



Education and Skills Policy Development Committee – 5 August 2020

Draft Report of the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee

Cabinet – 17 September 2020

Implications and Preparation for the New Curriculum in Swansea Schools

Purpose:	To consider implications and preparation undertaken for the introduction of the new curriculum in Wales.
Policy Framework:	Welsh Government Curriculum and Assessment Reform Education in Wales: Our National Mission 2017-2021 Regional Strategy ERW 2019-2022
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance and Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Swansea identifies and continually reviews its school support needs as the new curriculum evolves. It will deliver information, assistance and influence via various methods, including regional partnerships, where appropriate.2. A Swansea-wide Professional Learning Community (PLC) is further developed to share effective practice, ideas and learning. The PLC will continue to harness opportunities to work with external partners, as appropriate, including both Universities.3. Swansea schools and officers maintain mechanisms to systematically share good practice on-line by sustaining and building on existing platforms.4. Meaningful pupil progress and achievement indicators are developed locally and in collaboration with Welsh Government.5. Robust systems of moderation, based on the cluster model, to ensure consistency of assessment practice across Swansea to support rigorous and reliable teacher assessment are sustained.6. School leadership capacity, at all levels, to deliver curriculum reform is supported, including partnership with the National Academy, where appropriate.

7. Ensure the workforce skills needed to deliver the new curriculum by maintaining systems to identify and meet continual professional development needs for all school practitioners.
8. Ensure skills learning for current and future occupations, including digital learning, is embedded into the curriculum in all Swansea schools in collaboration with Swansea's Skills Partnership / Partneriaeth Sgiliau Abertawe (PSA).
9. Swansea's curriculum implementation guidance moves into planning phases 3 and 4 following the successful milestones reached in phases 1 and 2 (appendix A).

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1. Introduction

- 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
- 1.2 The curriculum reform journey began back in March 2014 when the Minister for Education at that time, Huw Lewis, invited Professor Graham Donaldson, one of the architects of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, to review the Welsh National Curriculum. Prior to this work, the last significant change to the curriculum took place in 2008, when all the subject orders were revised. After poor PISA outcomes in 2009, the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) was added, along with national literacy and numeracy tests. In 2014, the English, Welsh and mathematics orders were amended to align more closely with the LNF. In the following years, changes to common GCSE qualifications were made.
- 1.3 In February 2015, after less than a year, which included the *Great Debate*², Donaldson published the findings and recommendations of his review in the report: *Successful Futures, Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales*³.
- 1.4 The report was wide-ranging in scope covering curriculum, teaching, assessment, and system evaluation. It contained 68 recommendations in total. The four purposes provided the overarching design of the curriculum, which were, and remain:
 - ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
 - healthy, confident individuals ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

- ethical, informed citizens ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
- enterprising, creative contributors ready to play a full part in life and work

In addition to the four purposes, six areas of learning and experience would replace subject disciplines. Literacy, numeracy and digital skills would be cross-cutting themes. The report also outlined twelve pedagogical principles. Notably, Donaldson's principle of subsidiarity would mean teachers and schools would have the freedom and responsibility to design their own local curricula.

- 1.5 Although the *Great Debate* only lasted 10 weeks, and commentators expressed concerns over the haste at which it had taken place, the *Successful Futures* report and its recommendations were broadly welcomed by stakeholders. There was a sense of excitement at the prospect of curriculum reform as noted by Dr Phillip Dixon, director of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers Cymru, at that time⁴.
- 1.6 In July 2015, Huw Lewis and the Welsh Government formally accepted Donaldson's proposals in full and began planning for the implementation in their education strategy, *A Curriculum for Wales, A Curriculum for Life*⁵, which was published in October 2015. Later that year, in May 2016, Huw Lewis stood down as an Assembly Member and was replaced by Kirsty Williams as Minister for Education.
- 1.7 In December 2016, Wales' PISA outcomes were disappointing. After a rapid review⁶ undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) during the following year, Kirsty Williams and the Welsh Government, supported by OECD's report, maintained the ambitious curriculum reform programme. Furthermore, the Welsh Government adopted OECD's *Schools as Learning Organisations*⁷ model that is based on seven action-oriented dimensions, which the OECD believes help schools to transform into learning organisations.
- 1.8 As part of the curriculum reform preparation, Welsh Government's Children and Young People's Committee heard concerns⁸ from pioneer schools stating they had not received clear guidance on what they needed to do, and further concerns⁹ from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) and the teaching unions on the vague nature of the initial curriculum reform work. Additionally, commentators pointed to issues in Scotland, where the Curriculum for Excellence, which is based on four capacities that are virtually identical to the four purposes outlined in *Successful Futures*, has encountered challenges. A recent review by the Scottish Parliament Education Committee published a damning report¹⁰ on the narrowing of subjects being taken by pupils in secondary schools. As a result of the review, and wider concerns in general, the OECD has been asked to conduct a review¹¹ of the Curriculum for Excellence during

2020-2021; this is the second review in six years on the difficulties of implementing the Curriculum for Excellence.

- 1.9 In spring 2019, the Welsh Government consulted on its White Paper; *Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum*¹². The consultation received 1780 responses, in total. To the first question, “*Do you agree with our approach to legislating for the new curriculum structure*”, over sixty-four per cent responded “*No*”. The feedback highlighted that while there was broadly consistent support for the underpinning principles, notwithstanding the response to the first question, respondents had significant concerns over a lack of detail and clarity on the proposed content, and impact on teachers’ workload in designing, resourcing and implementing the new curriculum.
- 1.10 In March 2019, the Welsh Government published a draft version of the Curriculum for Wales, which had been co-constructed by working groups of experts and teachers from pioneer schools. Alongside the contributions received through workshops and focus groups, the Welsh Government received 1,680 contributions online and via email for feedback¹³ on the draft curriculum. Most respondents said the guidance needed to be improved to help “*understand and implement the curriculum in practice*”.
- 1.11 In response to the weight of the feedback on the draft curriculum, the Welsh Government instigated a Response to Feedback Phase¹⁴, which included selecting Quality Improvement and Innovation schools from the existing pioneer-school network. These schools, along with experts from Glasgow University, University of Wales Trinity St David, the Welsh Government and regional consortia leads, were tasked with refining the draft curriculum documentation by responding to the key questions raised in the feedback, such as manageability, accessibility, learner progression and the curriculum framework to support teachers’ planning.
- 1.12 At the end of January 2020, the Welsh Government published the final version of the Curriculum for Wales¹⁵ 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.
- 1.13 The Welsh Parliament’s Children, Young People and Education Committee has announced a consultation on the Welsh Government’s Curriculum and Assessment Bill¹⁶. The consultation will consider:
 - the general principles of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill and whether there is a need for legislation to deliver the Bill’s stated policy objectives
 - any potential barriers to the implementation of the provision and whether the Bill takes account of them
 - any potential implications of implementing the Bill’s provisions while relevant sectors deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic

- whether there are any unintended consequences arising from the Bill
- the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum)
- the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Part 1: Chapter 5 of the Explanatory Memorandum)

2. Evidence considered by the committee

- 2.1 For the academic year 2019-2020, the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee focussed its attention on curriculum reform. As outlined above, curriculum reform in Wales will be ten years in the making. Currently, schools are expected to adhere to the current statutory national curriculum as well as make preparation for the implementation of the new curriculum from September 2022. It is timely that the committee considers policy to inform, assist and influence schools in preparing for considerable national policy change.
- 2.2 Over the programme of work, the committee has listened to and discussed challenges, issues and opportunities with four secondary schools and four primary schools, including curriculum pioneer schools. Officers presented on and informed the discussion on the implications and preparation undertaken for the new curriculum. Officers, including ERW chief officers, ERW's curriculum reform and innovation officer, primary/ secondary officers, digital and skills officers provided a breadth of information about support available to help schools with curriculum change.
- 2.3 Over the sessions, committee members heard wide-ranging views about the successes and challenges that curriculum reform presents to schools and their staff. A few schools outlined that as they are now three years into the pioneer school project, and having visited other pioneer schools they and their staff feel confident going forward that the new curriculum will benefit young people in the long term. More than one school referred to the serious issue of teacher recruitment facing schools, particularly Welsh medium schools, especially in subjects like science and information technology. Links and relationship with the cluster schools were highlighted as vitally important to schools' success in planning the new curriculum together. A few schools indicated a more cautious approach to change, while staying in line with the current statutory national curriculum. Schools indicated they are working well with ERW to upskill the staff in readiness for the new curriculum. A 'leader of learning' was also appointed who also works across the cluster schools, and this has proved beneficial. Pioneer primary schools demonstrated a strong enthusiasm for the curriculum work they had undertaken and shared with other schools within their cluster and beyond. A few schools mentioned the effect of working as a pioneer school in improving the quality of a range of aspects in their schools including assessment of pupil progress, staff development, Welsh language development and pupil focussed

planning. Impact on pupil engagement, enthusiasm and attitudes to learning was evident in pioneer schools.

- 2.4 The Head of Curriculum Reform and Innovation in ERW stated that in her view the progress being made in preparedness for the new curriculum in Swansea was very well aligned with the views of Welsh Government and schools are already discussing the matters and sharing good practice and ideas during the lead in period to the new curriculum. She also indicated that the new curriculum should allow schools to move away from the inflexibility of the current prescribed curriculum and allow them to focus on the pedagogical principles and develop and build/expand on the areas that they are doing well. The committee heard that ERW Schools as Learning Organisation and Curriculum for Wales events during the summer and autumn term 2019 were organised so that information could be disseminated and ERW can ensure that schools keep abreast with the rapidly changing landscape of education in Wales. A few schools also outlined the excellent support received from the local authority and outlined a trial of a more thematic based cross subject learning initiative which aims to assist and encourage improvement. In addition to local curriculum plan, ERW's curriculum team has developed complementary curriculum-planning guidance, *Transform Your Curriculum*¹⁸, to support schools.
- 2.5 A few schools have amended both the management and departmental structures at the school to build on the knowledge and experience of the staff and aim to maintain subject integrity going forward, which is key for pupils wishing to study A levels and progress to University. A new timetable and provision for humanities has also been trailed in one school this year and this has worked well. Schools referred to the anticipated and understandable anxiety of some teachers towards the new curriculum. Nearly all schools spoke about the importance of literacy across the new curriculum areas. Nearly all schools made reference to the investment in time required to train staff for curriculum changes.
- 2.6 Swansea's Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment Group (including members from both primary and secondary schools and officers within the Education Directorate) has been pivotal in preparing for the new curriculum by:
- reviewing the work of pioneer and non-pioneer schools
 - promoting research-based approaches through school networks; the work of key organisations and people have been shared, such as Educational Endowment Fund (EEF), Sutton Trust, Deans for Impact and Evidence Based Education
 - arranging for keynote speakers for schools and forging links with the National Academy for Education Leadership (NAEL)
 - developing a local authority curriculum implementation plan to support a consistent approach to schools in planning a phased approach to curriculum reform:
 - Phase 1 – Evaluate the current curriculum
 - Phase 2 – Planning and designing new curriculum

- Phase 3 – Trialling and refining
- Phase 4 – Implementing, monitoring and reviewing
- ensuring curriculum planning promotes:
 - the principles of schools as learning organisations (SLOs)
 - the four purposes of the new curriculum and the “what matters” statements within the new draft curriculum
 - strong evidence-based approaches on how pupils learn using the findings from cognitive science to help shape curriculum design and evidenced-based pedagogy
 - development and support for a well-informed school workforce
- promoting cultural capital through a connected curriculum in years 5/6 and years 7/8, and between secondary schools and post-16:
 - A connected curriculum promotes a degree of coherence between schools, for example, by building on previous knowledge and skills, and identifying aspects of cultural capital, while maintaining school-level flexibility
 - Cultural capital can be thought of as an entitlement to knowledge, skills and experiences that pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, might not otherwise acquire
 - The committee also heard that given the wide-ranging interpretation of the new curriculum framework, the Education Directorate has taken a strong research-informed, or evidenced-based, approach to supporting schools with curriculum reform. This approach complements the SLO model as well as the new teaching and leadership professional standards. These both expect teachers to take responsibility for their professional learning by keeping abreast of research findings to inform their practice. Following on from *The Science of Learning* cross-phase Headteachers meeting in February, Swansea Council was asked to provide feedback on Evidenced Based Education’s draft update to Sutton Trust’s, *What Makes Great Teaching, The Great Teaching Toolkit: Evidence Review*¹⁷. The evidence review was published in June 2020, and the Council’s contribution was recognised in the report alongside educational organisations and experts such as EEF, Harvard University, University of Cambridge, Dylan Wiliam, John Hattie, Tom Sherrington and David Didau.

2.7 Following presentations from officers and schools, Members outlined their concerns relating to issues including the complete change from the current system to the new curriculum, the capacity for change, capacity for assessment and monitoring in the system, literacy levels, city deal job opportunities and vocational training opportunities. In addition issues around the potential impact of several different feeder schools linking into one comprehensive, the issue of teacher engagement into the changes, lessons learned from the curriculum reform in Scotland, implications for

children currently in the system and the need to maximise the opportunities for disadvantaged children were considered by the committee. Overall, the committee was impressed with the steps taken to prepare for the new curriculum by the sample schools.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Swansea identifies and continually reviews its school support needs as the new curriculum evolves. It will deliver information, assistance and influence via various methods, including regional partnerships, where appropriate.
- 3.2 A Swansea-wide Professional Learning Community (PLC) is further developed to share effective practice, ideas and learning. The PLC will continue to harness opportunities to work with external partners, as appropriate, including both Universities.
- 3.3 Swansea schools and officers maintain mechanisms to systematically share good practice on-line by sustaining and building on existing platforms.
- 3.4 Meaningful pupil progress and achievement indicators are developed locally and in collaboration with Welsh Government.
- 3.5 Robust systems of moderation, based on the cluster model, to ensure consistency of assessment practice across Swansea to support rigorous and reliable teacher assessment are sustained.
- 3.6 School leadership capacity, at all levels, to deliver curriculum reform is supported, including partnership with the National Academy, where appropriate.
- 3.7 Ensure the workforce skills needed to deliver the new curriculum by maintaining systems to identify and meet continual professional development needs for all school practitioners.
- 3.8 Ensure skills learning for current and future occupations, including digital learning, is embedded into the curriculum in all Swansea schools in collaboration with Swansea's Skills Partnership/ Partneriaeth Sgiliau Abertawe (PSA).
- 3.9 Swansea's curriculum implementation guidance moves into planning phases 3 and 4 following the successful milestones reached in phases 1 and 2 (**Appendix A**).

4. Equality and Engagement Implications

- 4.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and 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

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

4.3 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening has been completed and is attached. As a result there it has been determined that there is no requirement for a full EIA report.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Background Papers:

- 1 [Education in Wales: Our national mission](#), Welsh Government, September 2017
- 2 [A report on responses to the Great Debate](#), Wavehill Ltd on behalf of the Welsh Government, June 2015
- 3 [Successful Futures; Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales](#), Professor Graham Donaldson CB, February 2015
- 4 [Curriculum changes in Wales must not be rushed, government is told](#), Dr Phillip Dixon, SecEd, May 2015
- 5 [A Curriculum for Wales – A Curriculum for Life](#), Welsh Government, October 2015
- 6 [The Welsh Education Reform Journey; A Rapid Policy Assessment](#), OECD, 2017
- 7 [Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales](#), OECD, October 2018
- 8 [Changes to the curriculum in Wales](#), Letter from Lynne Neagle to Kirsty Williams, Chair of CYPEC, January 2017
- 9 [Welsh Government's progress in developing the new Curriculum for Wales; Responses to the consultation](#), CYPEC, Welsh Parliament, December 2018
- 10 [Subject choices in schools](#), Education and Skills Committee, Scottish Parliament, September 2019
- 11 [Curriculum for Excellence Review 2020/21](#), Scottish Government, February 2020

- 12 [Welsh Government Consultation – summary of response Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum](#), Welsh Government, July 2019
- 13 [Curriculum for Wales 2022 Feedback Analysis](#), Wavehill Ltd on behalf of the Welsh Government, October 2019
- 14 [Response to feedback phase](#), Welsh Government, January 2020
- 15 [Curriculum for Wales](#), Welsh Government, January 2020
- 16 [Consultation on the Welsh Government’s Curriculum and Assessment Bill](#), Welsh Parliament, July-September 2020
- 17 [The Great Teaching Toolkit: Evidence Review](#), Evidence Based Education, June 2020
- 18 [Transform Your Curriculum](#), ERW, March 2020

Appendices:

Appendix A - Swansea’s Curriculum Implementation Guidance

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment Screening