



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 21 October 2021

New Curriculum Progress Update

Purpose:	To brief/update the Scrutiny Panel on school improvement
Content:	A briefing/update on: 1. CfW 2022 Progress Update
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and give views
Lead Councillor:	Councillor R Smith, Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills
Lead Officer & Report Author:	Damien Beech, Head of School Improvement Team (Temporary) Tel: 07810506259 E-mail: Damien.Beech@swansea.gov.uk

1. Background

- 1.1 Curriculum reform is a significant part of the Welsh Government's strategy to improve education in Wales. The overall strategy is articulated in the Welsh Government's action plan for 2017-2021, Education in Wales: Our national mission.
- 1.2 At the end of January 2020, the Welsh Government published the final version of the Curriculum for Wales along with a summary of the proposed legislation that is intended to lay the foundations for the start of the new curriculum in September 2022. The framework is high-level and requires schools to create a curriculum based on the needs of their learners. As a result, schools and teachers have the significant responsibility of selecting and organising the knowledge, skills and experiences that learners will need to acquire to embody the four purposes.
- 1.3 To support schools with developing the new curriculum, the Education Directorate set up a working group – Swansea Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment Group, SCTAG – which developed a four-phase local implementation plan based on strong evidence-based approaches.
- 1.4 The four-phase plan was launched in February 2020 at the Headteacher Cross-phase Conference – *The Science of Learning*. Professor Stuart Kime led the

conference and delivered a session on the best evidenced-informed approaches to curriculum design, teaching and learning, and assessment. The evidence-based approaches complement the Schools as Learning Organisation model and the Teaching and Leadership Standards. These both expect teachers to take responsibility for their professional learning by keeping abreast of research findings to inform their practice.

- 1.5 Shortly after the launch of the four-phase plan, schools went into lockdown due to the pandemic. Since that point, the work of SCTAG has been paused as schools have grappled with the challenges created by the pandemic.
- 1.6 In November 2020, the Welsh Government released its version of a four-phased implementation plan entitled, The Journey to 2022. This has subsequently been updated in September with, Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum roll-out.
- 1.7 In the summer term, 2021, the Welsh Government announced that secondary schools could opt to delay the implementation of the curriculum to September 2023. If secondary schools take this option, they will need to implement their new curriculum for both Year 7 and Year 8 at the same time.
- 1.8 In September 2021, the Welsh Government released updated guidance for the implementation of the new curriculum, Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum rollout. The guidance has been updated in the light of the pandemic and sets out expectations that curriculum design and learning should focus both on:
 - ‘renew’ - adapting and reprioritising learning and teaching to ensure learners progress in light of COVID-19
 - ‘reform’ - preparing for the roll-out of Curriculum for Wales

2. Briefing/Main Body of Report

- 2.1 Overall, the impact of the pandemic has slowed the LA’s and schools’ preparations for the new curriculum.
- 2.2 Despite the pandemic, elements of curriculum development and related aspects continued. For example, schools continued to share good practice related to teaching and learning through our CoL and SCASEN networks. Practice shared has had a strong focus on developing effective teaching and learning approaches through digital technology. This has led to many innovative approaches being developed that will support the new curriculum well.
- 2.3 In addition, during the pandemic, the training delivery and offer to governors has been modernised. Virtual sessions have brought about an increase to governor attendance. Curriculum-related training from school improvement officers has focussed on Blended Learning, Curriculum Questions, Assessment and Evidenced-Informed Governors. Feedback from the sessions has been positive and the training has supported governors in their understanding of developing evidence-informed approaches to curriculum development.

- 2.4 At the national level, despite the pandemic, the Welsh Government pressed ahead with its curriculum reform agenda. In March 2021, the Curriculum for Wales bill was passed, a review looking at how BAME aspects should be developed in the curriculum was published, and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) statutory frameworks were developed. Furthermore, in the summer term of 2021, eight curriculum-related consultations were released, as well as a Qualifications Wales consultation on qualifications reform.
- 2.5 To relieve pressure on schools, officers developed draft consultation responses to share with schools. Senior leaders hugely appreciated these, as they were able to use them to support their responses. In September, another consultation was released on Assessment arrangements: subordinate legislation resultant of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021. This closes on 31 October 2021.
- 2.6 In the summer term, 2021, the Welsh Government approached Swansea Council to develop a trial for the new RSE framework. Seventeen schools are involved. The trial will run in the first half of the autumn term and it will consider how the schools use the new framework to plan RSE in the new curriculum. It will also consider any community sensitivities related to this aspect of the curriculum. Key findings from the trial will be shared with schools across Wales.
- 2.7 Swansea's SACRE provided the main feedback to the consultation with the RVE framework. Its main concerns being that the guidance was not clear enough and would not provide teachers with sufficient support for planning and teaching of RVE. Overall, SACRE noted that the schools would benefit from more examples of evidence-informed practice to support them in their planning and resourcing.
- 2.8 The Education Directorate has appointed a 0.4 RVE/RSE adviser to support the work around the new statutory frameworks for RVE and RSE as well as supporting SACRE in their duties to have a locally agreed syllabus for RVE.
- 2.9 To support schools with curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment, local and regional officers have facilitated programmes for schools to participate in, such as:
- Professor Mick Waters
 - The Great Teaching Toolkit
 - 5 steps to the curriculum

3. Conclusions/Key Points Summary

- 3.1 In light of the Welsh Government's, Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum rollout, officers will need to consider re-establishing SCTAG and updating the local implementation plan.
- 3.2 Concerns remain over schools capacity to engage fully with curriculum reform. Currently, the pandemic is affecting school staff significantly, and the ability of schools to release staff for curriculum-related development is difficult. The

Welsh Government has recognised this challenge, somewhat, in its new guidance with a more sensitive language around readiness, for example, it states: “*We do not expect schools to have perfected or completed all aspects of curriculum design reform by roll-out*”.

3.3 A significant degree of high-quality professional learning is taking place through support programmes, training and school networks. This needs to continue in a way that is sensitive to the challenges that schools still face in the pandemic.

3.4 School Improvement Advisers and Curriculum Advisers will need to sensitively monitor and support schools in areas related to curriculum development.

4. Legal implications

4.1 There are no legal implications.

5. Finance Implications

5.1 There are no finance implications.

6. Equality & Engagement Implications

6.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and the Socio-economic Duty (Wales) must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Ensure that decisions do not impact negatively on people with fewer financial means.

Our Integrated Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

Glossary of terms:

Acronym	Expansion
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
CoL	Continuity of Learning
SCASEN	Secondary Curriculum and School Evaluation Network
SCTAG	Swansea Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment Group
CfW	Curriculum for Wales
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
RVE	Religion, Values and Ethics
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Background papers: None

Appendices: None