

Evidence re: Children, Young People and Education Committee - a one-off scrutiny session with the WJEC and Qualifications Wales in early May 2018

CYPE Committee have received letters from WJEC and Qualifications Wales setting out their position. The correspondence for awareness can be found on the link ([see Annex A](#)).

To inform our work in this area, the Committee would be grateful if you could provide any information or views you have on:

Summary

The pace of reform and the volume of change has been challenging for WJEC and this has affected the timely availability of resources and led to problems with Welsh-medium resources in particular. The unrealistic timeframe was as a result of England's decision regarding their examinations although as the two national examination systems in England and Wales move further apart, this is less likely to be an issue in the future. It is important that any major change in examination policy is introduced in a more staggered way in the future, avoiding both GCSEs and A Levels changing in the same year for individual subjects.

Currently, the availability of textbooks and other support materials lie outside the regulated market and are not the responsibility of Qualifications Wales or strictly, of WJEC. There are a large number of organisations involved, including Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and WJEC and the coordination of these different players is key.

Response to questions

- **whether there is a shortage of the necessary Welsh-medium, or English-medium, text books or learning resources, for pupils in Wales undertaking their GCSEs and A levels**

A-levels

This year we are undertaking an evaluation of standards and provision for A levels. This report is due to be published in autumn 2018. As part of this work we are gathering views about A-level textbooks and resources. Early findings from visits to schools and FE colleges indicate that leaders in all schools and colleges visited expressed disappointment and frustration about the quality and timely availability of English-medium and Welsh-medium textbooks and other resources such as specimen papers. All Welsh-medium and bilingual schools report that Welsh-medium textbooks and other resources are available much later than the English versions. A few schools and colleges are under the impression that materials for new qualifications in England were available before those in Wales.

GCSEs

We have not undertaken any direct surveys of the availability or quality of GCSE resources. Our views are therefore informed by discussion with teachers during school visits or inspection. In general, teachers have not complained about the lack of textbooks/resources in English. However, teachers in Welsh-medium or bilingual schools often mention the lack of availability of Welsh-medium teaching materials. Many teachers have raised concerns that even when Welsh-medium

resources are available, these are often published far later than the English texts. This impacts on their ability to plan schemes of work in a timely manner.

- **whether there are any shortages or issues in any particular subjects**

A-levels

Evidence from our thematic survey work regarding A-levels indicates that there are issues with mathematics, religious education, history, French, English, computer science and physical education in particular, though there are also concerns about other subjects. Many teachers raised concerns that exemplar examination materials from the WJEC were late.

GCSEs

We have recently conducted a thematic survey of the new GCSE qualifications in English language, Welsh language, mathematics and the Welsh Baccalaureate. This report will be published later this year. In many schools, teachers expressed frustration around a lack of clarity about assessment from the WJEC. In our visits to Welsh-medium or bilingual schools, some pupils opted to undertake their work for the Welsh Baccalaureate in English rather than in Welsh, citing the lack of relevant Welsh-medium resources available via the internet as a reason for this choice.

We do not ask questions directly about availability of teaching resources during school visits; however, teachers often raise the issue. Recently, teachers in Welsh-medium or bilingual schools have raised concerns about the availability of resources in physical education, music, problem solving in mathematics-numeracy, drama, French and Spanish. Some Welsh-medium or bilingual schools teach science through the medium of English. This is because text translated from English to Welsh is often more difficult for pupils to access.

- **whether you believe any of the reported difficulties will have/has had an impact on pupil outcomes**

In most cases, teachers produce their own resources. There is also increasing co-operation between schools (often coordinated by consortia) to share resources. This practice mitigates somewhat against the possible negative impact of a deficiency in resources. However, resources produced by groups of teachers have not been rigorously edited and their quality is extremely variable. In some instances, teachers are not given sufficient time to carry out this work and co-operation between the regional consortia is limited.

The lateness of textbooks, sample materials and clear guidance around marking is likely to have impeded teachers' planning. During the A level thematic survey visits many teachers were particularly frustrated about the lack of clarity and guidance around the application of mark schemes. They felt they were often left guessing as to how to mark pupils' work accurately and were therefore worried that they were not guiding the pupils appropriately.

These issues are very likely to have had an impact on pupils' achievement. During the A level thematic survey visits many pupils expressed frustration about the fact that they have been the first cohort to go through the new GCSEs and are now the first cohort to go through the new A levels, and felt that this was not fair.

- **your confidence in the availability of resources and textbooks in future, given the increasing distinctiveness of the Welsh curriculum**

The production of resources has increased recently.

- **the role of the WJEC and Qualifications Wales in ensuring the adequate provision of resources**

The WJEC provides a very useful web-based service for teachers to create their own test papers. In many cases, it offers comprehensive mark schemes. It also commissions publications from commercial publishers. There is a strong commitment to producing relevant resources to meet the needs of our new curriculum.

Qualifications Wales provides an appropriate overview of the WJECs work.

- **any other thoughts or comments on the provision of learning resources in Wales**
- It would be useful to have new qualifications approved more quickly than they are at present to provide more time for the production of teaching resources.
- It might be helpful if resources were written directly in Welsh so that translation is unnecessary. The translation of resources into Welsh often results in clunky and dense texts that are difficult for pupils to understand.
- If texts are translated, publishing bodies should endeavour to ascertain their readability by offering them to pupils and gaining their opinion.
- It would be helpful if the WJEC ensured that all necessary resources were made available before the start date of each qualification.