

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 30

Ymateb gan: Mudiad Meithrin

Response from: Mudiad Meithrin

### **Mudiad Meithrin's Background**

Mudiad Meithrin is a voluntary organisation offering provisions of *Cylchoedd Meithrin* (Welsh-medium playgroups), *cylchoedd Ti a Fi* (parent and toddler groups), wraparound care and Welsh-medium day nurseries. The Mudiad is the largest provider of Welsh-medium early years care and education in the voluntary sector in Wales. Mudiad Meithrin was established in 1971 with 50 *cylchoedd meithrin* to its name. Today there are 1000 *cylchoedd meithrin*, *cylchoedd Ti a Fi*, 'Cymraeg for Kids' groups and day nurseries working under the Mudiad's banner.

Each week these provide early years experiences to approximately 22,000 children. In addition, the Mudiad works closely with parents to provide advice and support, enabling them to continue the *cylch*'s work within the home, and also opportunities to begin learning Welsh through the 'Clwb Cwtsh' scheme.

To this end, Mudiad Meithrin employs 200 people nationally and has a further 2000 working within the *cylchoedd* themselves. The *cylchoedd* are supported by a national network of professional staff, who advise on a wide range of matters, such as encouraging good practice, staff training, linguistic matters and Local Authority contact.

The Mudiad works with children and families from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. We work in collaboration with the *Flying Start* agencies to provide opportunities in the least affluent areas, and with local education authorities to offer part time education to 3 year olds within their local community.

In addition, we have a subsidiary company that provides Welsh-medium training for early years qualifications. This is done by working with secondary schools to provide courses for school pupils, and through the national training plans. Training based on work-based

learning is provided by a network of tutors, assessors and internal verifiers across Wales.

**We note that the terms of the inquiry intends to focus in particular on the following:**

**Progress on the production of a draft Curriculum for Wales in order for the Welsh Government to publish and gather feedback from the public in April 2019;**

**The role of the Pioneer Schools and any opportunities and challenges facing them as they contribute to the planning of the curriculum;**

**Update on the work of the Working Groups set up to deal with each of the six Areas of Learning and Experience;**

The contribution of academic experts and other external experts in the planning of the curriculum;

How the 'What's Important?' statements, published in December 2017, are being developed to create the content of the curriculum in each of the six Areas of Learning and Experience;

**The progress in defining achievement results while progressing through the various stages of the new curriculum;**

How the development of the new Curriculum for Wales is in line with the development of the new national professional teacher learning offer;

To inform schools and teachers about the work underway to develop the curriculum and content of each school (not just the Pioneer Schools);

**The effectiveness of the governance arrangements, the role of the Independent Advisory Group and the Board of Change, and the contribution of Strategic Stakeholder Group on Education Reform;**

**The readiness of schools and teachers to introduce the new curriculum and the extent to which the concepts of Professor Donaldson's report on its review, 'Successful Futures', are already being tested and implemented;**

**How the Curriculum and Assessment Group are ensuring that the development of the Curriculum is on track and the outcome of the meeting held on 13 and 14 November 2018 to review progress;**

**Progress in developing new assessment arrangements;**

**The steps taken to ensure that the new Curriculum for Wales complements other Government priorities, including (but not limited to) Cymraeg 2050;**

**Any other matter which stakeholders wish to draw the Committee's attention.**

Although the situation of non-maintained settings providing Foundation Phase Education for three year olds (funded by local authorities in Wales) is not obviously within the inquiry's remit, Mudiad Meithrin is of the opinion that we have important and relevant information to share with the Children and Young People Committee. The funding rates for three year olds in the non-maintained sector do not correspond to the rates given to schools. Nevertheless the expectations in terms of the inspection and implementation of the Welsh Education Curriculum is the same as within the statutory sector. Mudiad Meithrin is supporting 269 Foundation Phase provisions within Cylchoedd Meithrin, and 14 Foundation Phase provisions within nurseries. All locations are inspected against the ESTYN Foundation Phase framework as well as being inspected by the Care Inspectorate for Wales.

We present information about Mudiad Meithrin's experiences of the reformation of the Curriculum for Wales. Our evidence is relevant to most areas of the above terms of reference.

Mudiad Meithrin is funded by the Foundation Phase Department to employ a Foundation Phase Chief Officer. The main focus of this work is:

- Raising standards among education providers for 3 year olds in Cylchoedd Meithrin and nurseries (which are funded to provide part time education)
- Organizing good practice dissemination and training events to correspond with the Foundation Phase Implementation Plan.
- Advising on relevant aspects and raising awareness of the Curriculum for Wales amongst its members
- Being active members of the Foundation Phase Excellence Forum which is administered by the Government's Foundation Phase Department.

Through the Excellence Forum (a multi-agency group), there was a clear demand for the Foundation Phase to have a voice and influence the process of creating the new curriculum. Despite the best efforts of the Foundation Phase Department, the response from the departments charged with developing the new curriculum, has been slow. We were informed (mostly through meetings of the Excellence Forum) that the pioneer schools were chosen by the Regional Consortia. It seems that when choosing which schools were to be part of this innovative work, expertise in Foundation

Phase was not specified in the criteria. This is regrettable, and our more recent findings support that this has been a weakness and disadvantage to the development of the curriculum from the beginning.

Mudiad Meithrin (and several others) repeatedly made it known that there was no innovative work happening in the non-maintained sector, and this would put our education providers at a disadvantage as the curriculum is developed. Nevertheless our recommendations were not acted upon, and we have yet to receive opportunities to be involved in the grass roots level development and implementation of the new curriculum in the very early years.

When members for the working groups of the 7 areas of learning were appointed, Mudiad Meithrin (and other partners) requested that the early years were given a strong voice, and also that the needs of the non-maintained sector were given consideration when implementing the new curriculum outside of schools. The task of securing representation was time-consuming but thanks to the Foundation Phase Department within the government there was agreement eventually to allow some representatives of the Foundation Phase to attend meetings and participate. (This happened in spring / summer 2018).

By the time these representatives were included; the 'What Matters' statements had been produced, together with each of the progression steps up including first step at 5 years old. Although the Foundation Phase Department and various individuals have been successful in influencing the content of these groups (over the last three months), we feel that the work has been rushed and the planning has been inadequate.

An invitation came to Mudiad Meithrin to send practitioners from Cylchoedd Meithrin to meetings that had already been convened and were already developing their work programme. Members of the Areas of Learning and Experience groups were all fully funded for their time and work through education funding arrangements. Their travel and accommodation costs were paid, and between September and the present they attended approximately 9 meetings, each one lasting a full day.

As the non-maintained education workforce tends to work part-time and within small organisations (where financial sustainability is a challenge and where wages are low), this affected their availability. It was very difficult for them to participate in the meetings. Despite assurances from the Welsh Government staff that costs would be repaid promptly and that it would be possible to claim back salary costs for *cylchoedd* who released staff, this did not happen in a timely way. This meant that the handful of practitioners who had tried to participate in the Areas of Learning and Experience groups had been out of pocket for in excess of a month, and therefore were not

able to continue their involvement. Mudiad Meithrin made a request for funding to directly manage the financial side for practitioners in order to reduce financial barriers to their involvement, but this was not possible.

In terms of the content of the work that has been developed by the Areas of Learning and Experience Groups, there have been major changes and improvements over the past three months. The absence of input from Foundation Phase general practitioners and specialist teachers was evident in the early drafts of these groups. There was no consideration as to how 3-year-olds develop. Several areas of learning had been overly complicated for the early years and so, much hard work has taken place to try to make improvements in a manner that respects the pedagogical principles of the Foundation Phase.

We continue to work with the various groups whenever opportunity arises, but the timetable is tight and therefore the obstacles and challenges are still in place. We would like to make some recommendations to ensure future improvements:

- Purposeful planning to deliver the 2050 Welsh Language Strategy. There is no indication in the current work of how the aim of creating Welsh speakers in the Foundation Phase will take place across Wales for everyone, whether in Welsh, Bilingual or English schools.
- Documents that relate to the pedagogy of the curriculum need to incorporate an understanding of the fact that we are a nation that has two official languages, and therefore we require a full understanding of the impact of second and third language acquisition in learning and teaching, in particular during the first years of a child's education.
- Currently the Welsh language feels like a side issue to the process of curriculum development. Mudiad Meithrin was invited to attend some stakeholder meetings in addition to some of the recent AOLE groups' meetings, and it must be noted that English was the sole language of these meetings, without there being Welsh translations of relevant documents available.
- Mudiad Meithrin would like to see innovative work taking place within the non-maintained sector so that 3-year-old education does not miss out on the new developments because of a lack of experimentation and participation. We are confident that many venues would willingly participate in this challenge as they are used to working to the pedagogical principles underpinning the Curriculum for Wales.

- There has been no discussion nor information shared to date regarding how the ' Curriculum for Wales ' will be incorporated into relevant qualifications of the non-maintained education workforce. This workforce follows dedicated early years care and education qualifications, and a new series of qualifications will be used from September 2019-2020
- Information has not yet been shared regarding how the non-maintained sector will be trained to deliver the Curriculum for Wales. This sector receives no support through Regional Consortia<sup>1</sup>. Non-maintained settings are currently supported by advisory teachers, under the control of the local authorities. We have seen major reduction in the funding that has been available to train and support the sector over the past few years. We are concerned that without specific investment to train education practitioners in the non-maintained sector, it will not be possible for our practitioners to introduce the New Curriculum.
- There are currently non-maintained settings providing education for 3-year-olds which are encouraged to use the Foundation Phase Profile as a means of recording children's progress. No details have been shared regarding any proposed changes to the recording of children's progress in the early years, as far as we know. We look forward to having an input into the development of whatever form the future profile takes.

We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to this inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a complicated picture across Wales. EAS does in fact manage the funding that employs the advisory teachers directly and works with non-maintained settings across the Consortia. This is not the case in the other 3 Consortia who pass funding on to Local authorities. The support available in each local authority varies and is often not available through the medium of Welsh.