

Council for Economic Renewal

Review of Assessment and the National Curriculum

Introduction

1. The Welsh Government is committed to an education system that improves standards of literacy and numeracy, reduces the impact of poverty on educational attainment, and provides a curriculum that equips children and young people with the range of skills and attitudes that employers are looking for.
2. In October 2012 the Review of Assessment and the National Curriculum was established to give consideration to existing arrangements in Wales. It is important that curriculum content and assessment are as focused as possible on our key objectives. The review was therefore asked to consider the wider assessment arrangements which operate in schools and to make recommendations on any changes needed to ensure that the Literacy and Numeracy Framework and Reading and Numeracy tests form part of a coherent approach. It was also asked to consider whether the expectations for what children should know and be able to do, as set out in the current national curriculum subject orders, are sufficiently demanding and in line with the expectations of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework.

Phase 1 of the Review – literacy, numeracy and wider skills

3. To date, the review has worked closely with stakeholders and held discussions with experts in the field of education, as well as commissioning independent research, to inform a number of proposals for change that are designed to support and improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy.
4. At the same time, and in order to ensure alignment with skills qualifications within a revised approach to the Welsh Baccalaureate, the consultation includes a proposal for wider skills – perceived to be essential for life, learning and work – to be statutory elements of the National Curriculum from early primary school onwards. They include:
 - critical thinking and problem solving
 - planning and organising
 - creativity and innovation
 - personal effectiveness
 - digital literacy.

Stakeholders are currently being given the opportunity to feedback on these proposals as part of a public consultation that closes 17 January 2014. Further details are available at the following link:

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/education/curriculum-for-wales/?lang=en>

Phase 2 of the Review

5. During the course of the review of stakeholder evidence, a number of issues that fall outside the scope of the initial review have emerged. These issues will be addressed during phase 2 of the review. It is important to note, when considering these issues, that they are all interdependent in delivering a final outcome for the review. In addition, all must be balanced against the overarching priorities of literacy, numeracy and reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

KEY ISSUES

Task and Finish Groups

6. At the outset of the review, five independent Task and Finish groups were established to consider specific elements of the curriculum and these have now reported. These groups have provided recommendations in the following areas:
 - **Schools and Physical Activity**, including a recommendation that Physical education be a core subject;
 - **Arts in Education**, including a recommendation that an arts rich education should be core to the school experience and include creativity alongside literacy and numeracy as a cross-cutting skill;
 - **Curriculum Cymreig, history and the story of Wales**, including the recommendation that we must develop a curriculum for Wales and qualifications with a Welsh perspective;
 - **Computer science and ICT**, including a recommendation that a new subject called Computing replace ICT and that a Digital Literacy Framework be developed; and
 - **Welsh Second Language**, including the recommendation that Welsh Second Language should be given equal status with other core subjects.
7. These recommendations will be considered in the context of the curriculum as a whole during phase 2 of the review.

Science and Languages

8. The curriculum must reflect the needs of business and the economy and this includes the critical role of science and technology. In this way we can help ensure that learners develop the skills necessary to succeed in STEM subjects, and later in STEM-related careers. Science is a Welsh Government priority but the initial review of stakeholder evidence has identified a number of areas where practice in this area could be improved. Some practitioners felt that science did not feature sufficiently in primary education and that content of science programmes of study were not always age-appropriate. Science has also been the focus of recommendations by Estyn which highlighted that current expectations are not sufficiently stretching for pupils, do not allow sufficient flexibility for learners to pursue their interests, and that the Welsh Government should review the National Curriculum subject orders for science to include essential content. Science, therefore, clearly needs revisiting and will be a key focus for the review going forward.

9. In addition, the review will look closely at the place of Modern Foreign Languages at Key Stage 3.

Wider Skills

10. Our discussions with stakeholders have highlighted the importance of learners developing skills that will benefit their life chances, learning, qualifications and opportunities for employment. The phase 1 consultation document therefore seeks agreement, in principle, to place these skills on a statutory footing within the curriculum.
11. Should the consultation response to this proposal prove favourable, there is a significant piece of work ahead to identify year on year expectations in skills development for learners. Discussions are taking place to ensure alignment from Foundation Phase through to the Welsh Baccalaureate and Key Stage 4, where actions in response to the Review of Qualifications are also being taken forward. The aim of developing a statutory wider skills framework is to create a tool that will support the teaching of these vital skills to learners. It would also further contribute to continuity across the learning journey by identifying clear routes for progression.

Primary School

12. Phase 2 of the review will consider how we rationalise the requirement to slim down a primary school curriculum that is perceived to be over-crowded against, for instance, recommendations that we should be including additional subjects or more time for existing subjects. Getting this right is essential if we are to remain clear that literacy and numeracy are our priorities, especially for those children disadvantaged by impoverished language.

Secondary School - Key Stage 3

13. Stakeholders feel that KS3 (the first 3 years of secondary school) should be an opportunity for teachers to support learners to embed and consolidate their skills and knowledge, in order to express ideas and opinions about a wide range of topics in preparation for KS4 and on. However, it has been clear from our discussions with stakeholders that many of them consider KS3 to have 'lost its way' and to lack clarity of purpose – contributing perhaps to the 'drop-off' in performance on transition from primary to secondary.
14. In response to concerns about this Key Stage of education the Minister for Education and Skills has announced his intention to bring back purpose to Key Stage 3. If we are to do this, it is vital that learners remain engaged during this stage of education. It is also important for all learners to be afforded similar opportunities for experiential learning, no matter their socioeconomic background or which school they attend. The review will look at how we might give learners at Key Stage 3 the opportunity to 'step outside' the curriculum and to pursue their own particular interests in more depth. This might involve learners spending a period of time undertaking a focused and detailed study around a particular topic or them.

15. In developing these proposals there are a number of opportunities for working with organisations beyond the school. This would allow other bodies to play a more prominent role in this phase of education; to develop young people's interests and promote their enthusiasm for learning. For example: art institutions, including galleries, could use this opportunity to provide immersive learning experiences; sporting organisations could open their doors to learners who want to further their interest in sports outside the confines of the school gymnasium or playing field; initiatives like Technocamps and other residential 'coding clubs' could offer students the chance at developing their skills in computer science with real-life programmers and industry experts; and, museums, who are uniquely placed to offer a Welsh perspective to learning, could support those learners with a particular interest in history.
16. Furthermore, industry, and HE/FE institutions, would be well-placed to support the development of engaging schemes of work for learners' personal projects. These could be used to support the continued development of a learner working outside a more traditional curriculum, while keeping an eye towards future qualifications and work opportunities.
17. The review is also considering whether we should develop the concept of 'graduation' at the end of this stage.

The Basic Curriculum

18. Phase 2 of the review will also include a review of the basic curriculum, which is comprised of:
 - **Religious education**– delivery of which should be based on a *National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales*;
 - **Personal and social education**– delivery of which should be based on the *Personal and social education framework for 7 to 19-year-olds in Wales*;
 - **Sex education**– delivery of which is based on *Sex and relationships education in schools, Welsh Assembly Government Circular 019/2010*; and
 - **Work-related education**– delivery of which is based on *Careers and the world of work: a framework for 11 to 19-year-olds in Wales*
19. It is important that this area should be looked at again as part of the current review, to ensure it is consistent with any revised curriculum and assessment arrangements and fit for purpose for Wales in the 21st Century.

Summary

20. The Review of Assessment and the National Curriculum offers an opportunity to do something unique in Wales: to develop a curriculum **for** Wales that gives us a clear vision for education all the way through from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4 and the work we are doing in the context of the Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales.
21. The review will work with all of our stakeholders and partners as we aim to develop and deliver a 'Curriculum for Wales'; a curriculum that will give our children the best possible chances, whatever their backgrounds, to go out and succeed as citizens of the world.