

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Hynt y gwaith gan Lywodraeth Cymru wrth ddatblygu Cwricwlwm newydd Cymru | Welsh Government's progress in developing the new Curriculum for Wales

CR 07

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Genedlaethol yr Ysgolfeistri ac Undeb yr Athrawesau Response from: The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee (CYPEC) in their scrutiny of the Welsh Government's progress in developing the new Curriculum for Wales.
2. The NASUWT is the largest teachers' union in Wales representing teachers and school leaders.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT maintains that Wales has a high-quality system of public education which is amongst the best in the world, and the National Assembly for Wales, the CYPEC and the Welsh Government should ensure that:
 - i. the public service ethos and values which are the foundation of quality public education for all are secured for future generations;
 - ii. the facts about the success of public education in Wales are promoted widely;
 - iii. steps are taken to secure an informed public debate about the quality of public education in Wales;
 - iv. the success of public education is publicly acknowledged and celebrated; and
 - v. international rankings of the performance of education systems are not used as the basis for driving developments in respect of national education policy.
4. The CYPEC should ensure that the Welsh Government builds on what has been successful in public education by:
 - i. securing continued increased investment in schools;

- ii. recognising that the workforce is fundamental to maintaining high-quality provision with conditions of service that enable effective working and recruit the best;
 - iii. improving the availability and quality of support for children, young people and families (including the provision of extended services in and around schools);
 - iv. securing excellence and genuine equality of opportunity for all learners;
 - v. substantially increasing support for teacher development;
 - vi. ensuring that teachers' professional practice is focused on teaching and leading and managing teaching and learning;
 - vii. establishing better support for teachers to secure a good behaviour climate in classrooms; and
 - viii. taking party politics and market principles out of public education, ensuring that policy developments are evidence-based.
5. The NASUWT also maintains that securing high outcomes for all children and young people means that action is needed to:
- i. provide a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum experience fit for the 21st century;
 - ii. ensure parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways and the cognitive, emotional, cultural, creative, ethical and social dimensions of learning;
 - iii. require all publicly funded schools and colleges to work together to secure a comprehensive curriculum entitlement for all 14-19 year olds;
 - iv. equip children and young people to be research-driven problem solvers;
 - v. extend entitlement for all children and young people to high-quality academic and vocational education, coupled with equality of access to high-quality, practical, hands-on, work-based learning opportunities;
 - vi. refocus the accountability system to reflect and support the expectation that all young people should remain in education and training until age 18;
 - vii. restore teacher morale by tackling poor employment practices, securing professional entitlements and respect for teachers, and refocusing the efforts of teachers and headteachers as the leaders of teaching and learning;
 - viii. establish teaching as a Masters-level profession and raise the pay of teachers in recognition of the increased knowledge and skills they bring to the job; and
 - ix. ensure access to high-quality professional development for all teachers throughout their careers.
6. It is clear to the NASUWT that the Professor Donaldson's *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements* recommended significant reforms to current arrangements in line with many

of the principles that the NASUWT sets out above, which were first published in the NASUWT report *Maintaining World Class Schools*.¹

7. While the Welsh Government has accepted the recommendations in *Successful Futures*, and they were generally welcomed by the NASUWT and the profession, the Union has warned that the implementation plan risks excluding the profession from meaningful engagement in the development of policy, in direct contradiction to the key principle set out in the review that the new curriculum should be 'built for the profession, by the profession'.
8. The report itself states:

'One of the tenets of the Review has been the desirability of engaging schools and teachers more directly in shaping the curriculum in ways that meet the needs of their children and young people. For the future, it will be important to nurture and encourage local ownership and responsibility within a clear framework of expectation and support that provides necessary direction and a sense of national purpose.'
9. The NASUWT is concerned that the principles set out in *Successful Futures* regarding subsidiarity and encouraging local ownership and responsibility within a clear national framework of expectation and support have been dissipated.
10. The NASUWT wishes to ensure that the voices of teachers and school leaders are at the heart of developments around curriculum and assessment policy and will continue to campaign to ensure that the Welsh Government moves forward on this basis. The Union seeks the support of the CYPEC in fulfilling that aim.
11. The NASUWT believes that the generality of teachers, including many in the Pioneer Schools network, are currently feeling disenfranchised from the process of building the new curriculum and the Union would not wish to see the mistakes made in Scotland and England, where there was insufficient engagement with the profession, repeated in Wales.
12. In Scotland, significant workload implications have resulted at school level due to the lack of clarity in structures, programmes and engagement at a higher level.
13. In England, despite the close involvement of the NASUWT and other trade unions at stakeholder level with detailed information on progress, the lack of ability to influence curriculum design and content has had a serious impact on schools and staff.

¹ NASUWT, *Maintaining World Class Schools*, April 2013, <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/in-the-classroom/inspection-and-accountability/inspection-in-england/ofsted-inspection/world-class-schools.html>

14. The NASUWT reiterates the view set out in previous evidence to the CYPEC that such a situation can be avoided in Wales if the design of new curriculum and assessment arrangements is workload impact assessed at every stage of development in the Pioneer Schools.² However, the lack of transparency and detailed information over the work being undertaken in the Pioneer Schools does not inspire confidence that workload is being considered.
15. Furthermore, the NASUWT notes that a key theme in the Welsh Government's *Prosperity for All: the national strategy* relates to pupils who are 'Ambitious and learning':

'Our education system must stretch the brightest, while at the same time making sure everyone attains the essential level of skills to build on in later life.'

*'The national strategy will support every learner to overcome the barriers to reaching their full potential. It will reform our approach to additional learning provision, to place learners, parents and carers at the centre of support and develop the skills of the workforce to deliver effective, specialist support for learners at key stages in their lives.'*³

16. The NASUWT believes that there is far to go before such effective specialist support is achieved in a credible way for all school-based practitioners.
17. The overall view of the current position is that NASUWT members report that they have lost faith in the progress and development of the reforms and that trust and belief in the process has been seriously undermined.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

18. The NASUWT offers the following comments and observations on the areas under scrutiny by the CYPEC.

Progress towards producing a draft Curriculum for Wales in time for its publication by the Welsh Government for public feedback in April 2019

19. The NASUWT maintains that there is no equitable or indeed linear development across Wales as far as the curriculum is concerned. The Union also believes that there are many presumptions around the philosophy behind the proposed Wales curriculum design and that the emerging curriculum design may differ considerably from those that eventually result on a national basis.
20. The NASUWT notes that Estyn has identified that:

'the curriculum lacks coherence and has become over-crowded, disjointed or patchy.'

² <http://senedd.assembly.wales/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?lId=12513>

³ Welsh Government, *Prosperity for All: the national strategy*, 2017 <https://gov.wales/about/programme-for-government/?lang=en>

And

*'there is still too much emphasis on stand-alone projects or bolted-on elements to the curriculum rather than a fully integrated approach to curriculum planning'*⁴

The role of Pioneer Schools and any opportunities and challenges in their involvement in curriculum design

21. It is the experience of the NASUWT that in many Pioneer Schools the so-called 'co-construction' is being undertaken by a small select group of staff, usually at a senior level, and education 'experts'. In many cases, the majority of other staff in the school are not involved, are not engaged and have little information as to any of the work being undertaken.
22. It is clear to the Union that there has been a lack of meaningful engagement with staff. If the principles set out in *Successful Futures* mean that the whole of the wider education workforce should be involved, particularly classroom practitioners, then the current developments are evidently failing the test.
23. The NASUWT notes that the report for the Welsh Government, *Formative Evaluation of the Pioneer School Model*, states:

*'Pioneer School representatives – senior managers and other practitioners engaged in the process – are enthusiastic about their experiences of being involved in the curriculum reform process.'*⁵
24. The NASUWT is concerned that in schools the big decision to change the curriculum has been made by senior staff and by those directly involved with the new design in Pioneer Schools. This is often perceived to be at an 'expert level', with little consideration for the views of the majority of teachers in the school.
25. The Union maintains that the majority of school staff are not engaged with the project and have had little information regarding any progress being made, while the rhetoric of the curriculum being co-constructed with the profession is far from the reality of the situation.
26. The NASUWT is extremely concerned that current versions of the design of the curriculum will reduce the need for specialist subject teachers as well as the traditional distinction between core and foundation subjects. This may cause schools and local authorities to reduce costs by lowering teaching staffing levels, leading to redundancies or the loss of key leadership posts in staffing structures.

⁴ Estyn thematic review, *Curriculum innovation in primary schools*, May 2018.

⁵ Arad/ICF Consulting, *Formative Evaluation of the Pioneer School Model, Final Report*, July 2018.

The latest position regarding the work of the Working Groups which have been established for each of the six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE)

27. The NASUWT notes that Estyn has also stated that:

*'Most pioneer schools have focused on delivering aspects of the AoLEs. However, they have not considered well enough the way teachers deliver their lessons or the impact of teaching approaches on pupils' learning and achievement'*⁶

28. The Union notes that the Working Groups published updates on their designs for the AoLEs and provided these to the Curriculum and Assessment Group in December 2017. This is now some 11 months ago and the NASUWT is only aware of one further update which was presented to the Strategic Stakeholder Group on December 4th and involved a draft Curriculum plan for the 'Health and Wellbeing' AoLE.

The involvement of academic and other external expertise in informing curriculum design

29. Alongside other elements of the reform programme, the NASUWT does not have a clear idea of who is involved in providing external expertise, where they are undertaking the work, what they are saying and doing and how this is feeding into the work being undertaken in schools. This is again one of the fundamental flaws of the project.

30. In some instances, the NASUWT understands that senior staff leading the development in Pioneer Schools have little or no expertise in the area of the curriculum with which they are engaged.

31. The NASUWT has serious concerns that the methodology now being used to develop the curriculum will result in a programme that will not stand up to scrutiny in the long term as it will not have been properly tested by teachers in a variety of forms, settings and ability ranges.

How the 'What Matters?' statements, published in December 2017, are evolving into the design of curriculum content in each of the six AoLEs

32. The absence of any further updates noted above is a major cause for concern and the NASUWT is unsure whether there has been any evolution of the curriculum content.

33. Furthermore, the Union is aware that the focus of many schools appears to be on the delivery and pedagogy of the curriculum design rather than on what constitutes actual content. The NASUWT is aware that this philosophy is in accordance with Professor Donaldson's beliefs in the development of the

⁶ Estyn, May 2018, Op. cit.

curriculum but that the lack of any real content is a concern to teachers throughout Wales.

34. The NASUWT is very concerned that in developing the AoLEs, practitioners will need to specify curriculum content and ways to measure progress. The Union understands that many staff report that they have not been properly consulted, upskilled or trained. They feel that in the absence of specialist help and trialling curriculum content and assessment arrangements are potentially compromised.
35. Despite this, the Union is aware that some schools are already rewriting the curriculum down to the detail of lesson planning without a clear idea of what the new curriculum actually is. This may have a detrimental impact on pupils' learning and progress.
36. Most worrying is that the NASUWT has suspicions that Estyn is bending the curriculum and assessment reforms to their vision of education rather than the one encapsulated by *Successful Futures* and *A Curriculum for Life*. The NASUWT noted at the outset that it would be essential for Estyn, as a key driver of behaviour in schools, to be fully on-board with the reforms and that its role should be to support the work taking place by practitioners in classrooms. Without this the reforms, including the changes brought forward by the Welsh Government to school accountability, would not be altered for the good if Estyn's work failed to align.

How the development of the new Curriculum for Wales is aligning with the development of the new national professional learning offer for teachers

37. The Arad/ICF Consulting report maintains that:

'There has generally been a lack of structure in place to facilitate collaboration and ensure coherence across the curriculum, professional learning and digital strands of activity. In particular, there have been challenges associated with establishing how the new curriculum and professional learning could be developed in tandem.

'Pioneer Schools reported a lack of awareness of activities taking place across the curriculum, professional learning and digital activity areas with which they are not directly involved.'⁷

38. Whilst accepting that some of the initiatives for professional learning are at an embryonic stage, the NASUWT is particularly concerned at the disjointed and piecemeal approach that is currently available to staff. The budget pressures on schools are having a dramatic effect on the ability of staff to access learning opportunities and, although the recent announcement by the Cabinet Secretary for Education regarding the National Approach to

⁷ Arad/ICF Consulting, Op. cit.

Professional Learning is welcome, the Union is unsure as to the impact this will have in the short and medium term.⁸

Communication with schools and teachers of the curriculum development work being undertaken and the engagement of all schools (not only Pioneer Schools)

39. The NASUWT notes that Estyn has concluded that:

*'Very few [Pioneer Schools] collaborate with others to evaluate the appropriateness of current teaching practices and whether they are well placed to deliver the four purposes of Successful Futures.'*⁹

40. In addition, the report for the Welsh Government, *Formative Evaluation of the Pioneer School Model*, states:

*'The challenges include (but are not limited to): coordinating activity across a large number of diverse schools; ensuring that there is continuity and progression in curriculum design built into the model across different strands of activity; managing working partnerships across organisations; communicating progress and ensuring buy-in among Partner Schools; and reconciling curriculum development with the assessment framework.'*¹⁰

41. The NASUWT maintains that this is the biggest issue facing schools and teachers across Wales. The lack of a clear communication strategy of all of the partners in developing the new curriculum is not only hampering the progression of the development but is excluding most of the teaching profession from the programme.

42. NASUWT members report an almost complete lack of involvement and understanding of the curriculum developments, which results in their isolation, confusion, frustration and dissatisfaction.

Effectiveness of the governance arrangements, role of the Independent Advisory Group and Chair Board, and involvement of the Education Reform Strategic Stakeholder Group

43. The NASUWT remains concerned that the Strategic Stakeholder Group, which, after a great deal of pressure had included trade union representatives, has not met for some considerable time. This body appears to have been marginalised.

⁸ <https://gov.wales/newsroom/educationandskills/2018/kirsty-williams-announces-single-biggest-investment-in-support-for-teachers/?lang=en>

⁹ Estyn, May 2018, Op. cit.

¹⁰ Arad/ICF Consulting, Op. cit.

44. The Union questions seriously the role of these bodies and their effectiveness in monitoring the development of the new curriculum. Indeed, the NASUWT is concerned that the Change Board, which comprises the education establishment rather than the profession, may now be leading the process.

The preparedness of schools and teachers for delivering the new curriculum and to what some extents of the concepts of Professor Donaldson's *Successful Futures* review are being tested and carried out already

45. The NASUWT is aware that restructuring of staffing structures and Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) Payments along the lines of the AoLEs is taking place in many schools who wish to 'get ahead of the curve'. This is especially the case in schools which have moved into new buildings as a result of the investment from the 21st Century Schools initiative.
46. The reality of this means the removal of middle leaders in key curriculum areas and handing over qualification responsibilities to staff who may not be specialists in those curriculum areas. The NASUWT believes that this is being done on the mistaken assumption that teachers who have lost their TLRs will carry on with their middle leader duties on the basis that they have been paid on the Upper Pay Spine or that they are in receipt of three years pay protection. This is not the case, as it would not be in accordance with teachers' conditions of service, and there is the real risk of lower standards in key areas up to the implementation of the new qualifications planned for 2025.
47. In many places, this approach has been challenged by the NASUWT based on a lack of concrete and tried systems, the incompleteness of Donaldson in its original form, the likely impact on staffing, and the impact on teaching and learning.
48. In other schools, existing curriculum structures have continued around the previous levels of importance and indicators of success. This is causing a dichotomy across Wales.
49. In the new design of 'all-through' schools, this practice is causing issues particularly with the teaching of core subjects in lower school (mainly primary). The NASUWT is aware that issues relating to poor planning have been raised and that progression is disadvantaging mathematics teaching and learning. There is the possibility that schemes of work in lower schools and primary schools may be at odds with approaches taken at middle and upper stages. There are concerns that the secondary approach is dictating pedagogy in lower schools. In order to promote the continuum of learning, teachers are asked to teach outside their subject specialism and age group, albeit through a theme or project.
50. The NASUWT is not aware of any evidence that all-through or all-age schools provide any benefits to pupils in either curriculum provision or in the general standard of education. The current trend towards these schools appears to be

a fad driven by the 21st Century Schools programme in a so-called ‘innovative’ model that provides access to capital funds.

51. The Union requests that the CYPEC, through its influence, directs Estyn to undertake a thematic survey of all-through provision to ascertain whether there are any real benefits, or whether certain groups of pupils, not least primary pupils who may join an all-through school in Year 7, are disadvantaged.

The role of the Curriculum and Assessment Group in ensuring the development of the curriculum is on track and the outcome of its ‘checkpoint’ meeting of 13-14 November 2018 to review progress

52. The NASUWT is not aware of any announcements or publications that have stemmed from the Curriculum and Assessment Group. In the absence of any meetings of the Strategic Stakeholder Group to provide updates, the NASUWT, teachers, leaders, schools and the wider public are reliant on the provision of public statements. This is not an acceptable state of affairs and again raises questions on the principle of subsidiarity.

Progress in developing new assessment arrangements

53. The NASUWT continues to raise concerns regarding the future relationship between the new curriculum, examination arrangements and post-14 education. The Union understands that experienced teachers fear that, despite the graduated attempts to focus more on the essential learning objectives associated with KS3 and KS4 subjects, an integrated approach to the curriculum with an associated loss of specialist teaching time, will impact negatively on the status of the subject. This will adversely impact on the ability of children to manage subjects at GCSE.

The steps being taken to ensure that the new Curriculum for Wales complements other Welsh Government priorities, including (but not restricted to) Cymraeg 2050

54. The NASUWT has no information on how this is being taken forward.

Any other issue stakeholders wish to draw to the Committee’s attention.

55. The NASUWT insists that strategies must be put in place to ensure that the new curriculum does not become workload intensive. The Welsh Government has done very little since the publication of the *National Education Workforce Survey* in 2017 to bear down on workload.¹¹ No further activity or actions have taken place, except for the publication of joint guidance by

¹¹ Welsh Government, *National Education Workforce Survey*, April 2017, <https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/policy-hub/national-education-workforce-survey.html>

Estyn in September 2017.¹² The Welsh Government workload stakeholder group last met on 5th December 2017.

56. The NASUWT finds this unacceptable and the workload burdens placed on classroom teachers and school leaders must be minimised if the reforms are to genuinely benefit the profession and as a result the pupils in their charge.
57. The NASUWT believes that the biggest failing, apart from the marginalising of classroom teachers, has been the lack of a clear and robust communication strategy, and the NASUWT considers that it is vital that the CYPEC makes this a priority.

¹² Estyn, et al, Reducing workload for teachers and headteachers, September 2017, <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/reducing-workload-teachers-and-headteachers>