

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 28

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Genedlaethol Prifathrawon Cymru  
Response from: National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)

**NAHT represents more than 29,000 school leaders in early years, primary, secondary and special schools, making us the largest association for school leaders in the UK.**

**We represent, advise and train school leaders in Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We use our voice at the highest levels of government to influence policy for the benefit of leaders and learners everywhere.**

**Our new section, NAHT Edge, supports, develops and represents middle leaders in schools.**

### **Work being undertaken to develop and design the new curriculum**

In response to the list of questions raised within the committee letter, NAHT Cymru present the following evidence. Many of the responses will address more than one of the specific questions at the same time.

1. The progress of the draft curriculum appears to be quite clearly explained via the Welsh Government channels to schools, such as the Dysg newsletters and related podcasts. However, it is difficult to ascertain how well understood this information is at school level and how many schools directly engage with these communications channels.
2. Headteachers have the challenge of ensuring critical information gets to the right staff at the right time within their schools, without overly bombarding with every piece of information concerning current reforms, as this would inhibit staff from fulfilling current duties to children and young people effectively.
3. The development of draft versions of key pieces of the curriculum structure within each Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE), such as the 'What matters' statements, the progression steps and the subsequent achievement outcomes, as outlined during the Summer Term 2018, indicate that the overall shape of the curriculum is progressing. However, the ability of schools beyond the pioneer network to engage with this type of detail is

still unclear and, as it is still effectively in draft form, the question remains as to whether it is desirable to encourage all schools to engage in too committed a way at this stage with that degree of detail?

4. In our evidence to the previous committee work on the 'Implementation of Professor Graham Donaldson's Review Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales', we stated, *'There appears to be a fundamental difference between 'encouraging' school-to-school working and actually constructing opportunities in order to 'facilitate' constructive school collaboration. NAHT Cymru hold the view that, for the greatest systemic-level of change, the greatest gains will be in those schools NOT directly involved in developing the new curriculum as without them on-board any inertia in the system will be exacerbated.'*
5. Another loud message being fed back from non-pioneer schools is that trying to develop an approach to the new curriculum remains challenging for them if they are awaiting a potential Estyn inspection, which will be based upon current arrangements.
6. The proposed break in the inspection cycle (Donaldson independent review) needs to be implemented swiftly for those schools not in statutory follow-up arrangements.
7. It is also critical that schools, Estyn and the wider stakeholders understand the critical need for this 'gap' and that it actually should signal greater involvement between the inspectorate and schools not less, as there must be an expectation that inspectors spend increasing time in schools during this time to understand the development of the new curriculum and the processes, challenges and opportunities facing schools.
8. Clearly, the role of the pioneer schools is set, to a great degree, by their specific role. For example, curriculum pioneer schools have sought to develop greater detail within each AoLE, whilst professional learning pioneer settings have been viewing and reflecting upon the draft curriculum content and gauging the implications for the wider workforce in terms of the required professional learning and development as well as providing feedback to the curriculum pioneer settings.
9. Opportunities for joined up working within the current approaches, processes and structures appear to be concerned with the ability to develop a broader understanding of the overall curriculum framework across those schools directly involved, as well as the ability to continue to refine the final curriculum at the same time.
10. There remain questions as to the effectiveness of the pioneer network to ensure all schools (particularly non-pioneer settings within their

geographical clusters) are kept up to speed with progress and in ensuring that they have started to develop approaches to prepare for the new curriculum. It is highly dependent upon the relationships between the various settings

11. Again, a balance needs to be struck in terms of providing enough information to start planning in non-pioneer schools, but not providing information in too great a detail, if it is still subject to change. For example, where this work has started effectively, some non-pioneer settings have begun to reflect upon how their curriculum approach will adhere to the key elements within the four purposes – as this is an area that is agreed and in place.
12. There is also some suggestion from a few non-pioneer schools that certain pioneer settings have produced an approach within their AoLE which is not as easily transferable to other settings, is too school-context specific, or is based upon an ideology which they believe is not as true to the original principles within ‘Successful Futures’ – e.g. that the AoLE has an over-emphasis upon knowledge with too little emphasis upon skill development. This is particularly pertinent when considering some of the feedback from employers about the requisite skills they would like to see from young people entering the world of work following completion of qualifications within Wales.
13. School leaders have suggested that for too many of the AoLEs, connections and involvement of external expertise and academic support was too slow in being put into place as when this has subsequently occurred, the work has become richer and more focused.
14. Whilst curriculum design expertise and teaching / learning pedagogical expertise might sit fairly strongly within school-based professional groups, many of the crucial areas to be included within the curriculum content, would clearly have benefited from expert involvement that might lie outside the school setting.
15. A possibly underestimated issue from the outset might have been that, although many of the above groups sit in the wider world of ‘education’, the forum for establishing such connections between external academics and experts with pioneer schools was under-developed. The connections might have benefitted from some direct facilitation.
16. The balanced approach, whereby external expertise can contribute key knowledge and skills and school-based expertise can flesh out how that might look and be delivered within a school-based context, took some time to establish and it is unclear whether this has been consistent within and between each part of the newly developing curriculum.

17. The 'What Matters?' statements appear to have provided a foundation for the subsequent development of area such as the progression framework and the achievement outcomes. One area of potential risk that NAHT Cymru also highlighted in previous evidence to the committee was the issue with developing curriculum in relative isolation from assessment as the two, in a learning context, go fundamentally hand-in-hand.
18. In our oral evidence session, one school leader member explained, '*...one of the things that I know New Zealand learned is that they implemented their new curriculum, and then, they produced their assessment progression online tools a couple of years later, which the heads and the leaders of their schools said that they wished it had been aligned at the same time.*'
19. It is therefore pleasing to note that there appears to be a desire to establish the achievement outcomes and progression steps at the same time in Wales.
20. What would be beneficial is to learn from the experiences of other countries developing a new curriculum and, if tools and resources provide useful support to schools, that they too are developed in preparation for the roll out of the new curriculum
21. As the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) has only recently been launched, it remains a little unclear what this will look like in a practical sense for schools. School leaders are already asking how the additional funding will be delivered to schools.
22. School leaders have already expressed some concern to NAHT Cymru that, whilst the additional resource / funding for the NAPL is exactly what is needed and very welcome, the risk - like the PDG - is that its impact might be diluted given current core-budget pressures within schools. School leaders are clearly committed to the professional learning of teachers, leaders and support staff and they recognise the essential need in relation to the new curriculum. However, when schools are facing funding pressures that might impact upon staff retention, the challenge is clear.
23. Although the Independent Advisory Board, Change Board and Strategic Stakeholder Group structure appears to align behind the pioneer school activity, it is still somewhat unclear to schools how they interrelate and support the overall work of curriculum and assessment development at school-level. There remains a lack of understanding of the role of the above groups, who sits on each group, or how each group is supporting the overall curriculum developments.
24. The direct involvement of the workforce unions / professional associations in all of the above groups, not just the Strategic Stakeholder Group, would assist in explaining to the wider profession exactly what each group does and, more importantly, enable each group themselves to better understand

the perception and progress of the curriculum work and how to address any perceived challenges as and when they arise.

25. It is positive to note the proactive approach being taken by certain groups, such as Qualifications Wales, in anticipating the potential challenges that a fully rolled out curriculum would have upon assessment and qualifications – particularly in learning the lessons from the issues related to current reform of Wales’ GCSEs etc.
26. The timetable for curriculum roll-out remains challenging but in Wales, with the scale of reform, we have to be better at anticipating large-scale changes and planning them over considerable periods of time to ensure they best meet the needs of our children and young people.
27. In terms of broader assessment plans, the principles behind some of the recent policy changes, such as ceasing the publication of teacher assessment and National Reading and Numeracy data below the national level from 2018 onwards and instead using data from assessments to support the individual progress of children, illustrate the need to clearly align both formal and informal assessment systems and processes. The wider profession recognise that the purpose behind pupil-level assessment had previously been lost within the desire to measure and assess the performance of whole schools, creating an approach that is not in the best interest of all pupils. It is pleasing, therefore, that Welsh Government have made changes to accountability to reflect what is best for pupils and the new assessment processes within the new curriculum must adhere to the same principles.
28. The progress that has been made thus far with the assessment arrangements has not been clearly enough explained to the wider sector. This is particularly critical when considering the role of Regional Consortia and Local Authorities, both of which have huge influence via accountability systems, upon the ‘behaviour’ of schools. For example, we have heard evidence of Challenge Advisers using National Testing data in order to shape performance management targets for Headteachers – completely against the purpose of the tests, which are diagnostic and for the development of the individual pupil.
29. One of the greatest challenges facing schools during this current period is the co-ordination and delivery of the raft of education reforms currently under way in Wales. The curriculum and assessment changes, accountability changes and updates to approaches, such as the online national tests, in some respect, could be seen as coherent and more straightforward to organise and align. However, for example, when considering the huge task facing schools in addressing the changes needed

to meet the new ALNET (Wales) Bill, against a backdrop of the most challenging period in school funding for a long time, it is clear that the overall task is immense. This is particularly so for school leadership, and headteachers especially.

30. Our headship recruitment and retention findings illustrate the challenges within Wales. It is clear, therefore, that any more fundamental reform to policy or leadership structures that require radical change and present further challenge to an already stretched profession, are particularly undesirable. The profession, and school leaders in particular, now need a period of stability with as little change in policy as possible in order to embed and make it work within schools. It is important to address the current issues the profession faces in order to deliver for children and young people before bringing in anything else that might threaten the progress made thus far.
  
31. The potential benefits for our children and young people of a well embedded, pupil-focused, well-resourced and world-leading curriculum mean that such a period of stability should be a fundamental aim for Welsh Government for a significant number of years to come.