is vital to support scrutiny and inform any consideration of value for money.

We recommend that the Welsh Government monitors and reports annually on the costs of its curriculum reform programme including costs to partners and schools. In developing and reporting on its best estimate, the Welsh Government will need to consider the impact of any additional data collection on schools in particular.

Response: Accept

We agree on the need to report on the costs of curriculum reform and have already published information on our plans through the Senedd budget process. As part of this, we identified a number of funded areas of activity that are more specific to curriculum implementation, while recognising that wider funding to schools and settings also supports the provision of learning and teaching and, therefore, new curriculum roll out. As schools are rolling out the curriculum in different ways, assessment of costs by school is administratively challenging. We will continue to be as transparent as possible in reporting on costs including to partners and schools, recognising the impact of additional data collection on schools in particular.

Ministers have already committed to report annually on curriculum implementation, and information on the directly attributable costs associated with these reforms will be included in that reporting process. The first annual report in this process will be published later this summer term.

2. To evaluate the effectiveness of the professional learning programme and support to schools

The Welsh Government has funded professional learning aligned to the new curriculum alongside its wider investment in teachers' professional learning. It has also funded the regional education consortia and partnerships to provide bespoke support for schools. It recently announced a national entitlement to professional learning for all teachers and teaching assistants.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensures that the effectiveness and value for money of its investment in professional learning for teachers and other school staff is evaluated.

Response: Accept

The National Professional Learning Entitlement that will be in place by September 2022 is a recognition that the effectiveness and value for money of provision are critical to the success of the new curriculum. All Professional Learning for all practitioners will be subject

to more rigorous processes of evaluation. I provided a [written statement](#) to the Senedd on 17 May updating Members on progress.

Our evaluation activity will review the extent to which the professional learning offer available to practitioners is conducive to and supportive of the roll out of the new curriculum and of high-quality and improving professional practice.

3. To design and implement new qualifications that support the Welsh Government's ambitions for the new curriculum

The Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales know that qualifications need to change to align with the new curriculum. Qualifications Wales is working with schools, further and higher education and others to co-design the new GCSEs and, subsequently, other qualifications. The detail of the qualifications and forms of assessment is not yet decided.

We recommend that the Welsh Government works with Qualifications Wales to:

- a) monitor teachers' and learners' participation in developing the new qualifications
- b) plan an effective national professional learning programme that will support teachers to deliver the new qualifications
- c) assess the resources needed for professional learning for the new qualifications and any changes to the assessment process, including any greater role for teacher assessment and/or digital technology.

Response: Accept

The Audit Wales report recognises the significant programme of work already underway on the development of new qualifications in support of the new Curriculum for Wales. This includes an ongoing process of engagement and co-construction with the profession and stakeholders. It will also, at the appropriate phase of development, include considerations and provision of fit for purpose support for practitioners.

4. To evaluate the effectiveness of schools' engagement with parents, carers and learners

A positive impact of the pandemic has been to strengthen engagement between schools and families in many cases. Schools will be required to engage with parents and carers about the curricula. Parents, carers and learners should be able to participate in schools' evaluation and improvement. This is underway in some schools.

We recommend that the Welsh Government supports schools to engage effectively with parents, carers and learners and evaluates how well schools are doing this to support improvement.

Response: Accept

We recognise the importance of effective engagement with parents and carers, as well as children and young people, as an integral part of rolling out the Curriculum for Wales. Statutory guidance on the new curriculum already includes expectations on schools and settings.

In taking this forward, we are providing a programme of support for schools and settings to aid their engagement and communications with parents and carers, following detailed research undertaken in 2021. This includes a range of tools and information developed nationally that schools and settings can adapt and use in their communications.

The ongoing evaluation and regular feedback on effectiveness of these approaches is a feature of this ongoing programme of work. Wider evaluative work to consider the views of parents / carers, as well as children and young people, is also a feature of our Evaluation and Monitoring programme – as set out in the Curriculum Implementation Plan published in January 2021.

5. To establish the information needed for a rounded understanding of schools' activities and outcomes

Work to support a national approach to self-evaluation is due to be completed by the end of the 2021/22 academic year. There is less clarity about the process for democratic accountability and transparency, including what information will be available to governors, local or diocesan authorities, parents, carers and the public.

We recommend that the Welsh Government:

- a) establishes what information those charged with holding schools to account, require as part of a new approach to accountability
- b) sets out details on how it will ensure transparency for parents, learners and the public.

Response: Accept

It is critical that the arrangements adopt an approach that uses a **sound evidence base and intelligent use of data** to inform evaluation, improvement planning and effective governance across all educational settings and spanning all agencies and tiers of the system. To that end, research is currently being undertaken to identify and evaluate the data and information requirements of all stakeholders, with a final report due in Autumn 2022.

School improvement guidance is planned for publication at the end of June. The guidance, which sets out a new framework for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability across the school system, will clarify Welsh Government's expectations for how information and evidence should be used by schools and others to evaluate schools and to hold them to account.

6. To ensure the new curriculum remains fit for purpose

The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 introduces a requirement for Ministers to keep the new curriculum under review. It does not set out the mechanism for cyclical review.

We recommend that, once the milestone of first teaching of the new curriculum is achieved, the Welsh Government sets out how it intends to keep the curriculum under review to ensure that it can become embedded and yet remain fit for purpose.

Response: Accept

We agree the importance of focusing clearly on supporting schools and settings to roll out the new curriculum from September 2022 and 2023. We have established a practitioner-led National Network which will enable participants to feed back on areas of improvement as the new curriculum beds in. As this conversation progresses it will support Welsh

Government to develop a curriculum review structure and process. We will also use the annual reporting cycle to the Senedd to draw out any key issues for a review process. The implementation plan set out our approach to evaluation of the reforms. The preparation and scoping phase is now nearing completion, and our evaluation programme will be announced in autumn 2022.